

together



06

Gandhi, the Critical Insider

Bobby Kattikad OFM CAP

12

Gandhi in the Time of AFSPA

Kapil Arambam

16

Ignore Gandhiji at Your Own Risk

Dr Vasudha

18

Nonviolence: Remembering Gandhi and Luther

Richard Rohr OFM

Together is a national family magazine. It is a monthly, published by the Franciscans (OFM) in India. It was started in 1935 in Karachi, now in Pakistan. It got its present name in 1966.

The magazine **Together** is a conversation platform. Nothing changes until our families change. It is an effort at making worlds meet by bringing down fearful, pretentious and defensive walls. **Together** is a journey, an ever-expansive journey—from me to us, from us to all of us, and from all

of us to all. Let us talk, let us cross borders. The more we converse and traverse, we discover even more paths to talk about and travel together. **Together** is an effort to uncover our shared humanity.

Your critical and relevant write-ups, that promote goodness, inclusivity and shared humanity, are welcome. Your articles must be mailed to editor@togethermagazine.in before the 15th of every month.

EDITOR

Saji P Mathew ofm

editoroftogether@gmail.com
editor@togethermagazine.in

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Jamesmon PC ofm
John Sekar ofm

COPY EDITORS

Augustine Pinto ofm
Joy Prakash ofm

LAYOUT

Kapil Arambam

PLEASE NOTE: The views of writers do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor or the publisher.

DIRECTOR

Xavier Durairaj ofm

PUBLISHER

Basil Lobo ofm

MANAGER

Anthony Mathew Joseph ofm

PUBLICATION OFFICE

Franciscan Publications
St. Anthony's Friary
#85, Hosur Road, Bengaluru 560095
Karnataka, India

managertogethermagazine@gmail.com
manager@togethermagazine.in
Mob: +91-88971 46707 / +91-77366 64528

PLEASE NOTE

When you subscribe or renew or contribute to **Together**, please inform the publication office about the same, mentioning your name and details.

SUBSCRIPTION

To subscribe to the magazine or to contribute to the running of **Together** please log on to www.togethermagazine.in

Pay online (NEFT) Transaction

Franciscan Publications – Together, South Indian Bank
Branch: Christ University, A/c. No. 0396053000005736,
IFSC: SIBL0000396, MICR: 560059010

Pay by Cheque or Demand Draft
in favour of **Franciscan Publications – Together**

ADVERTISING IN TOGETHER (PER ISSUE)

Back cover	₹13,000
Inside back cover	₹8,000
Inner full page	₹5,000
Inner half page	₹2,000
Inner quarter page	₹1,000

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

	1 year	3 years
India	₹500	₹1,400
Other Countries	US \$75	US\$200

EDITORIAL

04

Left, Right, Centre, and Gandhiji

As we strive for a more humane, less violent, and more civilised existence, the life and inspiration of Gandhi and his unwavering commitment to ahimsa continue to inspire, guide, and centre us.

Saji P Mathew OFM

COVER STORY

06

Gandhi, the Critical Insider

Bobby Kattikad OFM CAP

12

Gandhi in the Time of AFSPA

Kapil Arambam

16

Ignore Gandhiji at Your Own Risk

Dr Vasudha

18

Nonviolence: Remembering Gandhi and Luther

Richard Rohr OFM

OCTOBER TOGETHER

24

Onam Revisited: The Festival of Dravidian Egalitarianism

Dr George John

27

No Words

Tom Thomas

28

Francis of Assisi: Wounds of Fragility

Gerry Lobo OFM

31

Vegetarianism Is Not a Virtue

Susanna Marian Vas & Shaji Nicholas
Vadachery OFM

34

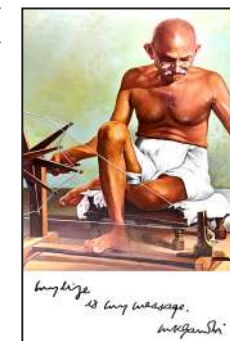
Education and Creativity

Arshia Chidambaram

36

The Toxic Corporate Grind: A Modern-Day Slavery

Sara Maria



22

IN PICTURES

My Life Is My Message

Liya Thomas

42

TRAVEL

Salvation in a Strange Land

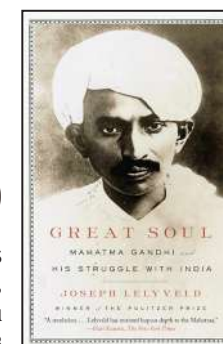
Saji Salkalachen

40

BOOKS

Mohandas, Gandhiji, Bapu

Dr Susheela B



38

CINEMA

Poverty, Stealing, and the Aftermath

Romil Udayakumar TNV



Left, Right, Centre, and Gandhiji

SAJIP MATHEW OFM

Every politician, when he leaves office, ought to go straight to jail and serve his time, thus goes an American folk saying. Politics and politicians have come to be synonymous with dishonesty, favoritism, and corruption. This perhaps is the underlying reasoning for many good and competent people to stay away from active politics; and many corrupt and incompetent people to get attracted to active politics. The good people's silence and inaction make it easy for the wicked people to fill the world with their opinions, lies, and propaganda; and establish their agendas and actions as normal and standard. For Gandhi, being political was not a choice, but an imperative. He famously said, "Anyone who says they are not interested in politics is like a drowning man who insists he is not interested in water."

Gandhi returned to India on 19 December 1914, after his sojourn in England and South Africa, as quite a matured man of forty-five, having seen the worlds of exploiters and the exploited. In the heart of the empire where the sun never sets, he must have seen the normalcy of white supremacy, privilege, and entitlement. In the South Africa of racial discrimination, being a man of color, Gandhi must have experienced what it means to be with less or no rights, underprivileged, and treated without respect. Gandhi plunged into the Indian freedom struggle with half a dozen keywords: *satya*, *ahimsa*, *satyagraha*,

sarvodaya, *swaraj*, and *swadeshi*. Recently in a session I was attending, Bobby Jose Kattikad, the speaker, said, as we arrive at our 40s, we also arrive at the keywords that define us. From the media content that we read and watch, our conversations, our engagements, our preoccupations, and the causes that we commit to, others around us can recognize it. Gandhi was 45 when he came back to India, and he had his uncompromising keywords to elaborate his life on. Though Gandhi had revised his opinions from time to time, his conceptual framework remained the same. He had not altered from his basics. After seven years, he unceremoniously exchanged his pant, shirt, and suit as a barrister for a dhoti and a towel at Madurai. Should we not be serious about the politics of a man clad in dhoti and a towel, and steadfastly upholding *satya*, *ahimsa*, *satyagraha*, *sarvodaya*, *swaraj*, and *swadeshi*?

India's Political Centre Ought to Be Gandhi

Left, right, and centre are terms used to describe different positions on the political spectrum. The terms left wing and right wing originated from the seating arrangements in the French National Assembly during the French Revolution (1789). Supporters of the king and the traditional social order sat on the president's right side. These were generally considered more conservative and resistant to change. Supporters of the revolution and those advocating for a more egalitarian society sat

on the president's left side. These were seen as more progressive and willing to challenge the status quo. Over time, these seating positions became symbolic of broader political viewpoints. The terms "left" and "right" were eventually used to describe the entire spectrum of political ideologies.

Left Wing focuses on equality, social justice, and reform. Left Wing ideologies generally believe in reducing economic inequality and increasing government intervention in the economy to achieve social goals. They hold on to values such as freedom, fraternity, rights, progress, and internationalism. They, with their enthusiasm for immediate social and political change, can easily move towards far left because, in the words of Ferdinand Marcos, "It is easier to run a revolution than a government."

Right Wing focuses on individual liberty, tradition, and limited government intervention in the economy. Right Wing ideologies generally believe in free markets, minimal government regulation, and a strong national identity. They hold on to order, hierarchy, duty, tradition, and nationalism.

Centre focuses on finding a balance between left-wing and right-wing ideas. Centre-right and centre-left ideologies aim for a mix of social welfare programs and economic growth. They hold on to values such as pragmatism, negotiation, and participation.

India, the world's largest democracy, boasts a vibrant political landscape. In the Indian context, though many may disagree and disown, it is proper and beneficial to consider Gandhi and his non-violence (*ahimsa*) as the political centre; because at the extreme right and at the extreme left, we see the use of violence as a chosen means to achieve their goals. Along with Gandhi, Nehru was centre-left and Patel was centre-right. The Indian National Congress was a left-leaning socialist organisation as it fought the British, but post-independence, the Congress party has also exhibited tendencies of right wing.

The Dangers of Far Right Going Too Far

India, more than ever before, must take the political position of Gandhi seriously, for India today exhibits a dangerously strong tendency towards the far right. Though extremes exist, the liberal left hasn't moved much, or they are more under control of the state. Robert Reich, a professor of public policy at the University of California, Berkeley, says the right has become more extreme over the last 50 years. Some have gone so very far that they have lost sight of the centre. As Robert introspects, he realises that in the last 50 years, he, being one from the centre, has moved further to the left of center without changing his political views at all. How? The right has moved far right and has moved dangerously close to fascism.

"Far right extremism is a global problem; and it is time to treat it like one," says Heather Ashby. Right-wing extremists pose the danger not with bombs but with ballots, says Daniel Byman. From Brazil to the United States, France to India, right-wing extremist ideas and groups are posing a grave threat to democratic societies. For example, in India, the ruling party, after they came to power in 2014, has brought extremist ideas into the mainstream, advancing the idea of India as a Hindu country irrespective of its great diversity.

Check Where We Stand

Far right begins with a strong "us versus them" mentality, and belief in the supremacy of, or at least strong loyalty to, a political, religious, social, ethnic, or other grouping, or to a person. The group's survival is therefore contingent on hostility towards and suppression of those who are outside the group. Far right eventually moves to radical right, and then to extreme right, with violence as an accepted means to social change.

One begins with racism and micro-aggressions, like belittling jokes, stereotyping a community or group. Then one moves to religiously or ethnically motivated verbal, online, and physical harassment and abuse. After which one begins hateful extremism with coordinated online and offline campaigns aimed at creating hateful and discriminatory attitudes. Finally, one arrives at violent extremism, advocating terrorist vandalism, attacks, and assault.

As we strive for a more humane, less violent, and more civilised existence, the life and inspiration of Gandhi and his unwavering commitment to *ahimsa* continue to inspire, guide, and centre us. ■



Gandhi, the Critical Insider

Bobby Jose Kattikad, Capuchin, a writer and social media influencer, who is a spiritual, social critique of his time, goes candid on Gandhi, Nonviolence, Ram Rajya, and more, as he speaks to **Saji P Mathew OFM** of *Together Magazine*. (The interview was originally conducted in Malayalam and then transcribed and translated to English)

SM: On the question of the identity and influence of Gandhi we live in a divided nation. At the one end of the spectrum the majority most reverently call him as the Father of the Nation, and at the other end of the spectrum he is even deemed as an anti-national. Who is Gandhi? What is his relevance today?



BJK: On the fateful evening of January 30, 1948, as the sun cast its dying rays over New Delhi, an act of unfathomable violence shattered the tranquility of The Birla House. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the indomitable spirit of India's non-violent struggle for independence, breathed his last at the age of 78. The tragedy was marked by two poignant symbols: his iconic spectacles, dislodged from his face, lay shattered on the ground, while the hands of his watch froze in time, as if refusing to acknowledge a world without its master. Yet, this was not the first time Gandhi's glasses had been violently cast aside.



Decades earlier, on June 7, 1893, a young Gandhi, merely 24 years old, found himself unceremoniously ejected from a train in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa—a victim of the era's rampant racial discrimination. As he gathered his broken spectacles that day, and put them on, he began to see the world through a new lens—one that revealed the harsh realities faced by marginalised peoples throughout history.

Today, as we stand at the crossroads of a new era, it befits us to metaphorically retrieve Gandhi's shattered spectacles, to once again view our world through his visionary perspective. It is time to restart the Gandhian watch, allowing its hands to move forward once more, guiding us towards a future of compassion, equality, and non-violence.

The news of Gandhi's assassination sent shock waves through the nascent nation of India. An Indo-English writer, upon hearing of the Mahatma's demise, spent an entire day in fervent prayer, beseeching the divine that the assassin not be a Muslim. Such an act, if perpetrated by a follower of Islam, would have torn asunder the delicate fabric of India's unity, potentially destroying the very essence of what we now cherish as our nation.

This writer's anguished plea underscores a profound historical truth: the greatest masters and reformers of religion have invariably faced the fiercest opposition from within their own faith communities. From the Buddha to Jesus, from Muhammad to Gandhi himself, these visionaries stood as beacons of enlightenment, proclaiming a refined and radical spirituality that often clashed with the complacent orthodoxy of their times. They were, in essence, critical insiders—voices that dared to challenge the status quo from within, often at great personal cost. Consider Jesus, whose parables often cast his own people in an unfavorable light, while elevating the

outsider or the marginalised. His famous parable of the Good Samaritan serves as a prime example, where those of his own faith—a priest and a temple functionary—are portrayed as indifferent to human suffering, while a Samaritan, a member of a despised community, emerges as the true embodiment of compassion and righteousness.

This ability to critically examine one's own community, to highlight its shortcomings while recognizing the virtues of others, is the hallmark of a true secular spirit. In this light, Gandhi stands as one of India's most profoundly secular figures—a man who, while deeply rooted in his Hindu faith, possessed the moral courage to challenge its failings and embrace the universal truths found in all religions.

Gandhi's unwavering commitment to the welfare of others often transcended national boundaries and celebratory moments. On the eve of India's long-awaited independence, when jubilation swept through the nation like a tidal wave, Gandhi found himself not in the corridors of power in Delhi, but in the riot-torn streets of Noakhali. His absence from the festivities was not merely physical; it was a profound statement of his priorities. As the air reverberated with cries of freedom, Gandhi's voice cut through the euphoria with a sobering question: "Why such jubilation? Sabarmati is still far." This poignant statement encapsulates the essence of Gandhi's vision. Sabarmati, his ashram and spiritual home, was more than a geographical location—it was a symbol of his Utopian dream, a place where human dignity and peace reigned supreme. In juxtaposing the reality of Noakhali's communal strife with the distant ideal of Sabarmati, Gandhi challenged the nation to look beyond the superficial trappings of political independence and strive for true social harmony.

The assassination of Gandhi should have served as a stark warning against the dangers of extremist ideologies. Yet, tragically, the specter of neo-Hindutva that Gandhi so vehemently opposed has not only persisted but gained alarming strength in contemporary India. What was once achieved through brute force is now accomplished through insidious ideological warfare, waged in newsrooms, classrooms, and digital media platforms.

To truly honour Gandhi’s legacy, we must recognize him as a champion of secular imagination—a vision enshrined in the very constitution crafted by our nation’s founders. If the current trajectory of right-wing neo-Hindutva remains unchecked, we risk reducing secularism to a mere facade, devoid of its spirit and practice. Such a future would be even more perilous than the tumultuous days of 1948.

SM: You said that Gandhi was a critical insider and a champion of secular imagination. Have we lost him fully? Or what is left for us to do?

BJK: In this age of excess and moral ambiguity, a return to Gandhian principles is not just desirable—it’s imperative. We must reembrace his ethos of simplicity, frugality, and minimalism. Gandhi’s philosophical journey offers a compass for navigating the complex moral landscape of our times.

Consider the stark contrast between Gandhi’s vision and the post-independence rush towards modernisation championed by Jawaharlal Nehru. When Nehru, driven by ambition, proposed establishing a car factory as a priority for the newly independent nation, Gandhi’s response was both profound and pragmatic: “Indians are not yet anxious about cars; what they still need are bicycles.” This simple statement encapsulates Gandhi’s deep understanding of the nation’s true needs and his commitment to addressing the concerns of the common man. Gandhi’s influence on Nehru extended beyond mere policy decisions. He provided spiritual guidance to the agnostic leader, advising him to approach new projects with a day of fasting and introspection. “Reflect,” Gandhi urged, “on whether this endeavor will benefit the poor around us. If not, consign it to the rubbish heap.” This sage advice led Nehru to abandon the car project, demonstrating the power of Gandhian thought in shaping the nascent nation’s priorities.



Fast forward to our current era, and we find a stark deviation from these noble principles. Today’s India witnesses a frenetic race to erect grandiose statues and memorials—projects that do little to alleviate the plight of the common citizen. Our energies and resources are misdirected, invested in misguided agendas that fail to address the fundamental needs of the populace. This misalignment of priorities serves as a poignant reminder of how far we’ve strayed from Gandhi’s vision of a nation that prioritises the welfare of its most vulnerable citizens.

In an era of increasing complexity and moral ambiguity, Gandhi’s life and teachings stand as a beacon of simplicity

The allure of violence often stems from a misguided belief that justice must be swift and delivered by our own hands within our lifetime. However, this perspective fails to acknowledge the vast scope of human history and the limited reach of our individual existence.

and clarity. His approach to life—direct, frugal, transparent, and truthful—offers a refreshing antidote to our convoluted modern existence. As the world around us grows ever more intricate and multifaceted, we find ourselves struggling to identify our true adversaries and the causes worth fighting for. Gone are the days when we could easily discern our foes or the battles that demanded our attention. Now, seven decades after Gandhi’s passing, we find ourselves adrift in a sea of confusion, uncertain of what to resist or whom to oppose. It is in these moments of bewilderment that Gandhi’s simplicity emerges as a guiding light, a rare island of inspiration and strength amidst the turbulent waters of our time.

The enduring image of Gandhi—reduced to its essence in a minimalist sketch of spectacles and a walking stick—serves as a powerful reminder of the austere life he led. This iconic representation not only captures his physical appearance but also encapsulates the core of his philosophy: that true strength lies not in material possessions or complex ideologies, but in the purity of one’s convictions and the simplicity of one’s actions.

SM: All that matters is success; any means—violence, brute force, and aggressive capitalism all seem okay as long as you get there. What are your comments of Gandhi’s nonviolence?

BJK: As we grapple with the challenges of our time, it’s crucial to understand the two distinct processes that drive social change: evolution and revolution. The revolutionary approach, born of impatience and a desire for immediate transformation, often leads to violent upheaval. In contrast, the evolutionary path recognises that deep-seated structures require time to unlearn ingrained habits and reorganise themselves in more equitable ways.

The allure of violence often stems from a misguided belief that justice must be swift

and delivered by our own hands within our lifetime. However, this perspective fails to acknowledge the vast scope of human history and the limited reach of our individual existence. We must recognize that we are but fleeting actors on the grand stage of time, unworthy of shedding blood for changes that must first take root in our collective consciousness and ideologies.

History stands as a somber witness to the futility of bloody revolutions. Time and again, we’ve seen that violent upheavals, far from ushering in lasting peace or meaningful change, merely shift the reins of power from one set of oppressors to another. The cycle of violence begets more violence, leaving the fundamental structures of injustice intact.

Throughout history, societies have glorified bloodshed to an alarming degree. Both those who shed blood in the name of a cause—be they labeled murderers or martyrs—have been elevated to mythic status. Empires, kingdoms, and even religions have fallen prey to this dangerous glorification. Take, for instance, Christianity—a faith founded on the teachings of a man who shunned violence. Yet, a cursory glance at Christian history reveals numerous bloody episodes that stand in stark contrast to Jesus’ message of love and non-violence. This disconnect between the peaceful teachings of spiritual leaders and the violent actions of their followers is a recurring theme across religions and ideologies.

However, amidst this grim tableau of history, we find inspiring figures who chose a different path. Consider Thomas Merton—writer, theologian, mystic, and social activist—who raised his voice against American atrocities during the Vietnam War. Many believe his untimely death was no mere accident, but a consequence of his outspoken criticism. From Socrates to Gandhi, history’s true critical insiders have steadfastly adhered to non-violence, even in the face of death. These were not

passive observers, wracked with guilt over their inaction. Rather, they were active participants in the struggle for justice, choosing to shed light rather than blood. The impact of these non-violent resisters on human thought and societal structures is unparalleled. They stand as testament to the power of peaceful resistance and the enduring influence of ideas over force.

At its core, any form of violence is an affront to our shared humanity. Gandhi's life serves as an eloquent testament to the power of non-violence, demonstrating that there is no situation that inherently demands a violent response. Had Gandhi succumbed to the temptation of violent means, India's struggle for independence might have concluded sooner, but at what cost? The very soul of the nation would have been irreparably damaged. India, as we know it today, is the fruit of Gandhi's unwavering patience and commitment to non-violence. No other nation on Earth embraces such a vast tapestry of differences and diversity within its borders. This unique characteristic is a direct result of Gandhi's ability to rise above petty kingdoms and short-term interests, guiding the nation through a process steeped in non-violent principles.

SM: You spoke about the religious fervour of Gandhi. Gandhi had spoken about Ram Rajya; today, the promoters of Hindutva also raise the call to usher in the Ram Rajya; are those same?

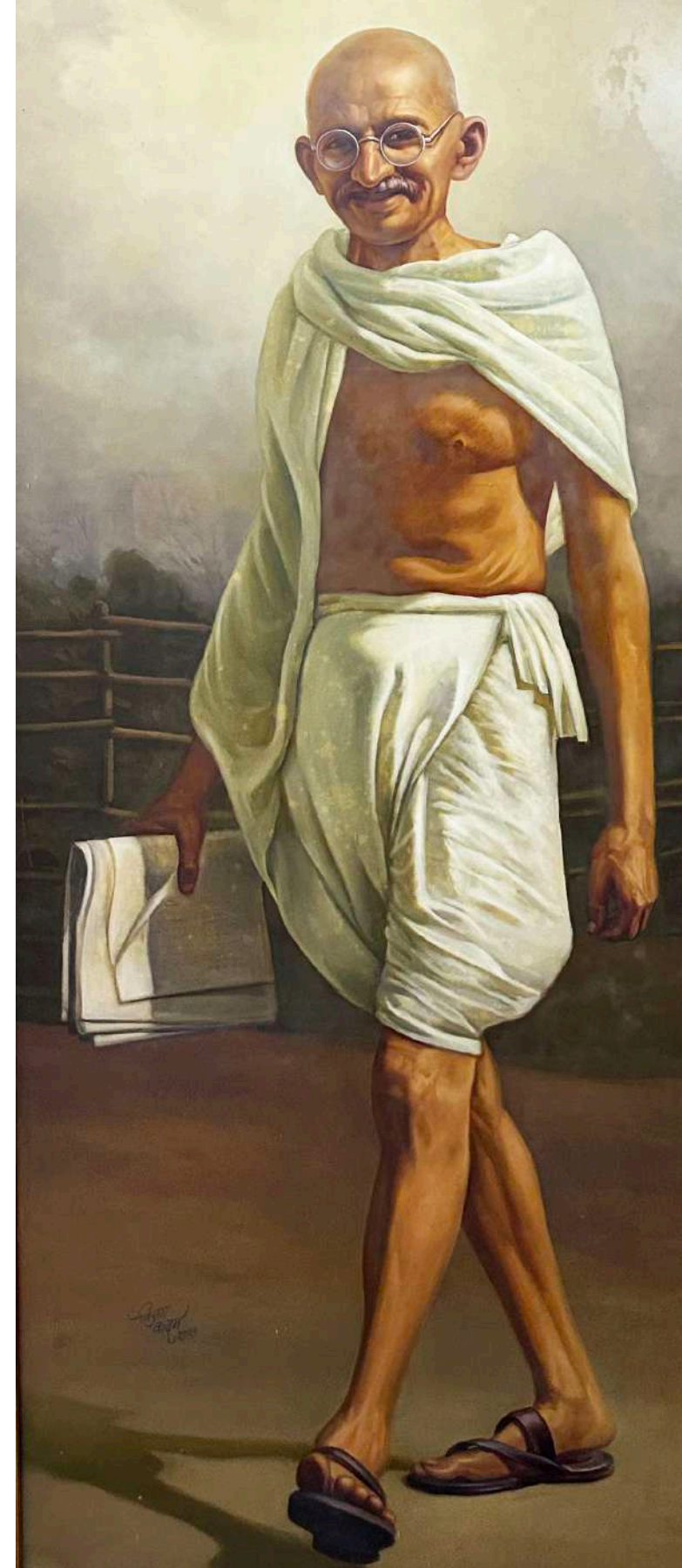
BJK: Gandhi's concept of Ram Rajya, much like Jesus' Kingdom of God, was never intended to be a tangible earthly realm. It is, instead, a metaphorical world of peace and self-dignity—a state of being that requires no defense by swords or guns. To reduce Ram Rajya to a few acres of contested real estate in North India is to fundamentally misunderstand and diminish Gandhi's vision. This misinterpretation mirrors the tragic history of the Holy Land for

Gandhi's concept of Ram Rajya, much like Jesus' Kingdom of God, was never intended to be a tangible earthly realm. It is, instead, a metaphorical world of peace and self-dignity—a state of being that requires no defense by swords or guns.

Christians. Once marked as their own and defended through bloody crusades, the ongoing conflicts in Israel and Palestine stand as a stark reminder of the dangers of literalising spiritual concepts.

Ram Rajya, in its truest sense, is not a geographical area but a process and an attitude. Gandhi's Ram Rajya is poetry—rich in metaphor and possibility—while the current interpretation is prose—rigid, definite, and lacking in imagination. The profound irony that Gandhi, the champion of Ram Rajya, was assassinated by a Hindu who claimed to seek the same ideal, underscores the vast chasm between these two interpretations.

In our contemporary discourse, we often hear of Hindu fundamentalists, Christian fundamentalists, or Muslim fundamentalists. However, this categorisation is fundamentally flawed. There are no Hindu, Christian, or Muslim terrorists—there are only terrorists, individuals whose actions have divorced them from the true teachings of their faiths. The good people of any religion—those who embody its highest ideals of compassion, peace, and universal love—are its true representatives. Fundamentalists and extremists, regardless of their proclaimed faith, do not represent any religion. They are outliers who must be addressed through social and legal means, not as ambassadors of their purported faiths.



Sabarmati Ashram. Photo by Liya Thomas

- We must strive to emulate Gandhi's critical insider perspective
- Address contemporary issues with compassion, integrity, and non-violence
- As we face the challenges of our time, let us pick up Gandhi's shattered spectacles once more

SM: Books, articles, and interviews on Gandhi still uncover newer areas of his life. Thank you for doing the same. Finally three quick suggestions to our readers from Gandhi's life.

BJK: We must strive to emulate Gandhi's critical insider perspective—the ability to love one's community deeply while also having the courage to challenge its shortcomings.

Address contemporary issues with compassion, integrity, and non-violence. We must resist the temptation of quick, violent solutions and instead embrace the patient, evolutionary approach to social change.

In a world increasingly divided by fundamentalism and extremism, Gandhi's vision of a secular and inclusive society can pave way to a state of peace, dignity, and mutual respect for all.

As we face the challenges of our time, let us pick up Gandhi's shattered spectacles once more. Through this lens, we may yet see a path forward—one that leads us not to division and conflict, but to unity, peace, and shared prosperity for all of humanity. ■

Gandhi in the Time of AFSPA

The symbolism of MK Gandhi in India is peppered with significance as evident from a title like the father of the nation that is attributed to him. However, how significant is he or his image when the very nation is a symbol of violence and intimidation?

KAPIL ARAMBAM

The above question has been made relevant by a simple fact that the State has been sponsoring violence and terrorism in the name of fighting terrorism. It was Mahatma Gandhi who said: An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind. First of all, it is difficult to define terrorism; and secondly, India has apparently picked up the baton that the Britishers had left in 1947.

This is not just a guesswork. In many conflict zones, which mainland India might be oblivious of, India is accused of being a neocolonial power. One of the reasons why it is called so is because of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958, which is notoriously known as the AFSPA. This act is a modified version of the Armed Forces Special Powers Ordinance that was legislated by Britain.

Yes. He was assassinated only after the Indian independence, or in 1948 to be precise. A glance into high school history textbook reveals that it was in the same year he made the slogan of Do or Die in the wake of the Quit India Movement. This civil disobedience movement was again a consequence of the Cripps Mission with which the British wanted to secure the support of the Indians in the then ongoing World War II.

Gandhi, as future father of the nation, demanded political independence in return for the support—albeit he did support the British in the World War I. The British considered it was not worth considering and instead responded with the enactment of the Armed Forces Special Powers Ordinance, 1942 in August of the same year (see images).

The Armed Forces Special Powers Ordinance 1942 was one amongst more than 90 ordinances passed in the Central Legislatures in that year.

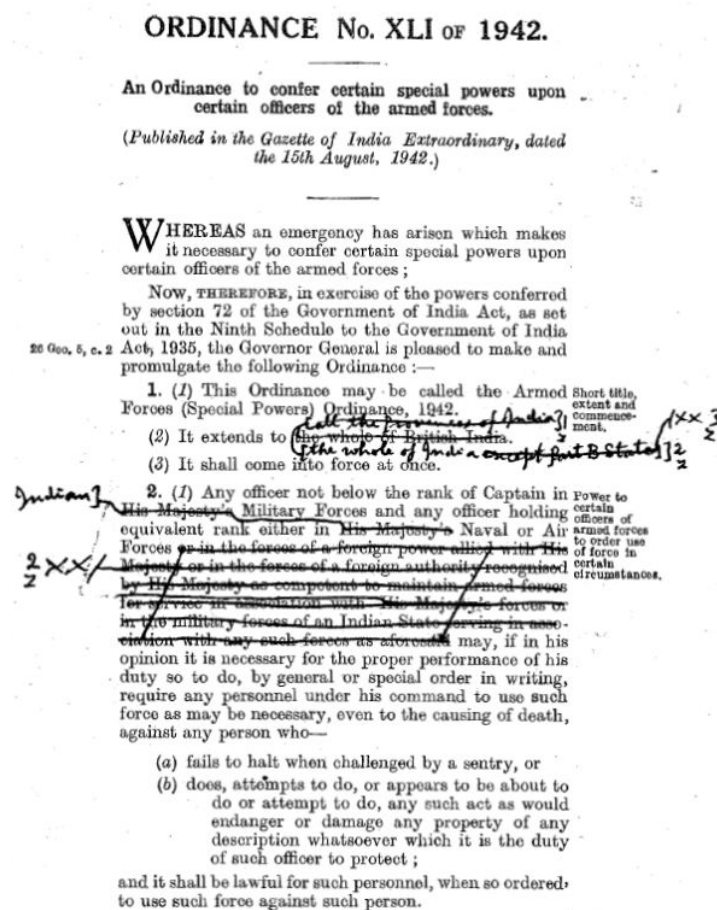
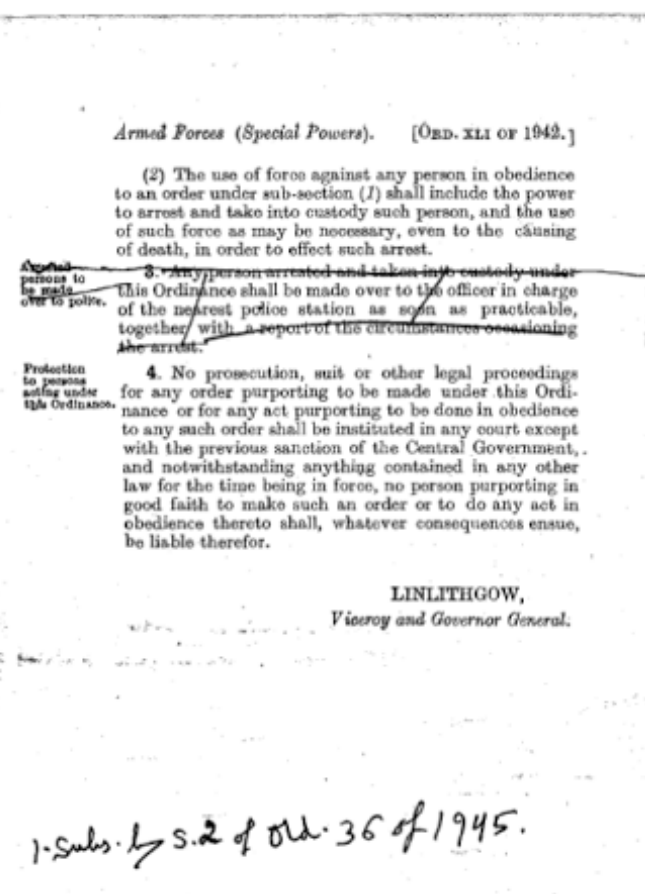


Image: Screenshots from *A Collection of the Acts of the Central Legislature and Ordinances of the Governor General for the Year 1942*, published by the Manager of Publications, Delhi, Government of India Press in 1943 (Source: Digital archive of the Ministry of Law and Justice, Govt of India, March 2016)



Several protestors were killed in the following days when Lord Linlithgow was the then viceroy of British India. Those were also the days of nightmare for the British who had to confront the advancing Axis powers from the Burmese side in its eastern frontier. (Around two years later, the Battles of Imphal and Kohima changed the fate of the war.)

On the other hand, Gandhi had escaped the fate of thousands of people who were killed in their protest for 'independence' that is sometimes referred to as the Indian August Revolution. We will come back to him later.

There are reports available in public forums that describe the earliest days of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958. It was a legal sanction to maintain the Indian internal security in the early post-independence period. For instance, the Committee to Review the AFSPA of 1958, constituted by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India attributed the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act of 1948 as the foundation of this draconian act though it was repealed nine years later and gave birth to the revised version of 1958.

The new act further replaced four ordinances: [i] the Disturbed Areas (Special Powers of Armed Forces) Ordinance; [ii] the Assam Disturbed Areas (Special Powers of Armed Forces) Ordinance; [iii] the East Bengal Disturbed Areas (Special Powers of Armed Forces) Ordinance; and [iv] the United Provinces Disturbed Areas (Special Powers of Armed Forces) Ordinance.

The Committee also mentioned that the constitutional validity of the act by referring to Article 355 that the union government must 'protect every state against internal disturbance' and that 'it is considered desirable that the government should also have power to declare areas as "disturbed", to enable its armed forces to exercise the special powers'.

However, the actual origin can be traced back to the Armed Forces Special Powers Ordinance of August 1942. Perhaps the severity of the AFSPA explains why 1948 is taken as the base year. In the original ordinance, for instance, only an officer above the rank of a captain had the power to arrest or shoot a suspect. In the case of AFSPA 1958, even a non-commissioned soldier has that kind of power; and thus, 1948. The 1958 version also authorises the personnel to enter and search any house without warrant, which was another provision that was not included in the 1942 Ordinance.

We can make a few conclusions from these developments. India lost no time in transforming itself from being oppressed to the role of an oppressor. It also lost no time in transforming itself from a slave nation to that of a neo-colonialist. Then till today,

India is using a colonial weapon to suppress political movements albeit with no intended results. The concept of impunity that it successfully developed is now inherited proudly by its federal states today, for the most part by those in the security establishment. The double standard never ceases as India has been sponsoring state terrorism in its own backyard and endorsing military rule while showing-off Gandhi's principle of non-violent resistance and showcasing the ideals of democracy in front of the whole world.

These conclusions remind us of the wisdom that you cannot fool all the people all the time but so far it is going good. In this context, how does the so-called father of the nation fit into the state of affairs?

I advocate training in arms for those who believe in the method of violence. I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honour than that she should in a cowardly manner become or remain a helpless witness to her own dishonour.

—MK Gandhi, *The Doctrine of the Sword* (1920)

To put the quote into its original context, Gandhi mentioned that he suggested for violence when given 'a choice between cowardice and violence' and that 'nonviolence is infinitely superior to violence'.

For starters, Gandhi has nothing to save the self-declared honour by imposing AFSPA in places like Kashmir, Nagaland, and Manipur, among others, where peace and justice are more desirable than 'honour' that is overdone with self-righteousness. Besides he has little to do with the Indian-nation building process, because he was already no more. The nation is an antithesis to our peaceful existence. Gandhi, while he was alive, might not have wanted to be called the father of a violent nation. Anyway, we know there is no constitutional provision that allows such a title of 'father' and that there is no such official recognition yet nothing is more concrete than the reality.

And the reality? We have been force-fed with 'national' icons and symbols that can be at best described as junk, but nevertheless forced on us, though popular narratives

of the Indian freedom struggle and propaganda. Now who can tell the difference between India and the erstwhile British Raj particularly so when there are several reports indicating India's income inequality is worse now than under the British Rule?

This is not to deny the fact that Gandhi played a major role in the freedom movement. Let's not even call him a charlatan like others have been criticising him. Let's agree that he played a godly or saintly or angelic role in the movement. Still, history has obliged us to defy it because the Indian independence means little to so many people, who reside within the present political map of the country. In just two years, as noted above, India reincarnated as another imperialist nation that people in the subcontinent had been fighting against for two centuries. Incidentally Gandhi was no more by then.

He is also relevant here on the virtue of the sheer number of his followers and the holy position he occupies in the national politics till today. An act like AFSPA is in direct contrast to his Tolstoy- and Thoreau-inspired ideals of nonviolence and civil resistance. On another level, the union rejects those people who protest using his principles like a useless piece of crap.

Either India should do away with him to move forward with practical approach such as that of using the Kautilyan statecraft or if not, offer some reasons for putting him on a pedestal. But don't use guns as well as organise police training programmes under his name and philosophy of non-violence. Preaching two contradictory things simultaneously is hardly convincing.

Once Gandhi stated: 'I have conceded that even in a nonviolent state a police force may be necessary' and added, 'Of course, I can and do envisage a state where the police would be unnecessary but whether we shall succeed in realising it, the future alone will show*.' Apparently he was too idealistic and didn't have an imagination of the future, especially with reference to the ever-growing inclination of the Indian state towards employing violence as a means to its national ends. In a way it is futile to even talk about human rights in this context. (*Source: *Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*)

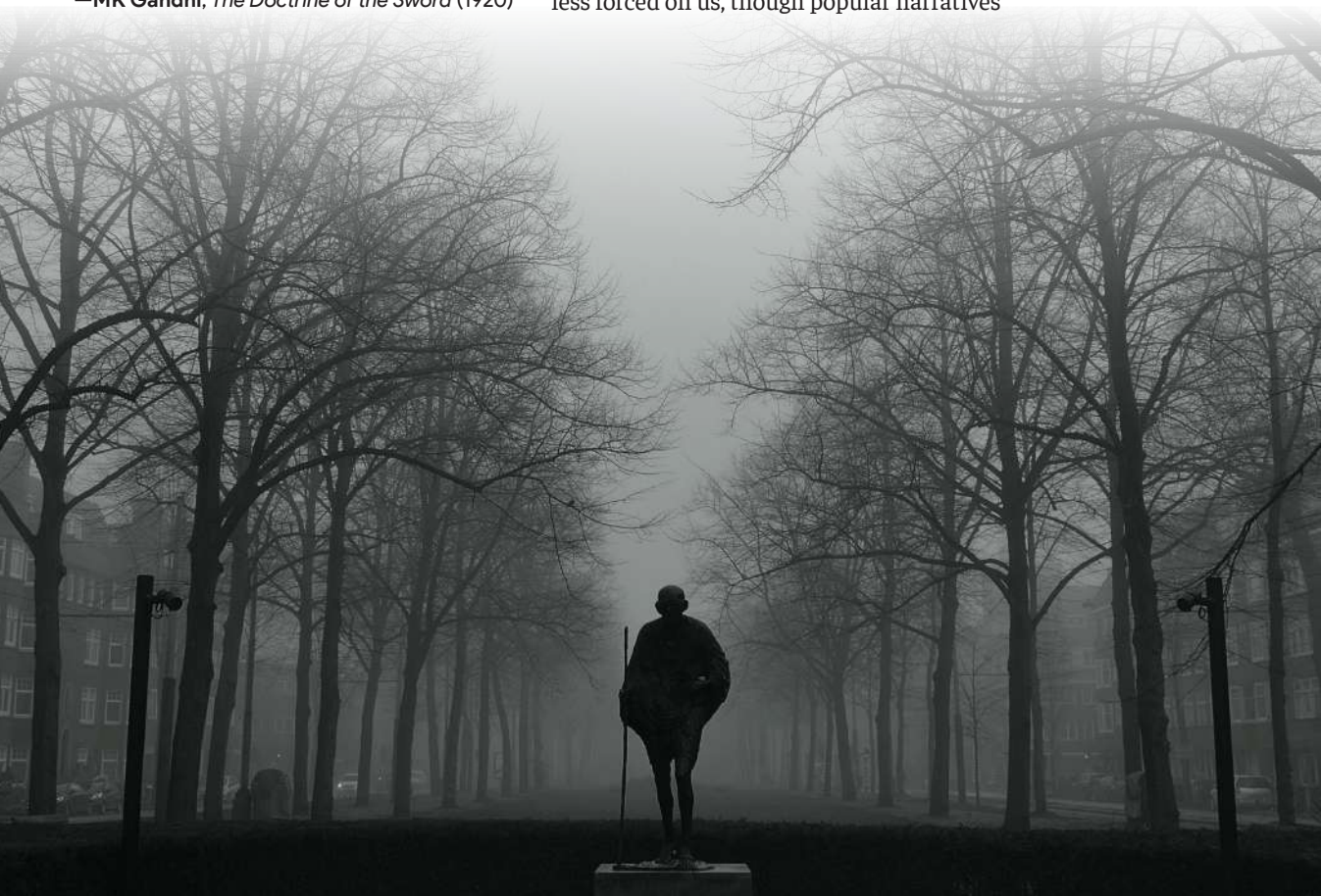
It is claimed that he did have a hint about the days to come, which was evident from his desire to dissolve the Congress party. This party monopolised the national politics for nearly three decades without a break. The period as well coincided with the annexation of Manipur, the rise of armed movements across the Northeast and the union's decision to utilise coercive measures including the imposition of AFSPA to deal with the issues.

Yet we can be sure that it could as well be any other political party and for a hint we have the incumbent right-wing BJP at the centre. This statement is not a wild guess but an inference from the arrogance and ignorance of the union that have shaped the politics of the day. To make it clear, the critique is far different from those perspectives put forward by both the mainland right- and left-wing organisations that always have a hard-on for Gandhi.

If we talk about those Quit India days, there were lack of coordination and several other reasons—ranging from opposition by the Muslims and 'Indian' army to the indifference of traders and bureaucrats—that made the movement unsuccessful; apart from becoming just an additional, undesirable paragraph on history textbooks or possibly a creative prompt for a Bollywood filmmaker; remember 1942: *A Love Story*.

Our lived experience has become that sort of unsuccessful and additional, undesirable part in the Indian nation-building project. Our mistake was that we were situated near an Indian frontier that was not even its own creation. India, no doubt, was created by the British Raj and the Mughals, named by the Greeks and Persians and appropriated by the Hindus in contemporary history.

Now we have come to such a pass that we are no more interested in its history. To add insult to the injury, there is AFSPA, which is a blot on the Indian democracy. Bapuji is no more; and so, unwillingly for the Indian nation-state, is his idea of non-violence as well. ■



Ignore Gandhiji at Your Own Risk

Dr VASUDHA

Gandhi's vision of civil society, distinct from Western models, was grounded in civic virtues such as tolerance, mutual respect, and self-sacrifice.

This half-naked Fakir of India (as portrayed by Winston Churchill), a “papu” of 1869, was destined to become the “Bapu” of the country. His most outstanding contribution to the world was a 20th-century invention, “*Satya and Ahimsa*”, (truth and non-violence), a legacy that, despite its global impact, did not earn him a Nobel Prize nomination. Gandhi's unwavering commitment to truth is exemplified in his autobiography, aptly titled *My Experiments with Truth*. The honorific “Mahatma” (great soul), bestowed upon him by the illustrious poet Rabindranath Tagore, is a rare distinction shared only with social reformer Jyotirao Phule.

Gandhi's multifaceted persona as a lawyer, politician, social activist, and writer culminated in his pivotal role as the architect of India's non-violent struggle for independence against British colonial rule. This peaceful resistance movement not only secured India's freedom but also elevated Gandhi to the status of a global icon, earning him the title “Father of the Nation” from freedom fighter Subhas Chandra Bose.

The discourse on Gandhi's significance in modern India often oscillates between two contrasting perspectives. Critics, regretfully, dismiss him as an idealist whose Utopian visions of village-centric democracy and non-violent society have been overshadowed by economic imperatives and political machinations. This sentiment is encapsulated in Jayaprakash Narayan's observation that the ideological landscape of contemporary India seems bereft of Gandhian principles. Such a pessimistic view, however, fails to recognise Gandhi's dynamic leadership and the profound impact of his movement's methodologies, which transcended his personal ideals.

Conversely, Gandhi's admirers hail him as the precursor of India's social and political transformation, drawing direct correlations between his ideals and post-independence developments such as the legal abolition of untouchability and the establishment of the Panchayati Raj system. This perspective acknowledges the far-reaching influence of Gandhi's movement while recognizing the complex interplay of various socio-political factors in shaping modern India.



Sabarmati Ashram. Photo by Liya Thomas

Gandhi's publications, *Young India* and *Harijan* served as influential platforms for disseminating his ideas on social justice, truth, and non-violence. His choice of non-violent civil disobedience over constitutional demands stemmed from a profound belief that India's path to freedom should be rooted in indigenous principles rather than in British-imposed institutions.

Central to Gandhi's philosophy was the concept of “Swaraj” (self-rule), which emphasised the interdependence of individual and collective well-being. He envisioned a society where prosperity was achievable only through the harmonious coexistence of personal freedom and societal peace.

Gandhi's role as a social engineer was evident in his tireless efforts to create a society free from violence and inequality. His advocacy for marginalised groups, including women and untouchables, and his stance against social evils like child marriage and restrictions on widow remarriage, laid the foundation for a more equitable society.

Although Gandhi did not explicitly discuss the concept of civil society, his inclusive approach and emphasis on mutual respect embodied its core principles. His vision of civil society, distinct from Western models, was grounded in civic virtues such as tolerance, mutual respect, and self-sacrifice, promoting a “live-and-let-live” ethos aimed at mitigating inter-group conflicts.

Mahatma Gandhi's role and influence in shaping modern India is beyond dispute. His relevance as a person and a philosopher in the 21st century is as significant as in the previous one. In our increasingly globalised and technologically advanced world, Gandhi's principles of *Sarva dharma sama bhaav* (Equality of all religions) and *Sarva dharma Sadbhaav* (Goodwill towards all religions) remain profoundly relevant. These tenets, when applied, can foster an environment of harmony and compassion, realizing Gandhi's vision of *Vasudhaiva kutumbakam* (The world is one family).

As we navigate the complexities of the 21st century, the words of Dr Martin Luther King Jr resonate with renewed urgency: “If humanity is to progress, Gandhi is inescapable. He lived, thought, and acted, inspired by the vision of humanity evolving toward a world of peace and harmony. We may ignore him at our own risk.” Indeed, Gandhi's legacy continues to serve as a guiding light, illuminating the path towards a more just and harmonious global society. ■





Pic: Public Radio Tulsa

NONVIOLENCE: REMEMBERING GANDHI AND LUTHER

Our secret inner attitudes are often cruel, attacking, judgmental, and harsh. The ego seems to find its energy precisely by having something to oppose, fix, or change. This is the universal addiction.

RICHARD ROHR OFM

Generations of Christians seem to have forgotten Jesus' teachings on nonviolence. We've relegated visions of a peaceful kingdom to a far distant heaven, hardly believing Jesus could have meant for us to turn the other cheek here and now. It took Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948), a Hindu, to help us apply Jesus' peace-making in very practical ways. As Gandhi said, "It is a first-class human tragedy that peoples of the earth who claim to believe in the message of Jesus whom they describe as the Prince of Peace show little of that belief in actual practice." Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968), drawing from Gandhi's writings and example, brought nonviolence to the forefront of the civil rights movement in the 1960s.

Training in nonviolence has understandably emphasised largely external methods or ways of acting and resisting. These are important and necessary, but we must go even deeper. Unless these methods reflect our inner attitudes, they will not

make a lasting difference. We all must admit that our secret inner attitudes are often cruel, attacking, judgmental, and harsh. The ego seems to find its energy precisely by having something to oppose, fix, or change. When the mind can judge something to be inferior, we feel superior. We must recognize our constant tendency toward negating reality, resisting it, opposing it, and attacking it on the level of our mind. This is the universal addiction.

Nonviolence teacher Ken Butigan says, our true calling is to love one another as God has loved us. When we take this seriously, we are transformed into lovers who care for all beings. In practical terms this means resisting the tendency of the violence system to divide the world into various enemy camps. A fundamental script of this system is to separate "us" from "them": ... those who are worthy of our love and those who are not.... Often, we project our own unacknowledged violence onto them.

Nonviolence takes another approach. Practitioners of nonviolence seek to become their truest selves by slowly learning to love all beings, confident that all are kin and that we are called to embody this kinship concretely, especially in the midst of our most difficult and challenging conflicts.... Nonviolence is committed to challenging and resisting every form of violence. Nevertheless, it does not conclude that the opponent is absolutely and irrevocably incapable of loving or of being loved. To love the perpetrator.... is a creative and daring act that seeks to provoke all parties to make contact with their true self, the undefiled reality of God, which dwells at the center of their being. The greatest work of nonviolence is to create situations, which free the sacredness of ourselves and our opponent.

Violence Begets Violence

Today, many think we can achieve peace through violence. We've all witnessed actions coming from the logic "We'll stop killing by killing." It's the way we think, even though it's in opposition to all great religious teachings. Our need for immediate control leads us to disconnect the clear unity between means and ends. The U.S. even named a missile that was clearly meant for the destruction of humanity a "peacekeeper." The peace we are keeping is a false peace.

War is a means of seeking control, not a means of seeking peace. Violence will always create more violence, especially on the edges, in the colonies. At the center, among folks who are "insiders," it has what it calls peace, yet the violence has merely been exported to those on the edges of society. That is no real peace. Our rich gated communities with security entrances are evidence of the same today. As Pope Paul VI said, "If you want peace, work for justice."

Do we have any idea of all the slavery and oppression, all the killing and torture, all the millions of people who have existed around the edges of every empire so those at the center of the empire could say they had peace? Every time we build a pyramid, certain people at the top will have their peace, yet there will be bloody bodies all around the bottom. Those at the top usually don't recognize the price of their false peace.

From the perspective of Gandhi, nonviolence is the use of power to try to resolve conflicts, injuries, and issues in order to heal and uplift, to solidify community, and to help people take power into their own hands and use their power creatively. Nonviolence makes the effort to use power responsibly.

A Climate of Violence

We live in a whole climate of violence. There is violence in the area of economics by reason of acute fiscal crises, the repeated devaluation of our currencies, unemployment, and soaring taxes—the burden of which ultimately falls on the poor and helpless. There is violence at the political level, as our people in varying degrees are deprived of their right of self-expression and self-determination and of the exercise of their civil rights. Still more grave in many countries are human-rights violations in the form of torture, kidnappings, and murder. Violence also makes its appearance in various forms of delinquency, in drug abuse as an escape from reality, in the mistreatment of women—all tragic expressions of frustration and of the spiritual and cultural decadence of a people losing their hope in tomorrow.

Archbishop Oscar Romero (1917–1980) of El Salvador called the people of his church and his nation to return to justice and love as a way to end violence. He said, I will not tire of declaring that if we really want an effective end to violence we must remove the violence that lies at the root of all violence: structural violence, social injustice, exclusion of citizens from the management of the country, repression. All this is what constitutes the primal cause, from which the rest flows naturally. Institutionalised violence also exists, and that the desperate violence of oppressed persons is not overcome with one-sided laws, with weapons, or with superior force.... As long as there is not greater justice among us, there will always be outbreaks of revolution.

If there were love of neighbor, there would be no terrorism, no repression, no selfishness, none of such cruel inequalities in society, no abductions, no crimes. Love sums up the law. Not only that, it gives a Christian meaning to all human relations.... Love gives plentitude to all human duties, and without love justice is

only the sword. With love, justice becomes a brother's embrace. Without love, laws are arduous, repressive, cruel. . . But when there is love—security forces would be superfluous, there would be no jail or tortures, no will to beat anyone.

The Tension of Nonviolence

One of Dr. King's greatest examples of creative nonviolence was his 1963 direct action campaign in Birmingham, Alabama. Thousands of African Americans, mainly teenagers, were arrested by white police officers for marching against segregation. They kept coming forward, even marching into the face of the fire hoses, and one day, a miracle happened—the white firemen put down their fire hoses and let them march. When that happened, segregation fell. King himself spent Easter week behind bars where he wrote his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” perhaps the greatest document in U.S. history. “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny,” he wrote in his jail cell. “Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

In his letter, King illustrated how a non-violent stance both creates and “holds the tension” of conflict, opening opportunities for transformation. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored.... I just referred to the creation of tension as a part of the work of the non-violent resister.... I have earnestly worked and preached against violent tension, but there is a type of constructive nonviolent tension that is necessary for growth.... So the purpose of the direct action is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation....

Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured as long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its pus-flowing ugliness to the natu-

ral medicines of air and light, injustice must likewise be exposed, with all of the tension its exposing creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.

Remaining Steadfast in Nonviolence

Palestinian Quaker Jean Zaru reflects upon her lifelong commitment to peacemaking: I call myself a Quaker or a Friend. And Friends, throughout history, have maintained a testimony to nonviolence. Early on in my struggles with living nonviolently in a situation of violence, I found myself at a crossroads. I needed to know in my own deepest convictions whether I really did believe in the power of nonviolence to transform a situation of conflict.... How can I have peace within when I worry so much about life in general and the lives of my family members?... How can I have peace within when our movement is restricted in our own country, when walls are built to imprison us and separate us from one another?

As Palestinian women, we have a special burden and service. We are constantly being told to be peaceful. But the inner peace of which I speak is not simply being nice, or being passive, or permitting oneself to be trampled upon without protest. It is not passive nonviolence, but the nonviolence of courageous action.

What is that inner force that drives us, that provides regeneration and perseverance to speak the truth that desperately needs to be spoken in this moment of history?... If I deserve credit for courage, it is not for anything I do here, but for continuing in my daily struggle under occupation on so many fronts, for remaining *samideh* (steadfast) and, all the while, remaining open to love, to the beauty of the earth, and contributing to its healing when it is violated.

Transformative Nonviolence

Nonviolence is the greatest and the most active force in the world.... One person who can express *Ahimsa* in life exercises a force superior to all the forces of brutality, said, Mohandas Gandhi, *Harijan*, March 14, 1936.

Peace activist Father John Dear describes nonviolence as an expression of who we are more than something we do. Active

As we face the structures of violence head on with the power of organised nonviolence, we build grassroots, bottom up, people-power movements to end tyranny and injustice.

nonviolence begins with the truth that all life is sacred, that we are all equal sisters and brothers, all children of the God of peace, already reconciled, all one, all already united, and so we could never hurt or kill another human being, much less remain silent while wars rage, people die in poverty, and nuclear weapons and environmental destruction threaten us all. It is not passive but active love and truth that seek justice and peace for the whole human race and all of creation, and so resists systemic evil and violence, persistently reconciles with everyone, works to create new cultures of justice and peace, yet insists there is no cause however noble for which we support the killing of any human being. Instead of killing others, we work to stop the killing and are even willing to be killed in the struggle for justice and peace.

As we face the structures of violence head on with the power of organised non-violence, we build grassroots, bottom up, people-power movements to end tyranny and injustice and institutionalise nonviolent democracy and social, economic, racial, and environmental justice. When organised on large national and global levels, active nonviolence can peacefully transform entire societies, even the world, as Gandhi demonstrated in India's revolution, as the civil rights movement showed, as the growing women's, LGBTQ, and environmental movements demonstrate, as the People Power movement showed in the Philippines, and as Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the churches of South Africa showed against apartheid. Gandhi said that nonviolence, when it is harnessed, becomes contagious and can disarm the world.

Nonviolence Begins Within

There is always a linkage between the inner journey of contemplation and our ability to work against violence in the world, in our culture, and in ourselves. As long as we bring to our actions a violence that primarily exists within ourselves, nothing really changes. The future is always the same as the present. That's why we have to change the present.

We have to begin within and allow ourselves to be transformed. Then the future can be different than the present. Otherwise, we have no evidence that we're going to do anything different tomorrow, next week, or next year. We're going to react next week to the violence that emerges in our wider culture, in our institutions, and in our families just as we react right now. And so we always have to return to what I have often called “cleaning the lens.” Authentic spirituality is always on the first level about us—as individuals. It always is. We want it to be about our partners, our coworkers, or our pastors. We want to use spirituality to change other people, but true spirituality always changes us.

Many people intellectually accept Gandhi's or Martin Luther King Jr.'s teachings on nonviolence and try to execute it by will-power, but that's not what I call a “mystery of participation.” Such people aren't participating in a qualitatively new and different life in themselves. They have changed their minds but not their hearts. In real moments of tension and trial, such people are as much a part of the problem as the people they oppose. Their will and egos are still totally in control with their need to be right, to win, and to have success, which almost always leads to violence of some kind.

I think that was the great disappointment with political activism and even many of the nonviolent movements of the 1960s and 70s in the U.S. It was not really transformation. It wasn't really coming from what we would call—to use a very old-fashioned, religious word—holiness. Such action was often not coming from holiness, but simply the intellect and will, which are not the transformed self.

What we're seeking is pure or clear action. When we find inside ourselves the positive place of communion and holiness, there's nothing to react to. Such action can be very firm, because it comes from that place where we know what's real, what's good, what's true, and what's beautiful. The giveaway is that the energy at that point is entirely positive. That's when we know it's prayer energy and that is what I think it means to be a person of true nonviolence. ■



*My life
is my message.
M.K. Gandhi*

My Life Is My Message

LIYA THOMAS

It was a beautiful drive along the Sabarmati River. As the River whispered its timeless tales, I found myself on a pilgrimage to the hallowed ground - the Sabarmati Gandhi Ashram, the cradle of a revolution that would change the world.

Gandhi returned from South Africa with his heart aflame with dreams of freedom and justice. Here, Mohandas Gandhi planted the seeds of a new India, nurturing not just crops and cattle, but the very spirit of non-violence that would blossom into a nation's liberation. Within these humble walls, Gandhi and his beloved Kasturba wove the fabric of a new society. Their hands spun khadi, but their spirits spun something far greater—a tapestry of self-reliance, dignity, and unshakeable resolve. From this sacred soil, a 241-mile journey

began—the legendary Dandi March. With each step, Gandhi not only defied an unjust salt law but also challenged the very roots of British rule in India.

As I walked through the Ashram's gates, time seemed to slow down. Every object hummed with history, every corner whispered of sacrifice. I found myself touching the past, reading the unwritten chapters of courage, and hearing the silent roar of a nation awakening to its destiny.

And then, as I stood at the threshold, preparing to leave, I felt a profound connection to a man who dared to live his entire life as a testament to his beliefs. Tears welled in my eyes, not of sorrow, but of awe and gratitude. For here, in this simple ashram, I had witnessed the power of a life lived as a message.



Onam Revisited The Festival of Dravidian Egalitarianism

DR GEORGE JOHN

Onam's enduring significance lies in its celebration of a forgotten past, a time when society was free from the oppression of caste, and everyone lived in equality with a rich tapestry of historical, cultural, and social meaning.

Onam, celebrated with great enthusiasm in Kerala, is often regarded as a Hindu festival. It commemorates the annual return of the benevolent King Mahabali, whose reign is remembered as a time of prosperity, equality, and justice. However, on closer examination of the festival's origin and its historical context reveals that Onam may not be a Hindu festival at all. Rather, it can be seen as a celebration of the indigenous Dravidian culture, which predated the advent of Hinduism in Kerala. This essay seeks to revisit Onam, exploring its cultural roots, the transformation of Kerala society under the influence of Hinduism, and the enduring significance of Mahabali's narrative in reflecting the struggle between egalitarianism and social stratification.

Mahabali receiving Vamana, Chennakesava Hindu temple, Somanathapura, Karnataka. Photo by Kandukuru Nagarjun



The Pre-Hindu Egalitarian Society of Kerala

Before the advent of Hinduism, Kerala was home to a classless, casteless society rooted in Dravidian culture. Historical evidence suggests that much of early Kerala society was shaped by the principles of Buddhism and Jainism, both of which promoted egalitarianism and rejected the caste system. Kerala, with its tropical landscape and self-sufficient communities, developed in relative isolation from the northern Aryan influences that brought hierarchical social structures to other parts of India. The native population followed indigenous practices, centred around agriculture and trade, and the absence of a rigid class system allowed for a more democratic and egalitarian social order.

In this pre-Hindu society, most of the population were adherents of Buddhism, and they found fertile ground in Kerala. Buddhism's emphasis on the equality of all beings appealed to the indigenous Dravidian population, including the Pulayas, Parayas, and other communities later classified as "lower castes". Early Kerala's egalitarianism is evident in how these communities lived and worked together, without the rigid social stratification that would later define caste-based societies. Historical records from this period describe a democratic way of life where land was communally owned and the concept of Varna (caste hierarchy) had no place in societal organisation.

The pre-Hindu Dravidian society in ancient Kerala was marked by a distinct cultural identity, independent of the influences that shaped much of northern India. The Dravidian people had their own pantheon of gods and goddesses, including deities like Murugan and Kottavai, who were later assimilated into the Hindu pantheon. Agriculture was the primary occupation, and the land was communally owned, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and social cohesion.

The Sangam literature from neighbouring Tamil Nadu provides glimpses of a society where warriors, poets, and traders moved freely without being confined by caste. It also depicts a period of flourishing trade and cultural exchange with the ancient Mediterranean and Arab civilisations. This cosmopolitan ethos, coupled with the emphasis on community welfare, laid the groundwork for the later acceptance of Buddhism and Jainism, both of which resonated with the egalitarian values already present in society.

The Decline of Buddhism and Jainism

The decline of Buddhism and Jainism in Kerala was not merely a religious shift but a deliberate socio-political strategy employed by the emerging Brahmanical elite. By the 8th century CE, Buddhism, which had enjoyed royal patronage and widespread support, began to lose ground to the rising influence of Hinduism. This period coincides with the life of Adi Shankaracharya, a philosopher and theologian born in Kaladi, Kerala, who played a crucial role in reviving and consolidating Hinduism through his philosophy of Advaita Vedanta.

Shankaracharya's debates with Buddhist scholars and the establishment of Hindu monasteries (*mutts*) in key locations across India were part of a broader strategy to re-establish Brahmanical dominance. Temples dedicated to the Buddha were reconsecrated as Hindu temples and Buddhist symbols were appropriated and repurposed. For example, the Avalokiteshvara statue in Thiruvananthapuram was transformed into an icon of Padmanabhasawamy, a special form of Lord Vishnu. This process of cultural assimilation and erasure led to the near-complete disappearance of Buddhism from Kerala by the 12th century CE.

Impact of Aryan Migration on Social and Religious Structures

The arrival of Aryans in the southern regions of India brought about profound changes in the social and religious fabric of Kerala. The Aryan influence also brought with it the Patriarchal family structure, which conflicted with the Indigenous matrilineal systems practised by many Dravidian communities. The Brahmins, with their access to Vedic knowledge and rituals, positioned themselves at the top of the new social order, creating a stratified society that would eventually solidify into the caste system.

The egalitarian society of early Kerala began to change with the Aryan migration into the southern regions of India, bringing with it the Brahminical system of Hinduism. The Brahmins, who were closely tied to the royal families of Kerala, slowly began to exert influence over the local population, introducing the concepts of the varna system and the caste hierarchy. The transformation was

gradual but profound, as the Brahminical elites established control over religious, political, and social institutions, solidifying their dominance through alliances with the ruling class.

As Brahminical Hinduism took root in Kerala, the once-egalitarian society became stratified according to caste. The royal households in Kerala played a key role in this transformation. They adopted Hinduism as a means of consolidating their power and aligned themselves with the Brahmin class. The Namboodiri Brahmins gained significant control over the religious and political life in the region, creating a social order that privileged the upper castes while marginalising the lower castes. The caste system became deeply entrenched, with the lowest castes, subjected to severe discrimination and exploitation.

During this period, the once-dominant religions in Kerala - Buddhism and Jainism, were systematically suppressed. The extermination of the Buddhist culture in Kerala was almost total, as the Brahminical elite sought to eliminate any challenges to their religious and social dominance. Buddhist temples were converted to Hindu places of worship and Buddhist communities were either absorbed into lower castes or forced into exile. This period of religious transformation saw the complete subjugation of Kerala's once-egalitarian society into the strictures of caste-based Hinduism.

The Symbolism of Mahabali and Vamana: A Clash of Classes

The myth of Mahabali, central to the celebration of Onam, offers a striking reflection of the historical shifts in Kerala society. According to the Hindu narrative, Mahabali was a benevolent King whose reign was marked by prosperity and equality. However, his growing power and influence alarmed the gods, particularly Vishnu, who took the form of Vamana, a dwarf Brahmin. Vamana tricked Mahabali into surrendering his kingdom by asking for three paces of land, and with each step, Vamana expanded in size, eventually pushing Mahabali into the underworld of *Pathalam*.

This story, often interpreted as a tale of divine intervention, can also be seen as a

symbolic representation of the displacement of the Indigenous Dravidian egalitarian order by the Brahminical caste hierarchy. Mahabali, revered as a just and fair ruler, represents the pre-Hindu, classless society of Kerala, while Vamana, the Brahmin avatar of Lord Vishnu, symbolises the imposition of the caste system by the upper castes. The narrative of Mahabali being pushed underground can be viewed as a metaphor for the subjugation of the lower castes under the dominance of the Brahmins.

In this context, the annual celebration of Onam – marking the return of Mahabali to visit his subjects – takes a deeper meaning. It is not a celebration of harvest and its abundance but a remembrance of a lost egalitarian society as well as a celebration of liberation from oppression. It is a festival which emphasises unity and equality, reflecting a longing for the return of a time when Kerala was free from the rigidities of caste.

Colonial Era and Social Reform Movements

The British colonial administration's policies had a profound impact on Kerala's social structure. The British codification of laws and their support for the upper-caste landowners entrenched the caste system further. However, this period also witnessed the rise of social reform movements that sought to challenge caste oppression and religious orthodoxy.

Social reformist leaders like Sree Narayana Guru championed the cause of the lower castes, advocating for social equality and the rejection of caste discrimination. His famous proclamation, "One caste, one religion, one God for all humanity", became a rallying cry for social reform. Ayyankali, a leader from the Pulaya community, led movements to secure educational rights and social justice for the oppressed castes. These reform movements intersected with the missionary activities of Christian groups, who offered education and social mobility to lower-caste converts. The efforts of these reformers laid the groundwork for the eventual abolition of untouchability and the upliftment of marginalised communities.

Onam Today: A Celebration of Unity and Resistance

Today, Onam continues to be celebrated across Kerala, but its meaning and significance have evolved. While it is still seen as a Hindu festival by some, its roots in Kerala's Dravidian heritage and its connections to a time of egalitarianism and justice remain deeply embedded in the collective consciousness of the people of Kerala. The narrative that Mahabali's reign, once symbolising an egalitarian society, continues to resonate as a celebration of equality, unity, and resistance to social oppression.

The significance of Onam transcends its religious and cultural boundaries. In a society still grappling with the vestiges of caste-based discrimination, Onam offers a vision of a Kerala that once existed – a Kerala where class and caste distinctions did not dictate one's place in society. It is a celebration of a lost era of equality, a reminder of the injustices of the caste system, and a call to continue the fight for a more inclusive and just society.

The festival of Onam, though commonly understood as a Hindu celebration, is deeply rooted in the indigenous Dravidian culture of Kerala. It reflects the values of a pre-Hindu, classless society that was later transformed under the influence of Brahmanical Hinduism and the caste system. The myth of Mahabali and Vamana can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of the struggles between the upper and lower castes, with Mahabali embodying the benevolent rule of an egalitarian society and Vamana symbolising the imposition of caste hierarchy by the upper classes. Onam, therefore, is not merely a celebration of harvest or a religious festival, but a profound reflection of Kerala's history, where the values of equality and justice, which were once dominant, were suppressed by the caste system.

As Kerala evolved, both Christianity and Islam, although theoretically casteless, still sadly had elements of the caste system. The mass conversion of lower castes to Christianity provided a way for marginalised communities to escape the oppression of caste-based discrimination. However, elements of caste hierarchies within the new religious identities even temporarily, show how deeply ingrained the caste system had been in Kerala society.

Onam's enduring significance lies in its celebration of a forgotten past, a time when society was free from the oppression of caste, and everyone lived in equality with a rich tapestry of historical, cultural, and social meaning. Onam is a festival of freedom, one that resonates with the timeless struggle for equality and the enduring hope for a more just and inclusive society. ■

Dr George John, a retired British psychiatrist, is a freelance essayist and lives with his wife in Kochi, India. docgjohn@aol.com

No Words

TOM THOMAS

The words have not come out of her for a long time. Neither have the musical notes, the piano gathers dust.

As I visit her home, on my weekly trip to replenish the food in the fridge that her mother sends, I survey it in brief. Books everywhere, medical and non-medical. A place that looks almost like it has no inhabitants.

I sigh. This is her life. A life I was in part responsible for.

She is a healer, a surgeon. She could have been anything but this really as a gifted student. An Engineer, a lawyer, she had admission to these professions. But I am her Dad, I should know better right? I directed her to this profession, one that my sister, brother in law and wife and her husband are in. She got admission on merit to one of the best medical colleges in the country, and thereafter immediately for a postgraduate course.

I visit the hospital where she underwent the post-graduate course and she walks me through the hospital. It is evening and power goes off. I am a bit appalled at the conditions the duty doctor room is in, it does not seem very secure. Don't worry Dad, she tells me. Even when she contacts COVID during those times, and we are far away, and feel helpless, she says don't worry.

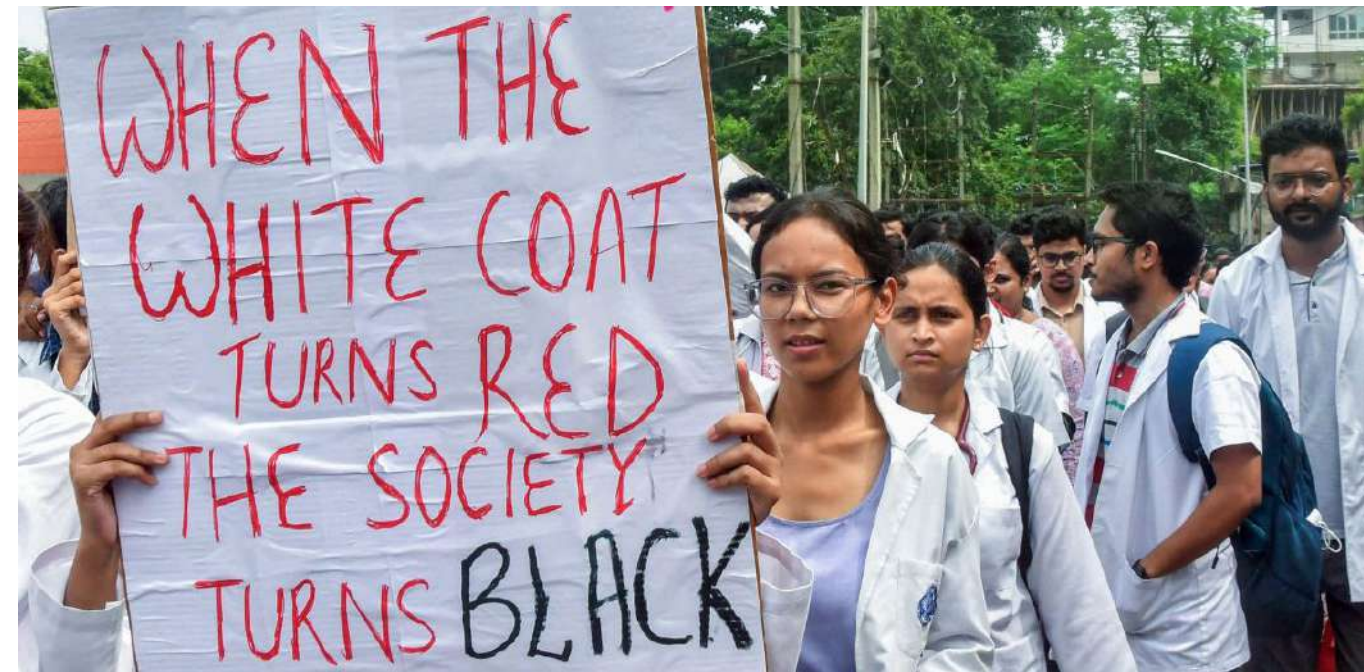
Now fully dedicated to her life's mission, there is no time for the words to come out of her. She is

a writer much better than I can ever be, naturally gifted with words. A talented pianist too, she has won many awards. But that is all in the past. A month ago was her birthday. I could not even wish her on that day; she was stuck in the OT all day attending to some emergency cases.

She is able now to only tend to those who come to her. "He shall live because of Me" is the motto of the hospital she works in. Through the tiredness, the hard long hours, she works at this Mission.

I read the Kolkata incident in the papers and my daughter's words come to me, "Don't worry Dad." How can I not? How can this nation not worry? This nation that celebrated its Independence Day with such pomp and grandeur recently and the vision that we are going to be one of the top economies of the world. If this nation cannot protect its own daughters and healers, as they go about their mission, then we need to worry.

All of us; and especially those who were instrumental in their children following this path, like me, cannot stop worrying. What can I do? I can only write about this pain now. For the loss to this nation of a daughter-healer just like my own. ■



Francis of Assisi

Wounds of Fragility

After having touched the wounds of the leper and having been healed of his own inner wounds, a gradual personal transformation had been taking place in him internally.

GERRY LOBO OFM

Francis of Assisi, while being immersed in a deep meditation on the peak of a mountain named, La Verna, was imprinted the five wounds of the passion of Christ, some time in September of 1224, perhaps around the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. There is enough historical evidence to prove this fact.

Wounds: Fragility to Hope

“By His wounds we are healed.” However, wounds inflicted by others can also cause death. Most elderly people have been marked by life. They carry a heavy burden, particularly in our age and time – their bodies and their infirmities, but also their souls, often wounded by painful experiences such as separation, bereavement, loneliness and sometimes rejection by the loved ones. Some of them are raw, as if flayed alive.

Persons are wounded in other myriad ways and for various other reasons – physically, emotionally, psychologically etc. They are wounded: physically in wars, in physical conflict with a force beside or beyond, in accidents on the road or by any other mishaps, as a result of natural calamity such as earthquake or tremor etc, because of self-immolation, self-inflicted injury, by harsh words hurled at one by another, because of a misunderstanding, by a hurtful feeling, by an outright rejection by the loved ones, because of a wrong accusation, because of human rights and dignity not meted out, because of an injustice done, by a

Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata by Vicente Carducho



Healing was not a kind of soothing balm on Francis, instead he was being wounded himself internally by the encounter with the putrefied flesh of a person with leprosy.

deliberate economic deprivation and social elimination, because of an apartheid praxis and mentality, by an ostracizing by the society, because participation in democracy is negated by the dominant forces, by maltreatment, because of a physical abuse and so on. There could also be what one may call ‘mystical wounds’ on the body of a person as a result of an authentic and focused life lived as “good.” The Stigmata wounds on the body of Francis point out to this very fact.

Wounds, other than inflicted due to hate, may be considered as mere fragility and of no substantial significance. However, they are not a “limit” imposed on a human person. Instead, they can be a fruitful “resource.” Fragility is related to human finitude, though the literal meaning is something that can be broken. Moral fragility is one’s failure in making appropriate choice in life; the economic fragility implies the scarcity of necessary means of living; social fragility consists of a situation of emergency and prejudice. In our experience, fragile are those who lack motivation and existential reason for being. Fragile, also, are those who are short of words before certain situations of life. Perhaps one might say, fragility is a human experience given by the sense (Bergamo Borgna). Hence, fragility: a limit or a resource? In the case of Francis of Assisi, the wounds on his body, imprinted on a mountain in 1224, speak of the fragility providing human resource: wounds are place of hope in the sense that the human person is not a victim or a hostage of one’s foils and failures, not a prisoner of his sins or frenzy of omnipotence and dominion over others. Human life can be changed, and does change in the measure in which one opens to greater positive possibilities. In the poverty of the flesh, as dust of the earth which rises with the wind, human fragility is a testimony of saving grace, elevated to the heights. Fragility is a constitutive dimension of the human person. Far from being a reduction of the human possibility, it opens to immense relationships.

Wounds are associated with emotional or psychological scars which can lead to a personal growth, resilience and understanding. Wounds can be opportunities for self-transformation and can challenge

the inner self. Wounds can lead to greater self-awareness and be a catalyst for spiritual awakening. The healing process of the wounds can be a journey toward self-discovery, compassion and deeper connectedness to one’s inner wisdom. They can lead a person to heightened sense of purpose and can provide the ability to overcome hardships in daily life. Wounds are a medicine for the heart if they are accepted graciously and patiently.

Wounds Heal, Not Soothe!

Physical as well as psychological-social wounds of others can break open insensitive and indifferent hearts towards magnanimity, solidarity with and communion with the suffering humanity. Wounds of others also, in our world today, can numb sensitivity in oneself opening a chasm of indifference towards the wound-bearer. The self-indulgent world of today concentrates on what profits the self for the advancement of egoic pursuits. Humanity’s trajectory since Adam and Eve has been one of ‘wound-inflicting’ and ‘wound-distancing’ enterprise. Cain killed his brother Abel and that set the track for humanity down the ages to inflict pain and wounds liberally on one’s neighbor. This happens on a daily basis in our society. Whereas few, accepting their own internal wounds of whatever kind they be and embracing also those of others, have found new life, freedom for healing and has provided a way for inner transformation for being unique personalities in history. Francis of Assisi exceptionally emerged as an outstanding personality who from being an unconcerned individual in pursuit of monetary wealth and profit as a merchant’s son, and then being ambitious of worldly glory by trying to gain knighthood, was healed of these mundane affairs by the extraordinary encounter he had with the wounded man with leprous sores and excluded by the “healthy-clean” society of Assisi of the 12–13th centuries.

Healing was not a kind of soothing balm on Francis, instead he was being wounded himself internally by the encounter with the putrefied flesh of a person with leprosy. Wounds of one do bring wound in the other throwing open in the latter the concealed

story of life which often has deep seated pretensions and blatant lies. Hence wounds of one can open the hidden recesses of the other and enable the other to confront his or her life with truth.

Francis did not live an angelic life. He lived a human life by embracing voluntarily the demands of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The physical wounds were only a culmination of the ardent and sincere pursuit of becoming a genuine human person, after the model of Christ. The positive decision to live and practice it with undeterred courage and good will itself was the wound within, with the aim of becoming “upright” in the way God created human beings to be. With this interior wound developed by Francis he pursued to eliminate the wound of “self-will,” which has been creating chaos, autonomy, appropriation and death.

Journey Towards the Physical Wounds

The Galilean prophet, Jesus of Nazareth, certainly appeared to Francis as the perfect model of a human being, not only because the Church had taught him that but also because of his own personal encounter with another human person in whom were concealed psycho-social wounds inflicted on him by the society in his times on account of the leprous wounds or sores that were visible externally on his body. Francis desired to be like the Galilean prophet in everything possible.

After having touched the wounds of the leper and having been healed of his own inner wounds, a gradual personal transformation had been taking place in him internally. The stigmatisation, although a later event in his life, was something that had its roots early on when he encountered the leper. The wounds he experienced through this journey were physically imprinted on him on Mount La Verna only in 1224. Wounds on his body of the crucified Jesus were not some out-of-the-way, instantaneous and magical or mysterious phenomena.

Instead, they were a gradual experience of the wounds he encountered and lived in the process of a journey which he undertook by living with the unfamiliar and differentiated personalities from and around Assisi.

Wounds of a Conscience

The basic concern in Francis was to discover the human person who constantly lives in denial of the truth and is caught up with the passions for possession, passion for power and passion for honor. The human person considers oneself as the proprietor of all things, including rights over God. The over-confidence in the self is expressed in having dominion and control over everything and everyone. Francis was fully aware of the way of Adam and the wound he had inflicted on humanity and that which has become the pattern of human dispensation.

Individualism, exclusion, competition, violence, division, inequality and domination of power have all been causing internal wounds which Francis believed could be healed by obedience. Francis discovered a lack of basic conscience which could be replaced by a definite humanitarian orientation. In opposition to the philosophy that holds its maxim: ‘I think, therefore, I am’, Francis tried to help humanity to replace it with the Gospel ideal, namely, “Life is to be a servant”. Hence the identity which he and his brothers held as ‘lesser brothers,’ that is, lesser before all and in everything, was already a manifestation of the wounds of Christ. After all, the wounds of Christ are nothing but a synthesis of all that he was and he taught.

The physical wounds or scars on the body of Francis which appeared during his intense communion with God are a sign of hope in his fragility. They are a clear depiction of a “conscience.” The wounds human history has carried with it due to immense tragedies will one day be a seedbed of flowers! Human fragility can rise, like the dust rising with the wind! ■

Vegetarianism Is Not a Virtue

In a country unafflicted by caste, you’re simply a vegetarian or a non-vegetarian.

SUSANNA MARIAN VAS & SHAJI NICHOLAS VADACHERY OFM

When a term is ubiquitous and we grow up hearing and seeing it, we take it for granted until its unnaturalness belatedly strikes us. Have you ever reflected on the pure vegetarian collocation and ask yourself whether the word pure was meant to describe the dishes or the diet-keepers?

There are few things more nettlesome than the coupling of those words. Identifying as pure vegetarian sounds more like the description of a virtue rather than the clarification of a dietary preference. If it were simply about the latter, wouldn’t plain vegetarian suffice? Given the proliferation of discourse around the recent Tirupati laddu controversy, we felt that a meaty analysis of the term pure vegetarian and its significances was in order.

Purity as a Caste Weapon

In 2021 Pew Research Center surveyed over 29,999 Indians and found that 44% of Hindus identified as vegetarian. Extrapolating, we get 56% as the figure for Hindu meat-eaters—the numerical majority. 40% of lower caste Hindus identify as vegetarian (60% do not), compared to 53% of general category Hindus (leaving 47%).

In a country unafflicted by caste, you’re simply a vegetarian or a non-vegetarian. Purity impinges on matters of diet when numerical minorities that happen to be hegemonic majorities desire to reinforce segregationist views that will differentiate the in-group from the out-group. In the case of India, the upper caste folk have co-opted the concept of purity to disdain communities that don’t fall under their dogmatic, discriminatory definition of it.





During our respective lifetimes, we've encountered 'puritans' who wore their vegetarianism on their sleeve like it was the supreme virtue, the sole determinant of moral uprightness. "We are pure vegetarian" is an imperious tribe-describing statement for these types. Susanna was a vegetarian for five years, but she never once thought of applying the word "pure" to herself. A college mate (Hindu by birth, atheist by choice) enlightened her on why: "The word is heavily tied to Hinduism, which is probably why you never felt inclined to use it. Only Hindus and Brahmins heavily use the word *pure*, and with pride too." (Interestingly, research has shown that Brahmin society was neither inherently nor universally vegetarian and that the priestly class non-reluctantly consumed meat.)

Caste Among the Cast Members

Although the upper castes have unimpeded access to guilt-edged schools and universities, it's pitiful that they cling to fallacious notions of purity. There are individuals from culturally vegetarian communities who excuse themselves from accepting anything beyond a glass of water from non-vegetarian homes, and even that with the utmost reluctance because the glass likely bears contaminating residue.

Some years ago, Susanna was in a play based on the works of Bengali author-activist Mahasweta Devi that spotlighted the ugly repercussions of communal and caste-based hostilities. On the occasions where the cast took their meals together and in the

same place, a participant from a culturally vegetarian background made a habit of making snarky remarks about non-vegetarian diets, condemning meat-consumption as murder and refusing to partake of a vegetarian feast from the director's kitchen. The reason? "I don't know what vessels they use." For people like her, 'pure' vegetarian food is not simply food without meat; it is food uncontaminated by even the slightest traces of meat.

Herd Mentality

Do you know there's a Wikipedia article called *Cow vigilante violence in India*? Here's a slice: Cow vigilante violence is a pattern of mob-based collective vigilante violence seen in India. The attacks are perpetuated by Hindu nationalists against non-Hindus (mostly Muslims) to protect cows, which are considered sacred in Hinduism.

According to a Reuters report, a total of 63 cow vigilante attacks had occurred in India between 2010 and mid 2017, most after Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in 2014. In these attacks between 2010 and June 2017, "28 Indians – 24 of them Muslims – were killed and 124 injured".

There has been a rise in the number of incidents of cow vigilantism since the election of a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) majority in the Parliament of India in 2014. The frequency and severity of cow vigilante violence has been described as "unprecedented". Human Rights Watch has reported that there has been a surge in cow vigilante

If a plate of beef roast fazes us more than the beef between jingoistic, politically indemnified vegetarians and minority-group non-vegetarians, then we need to seriously rethink what it means to be human and what we mean when we talk about the sacredness of life.

violence since 2015. The surge is attributed to the recent rise in Hindu nationalism in India. Many vigilante groups say they feel "empowered" by the victory of the Hindu nationalist BJP in the 2014 election.

If the ideal of vegetarianism is respect for the sanctity of life, why do certain vegetarians have no qualms about lynching people? Both parties have blood on their hands, but for different reasons: one kills an animal out of hunger, another kills a human out of hate. Big difference.

Out of curiosity, Susanna once asked a schoolmate to edify her on the deification of cows. The response was: "Cows give us milk from which we get dairy products, they help plough the fields, they're great for transport, and their excrement has many useful applications." Think long and hard about this explanation and you might come to the same conclusion that we did: the ardent fervour for this animal feels rooted in utilitarianism rather than haecceity.

Vegetarians' Blind Spots

"But plants have life, too" is the most common comeback in any debate between vegetarians and non-vegetarians. Let's get to the marrow of that riposte and treat it with the gravity it deserves.

Sunflowers and touch-me-nots visibly respond to stimuli like light and physical touch. Venus flytraps feed on insects. Why? Scientifically speaking, plants are living things. Logically speaking (harsh as it might sound), in order for one organism to live, others have to die, either naturally at the end of their life cycle or through predation, hunting, and slaughter as part of the food cycle. If the main contention between human herbivores and carnivores is that eating meat takes a life, then so does eating plants. Do we empathise with a life only when it shares our perceptive faculties and when the expression of said faculties is roughly congruent with our own?

Religious vs Ethical Vegetarianism

In the Hindu tradition, Shaji opined, vegetarianism is more of a religious practice than an ethical practice, where a 'religious' practice is connected to some unquestioned belief. For vegetarianism to be an ethical precept, it has to be a conscious choice because personal ethics are the climax of a reckoning between right and wrong. Still, it's not humanly possible to disconnect our demarcations of religious and ethical territories from our shared reality because no man is an island. In other words, ethics can be self-determined as well as socially, religiously, and culturally predetermined. Add to that the fact that religion and ethics constantly dictate and inform each other.

While religious and ethical vegetarianism can overlap, the underlying motivations differ. Religious vegetarians avoid meat out of deference to their faith's teachings, whereas ethical vegetarians base their choices on personal beliefs and values. Of the two, the religious camp is more likely to see vegetarianism as virtuous or spiritually purifying.

Diet is a ludicrous fulcrum for morality. If "you are what you eat", then 'pure' vegetarianism in India is a letdown because instead of fostering compassion for life, it has been shoehorned to breed resentment and divisiveness. A socially disruptive man once said, "It is not what goes into the mouth that makes a person unclean. It is what comes out of the mouth that makes a person unclean."

Vegetarianism is not a virtue nor is it the wellspring of all virtues. If a plate of beef roast fazes us more than the beef between jingoistic, politically indemnified vegetarians and minority-group non-vegetarians, then we need to seriously rethink what it means to be human and what we mean when we talk about the sacredness of life. At the end of the day, it is the purity of our actions and intentions, and not the ritual purity of our calories, that will decide our fate in the next world or the next life. ■

Education and Creativity

A handful of countries like Finland that prioritise autonomous learning have seen remarkable results in their education systems.

Could schools and universities that are viewed as places of growth be stifling innovation?

ARSHIA CHIDAMBARAM

Global education systems emphasise standardised learning and test students solely based on memory at the expense of their imagination. These lower-value workers have less to contribute to Indian society. By standardising education, these institutions restrict individuality and innovation and instead produce uniform workers. As society grows increasingly competitive, the demand for innovation rises, yet educational institutions hinder further economic progress. By creating uniform thinkers, educational institutions risk losing the creative potential required for economic growth. This has raised concerns about the ability to solve real-world problems amongst future generations.

Could schools and universities that are viewed as places of growth be stifling innovation? Intelligence tests given to students in schools and universities are heavily focused on specific cognitive skills such as reasoning and memory while excluding other aspects such as innovation and emotional intelligence. These tests, when used in educational settings can lead to the labeling of students which may eventually lead to self-fulfilling prophecies and conformity.

Professor Alison Gopnik of the University of California at Berkeley reflected on how the very educational institutions, that are designed to foster our learning, are instead systematically suppressing our creativity. In her study with

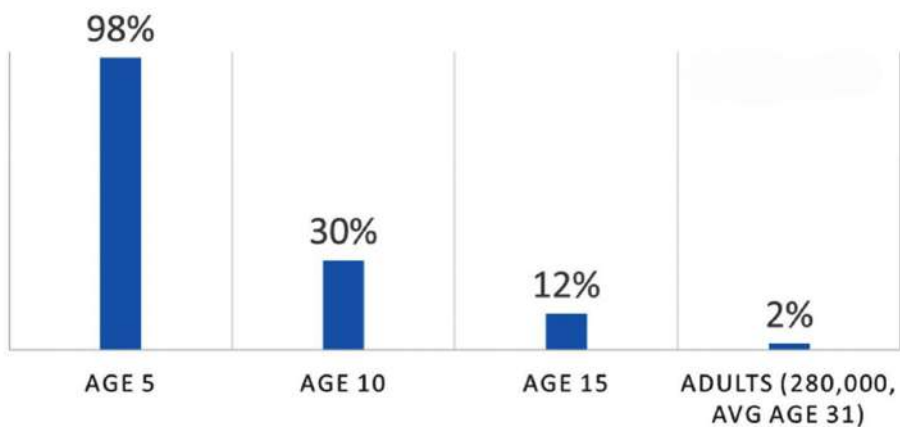
four-year-olds, and similar studies from MIT, it was discovered that self-directed learning (as in free of forced instructions) elevates learning and creativity.

Her research involved teaching the children to manipulate toys to perform specific actions. Children who were taught directly achieved the “correct” answer through replication quickly. The group that focused on self-directed learning, were given the toy to explore all the features themselves. This group took fewer steps to achieve the “correct” answer and was able to find other parts of the toy that could do interesting things.

By emphasising standardised education, schools and Universities produce conformity rather than creativity. This

limits the ability to think innovatively making it difficult to solve real-world problems. This problem has accelerated in recent years due to the rise of technology and artificial intelligence.

A handful of countries like Finland that prioritise autonomous learning have seen remarkable results in their education systems. These countries are known to consistently produce students who are better equipped to solve real-world problems. Education systems worldwide need to revisit their approach to teaching, by embracing critical thinking and innovation. This is not an option. It is essential for future generations as creativity fuels the future, and educational institutions are killing it. ■



Creativity scores at genius level: This is a visual representation of how creativity peaks in early childhood and declines as students progress through traditional education systems (Source: Idea to Value).



The Toxic Corporate Grind: A Modern-Day Slavery

SARA MARIA

Imagine a world where you're trapped in a never-ending cycle of work, stress, and fear. A world where your health, your relationships, and even your dignity are sacrificed on the altar of corporate profit. This is the reality for countless employees today, a modern-day slavery that's often hidden in plain sight.



Anna Sebastian Perayil's tragic death exposed the dark underbelly of corporate culture. A young woman, full of life and potential, was driven to her breaking point by the relentless demands of her job. Her story is sadly not unique. Countless others face similar pressures, struggling to survive in a system prioritizing profit over people.

It's like modern-day slavery but without the chains. Workers are bound by fear, debt, and the promise of a better life. They're forced to sacrifice their health, their relationships, and even their dignity for a paycheck. Think about it: Long hours, unreasonable deadlines, and constant pressure to perform. It's a recipe for burnout, if not worse. Some employees are even afraid to speak up or ask for help, fearing retaliation or job loss.

Anna's case is a stark reminder of the human cost of corporate greed. She was a bright young woman with dreams, aspirations, and a life ahead of her. But the relentless demands of her job, coupled with a toxic work environment, pushed her to her breaking point. It's time to call a spade a spade. Corporate culture has become toxic, and it's hurting people. We need to demand better treatment for workers. We need to prioritize human well-being over profit. Let's not let Anna's death be in vain. It's time to break free from the chains of corporate slavery and build a more humane and just workplace.

Gandhi's Vision of Human Dignity and Freedom

Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy offers a powerful lens through which to examine these issues. He emphasised the importance of human dignity, self-respect, and freedom from exploitation. His concept of swaraj, or self-rule, is particularly relevant in the context of modern corporate culture.

Gandhi believed that true freedom comes from within. Employees who are treated with dignity and respect are more likely to feel empowered and capable of

asserting their rights. He also advocated for non-violence, which can be applied to the modern workplace through peaceful means such as collective bargaining, strikes, and public protests.

The Parallels Between Modern Corporate Culture and Slavery

- **Forced Labour:** While not explicitly involving physical chains, many employees find themselves trapped in a work cycle they cannot easily escape. The fear of job loss, financial instability, and societal pressures can create a sense of coercion that is akin to forced labor.
- **Dehumanisation:** The relentless pursuit of profit often leads to a disregard for the well-being of employees. They are treated as interchangeable cogs in a machine, rather than as individuals with intrinsic value. This dehumanisation is reminiscent of the treatment of enslaved people.
- **Lack of Control:** Employees often have little to no control over their working conditions, hours, or even their personal lives. This loss of autonomy is a hallmark of slavery.

The tragic case of Anna Sebastian Perayil serves as a stark reminder of the human cost of corporate greed and exploitation. By drawing parallels between modern corporate culture and historical slavery, we can gain a deeper understanding of the systemic issues at play. Gandhi's vision of human dignity, freedom, and non-violence offers a path forward, one that prioritises the well-being of individuals over profit.

It is time for corporations to embrace a more ethical and sustainable approach to business that values the lives and livelihoods of their employees. We must demand a workplace that is free from exploitation, where workers are treated with dignity and respect. Let us honor Anna's memory by fighting for a better future for all. ■

Poverty, Stealing, and the Aftermath

ROMIL UDAYAKUMAR TNV

Based on a book by Luigi Bartolini, with a script by Cesare Zavattini written, as the author noted, “with the camera exclusively in mind,” *Bicycle Thieves* is both a political parable and a spiritual fable. It offers a hard look at the conditions of the Roman working class after World War II while also serving as an inquiry into the state of an individual soul. The soul in question belongs to Antonio Ricci, a lean, handsome, diffident man who lives with his wife, Maria, and their two young children in a recently built apartment that lacks running water.

The film explores how one’s helplessness can overtake hope when efforts to right wrongs are not enough to prevent further wrongdoing. *Bicycle Thieves* conveys much more than just the story of bicycle thieves; the bitter truths of a specific era are skillfully woven into the storyline.

The movie begins in post-war Rome, a city grappling with unemployment and poverty. Antonio, a husband and father, luckily gets a job on the condition that he can provide a bicycle to do the work. After acquiring one, it gets stolen. As he journeys to find it, the film reveals various aspects of society. For instance, his wife

sells bed sheets to a pawn shop to retrieve the bicycle, which is already in that same pawnshop. As the story progresses, it portrays powerful themes through scenes such as:

Antonio is in church but entirely focused on an old man who might help him get his bicycle back; he never prays or even looks towards Jesus’s sculpture. Even after losing hope, he tries to relax with his son and goes to a café. Eating there among rich people shows a stark contrast. In the end, when given a chance to steal a bicycle, he does so, and his son witnesses it. This scene is beautifully captured, with the child’s expressions and reactions showing how Antonio has lost all hope. The father-son relationship is depicted throughout the search for the bicycle: Antonio, disturbed, often ignores his son, who falls in places while running behind his father and is left alone at times. In the end, they hold hands and walk away together.

The use of ordinary people and actual locations, which didn’t originate with De Sica, was already a hallmark of neorealism in 1948, a movement that helped Italy secure a central place in postwar world cinema. Like most artistic tendencies, neorealism has often been more of a puzzle than a program, its essence obscured by theoretical hairsplitting and ideological disputation.

The use of ordinary people and actual locations, which didn’t originate with De Sica, was already a hallmark of neorealism in 1948.



By the strict accounting of some critics, there are exactly seven films in the neorealist canon: three each by De Sica and Roberto Rossellini and one by Luchino Visconti. A less rigorous definition includes countless Italian films released between the end of the war and the mid-1960s, even big-budgeted, movie-star-filled, internationally flavored productions like Federico Fellini’s *La Strada* and Visconti’s *Rocco and His Brothers*. Any Italian movie shot in black-and-white and concerned with the struggles of poor people might qualify.

Part of what draws filmmakers (and film lovers) to *Bicycle Thieves* is its purity and simplicity, but to emphasize those elements—the unvarnished honesty of the performances, the gritty realism of the Roman streets, the raw emotions of the story—is to risk underestimating its complexity and sophistication.

Their pursuit of the stolen bicycle is full of pain and anxiety, but it is also an adventure, with episodes of tenderness and comedy on the way to final heartbreak. Those moments, modulated by Alessandro Cicognini’s musical score, provide an undercurrent of hope, much as the bustling rhythm of Rome itself — a city that has resisted dreariness for 2,000 years — supplies a reminder that life goes on. The movie’s depiction of poverty still rings true within this day and age. I have always struggled since my first viewing to find the words to capture the authenticity of what I have been feeling while watching *Bicycle Thieves*, and perhaps what I have written might not be enough. We’re not merely watching a film about the sufferings of the lower class; rather, Vittorio De Sica makes his viewers live through this harshness. Within no time, an overwhelming feeling of heartbreak and guilt comes to our minds, only to be intensified even more by that final frame.

Mohandas, Gandhiji, Bapu

Through personal anecdotes and philosophical musings, the book explores human values and societal transformation.

DR SUSHEELA B

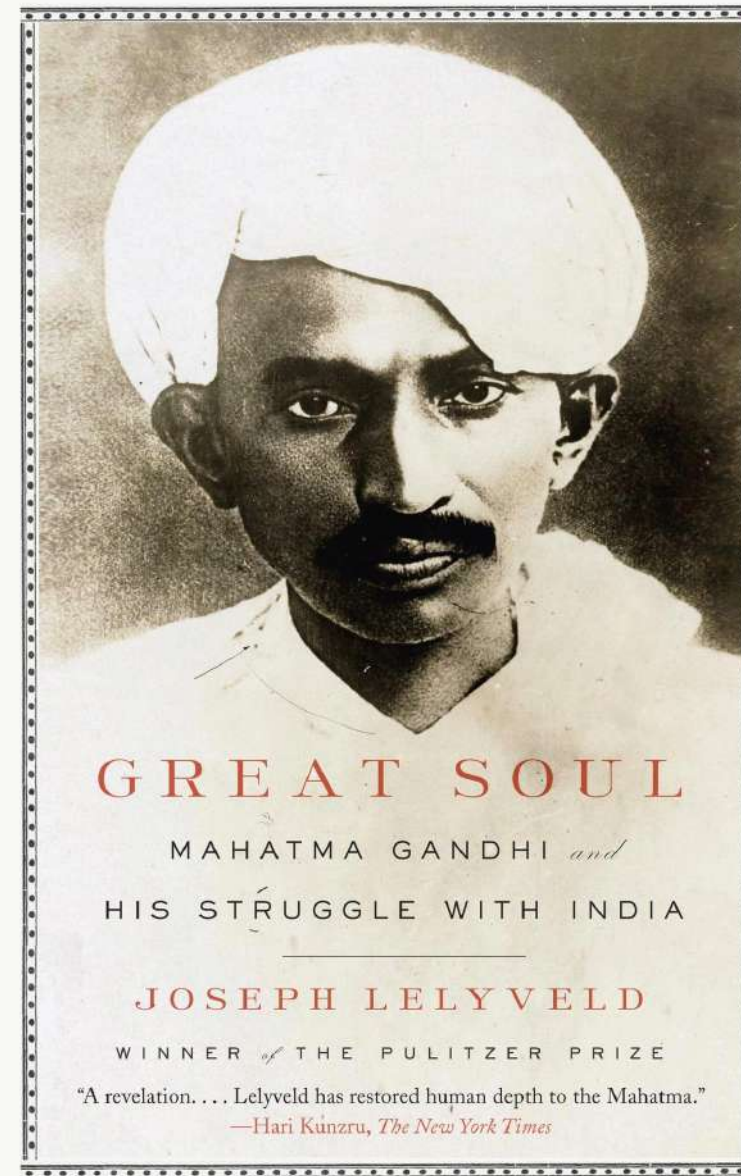
It took me several years to complete the book, *Great Soul: Mahatma & His Struggle For India* by Joseph Lelyveld. I have read a few pages then put it down because at times I found the book slow and difficult to read. But equally there are parts that are brilliant and riveting as the topics raised are heart breaking, whilst others encouraged me to find out more like Britain's responsibility in dividing India into Pakistan and the horrors and millions of death that as a result. Ultimately through this book I find interesting about man's search for truth and enlightenment and the struggles encountered with the self along the way.

This book serves as an autobiography of Sri Mohandas Karam Chand Gandhi, revered as the 'Father of our Nation' and affectionately called as 'Bapu' is an eminent figure in Indian history. Within its pages, Gandhiji chronicles his transformation from Mohandas to the revered Mahatma, detailing the pivotal moments that shaped his adoption of the principle of Ahimsa. Specifically, this literary work falls under the category of non-fiction, precisely an

autobiography. Gandhi's return to India marked a new chapter. Where he became a central figure in the struggle for Independence through peaceful protests, marches, and the Quit India Movement, he inspired millions to join the cause for freedom. His unwavering commitment to Ahimsa or Non-Violence became the corner stone of his approach, advocating the change through peaceful means rather than aggression.

This book is divided into five parts detailing the author's childhood, adolescent experiences with vices, moral dilemmas including theft and meat consumption, marriage at thirteen, educational background including his youth time, as a lawyer, professional journey to South Africa, founding of Sabarmati Ashram, weaving of Khadi, time in Congress and overall search for truth and Satyagraha—each part provides a vivid account of the author's life journey from innocence to challenges, ethical reflections, cultural contexts and personal growth. The narrative culminates in his pursuit of knowledge and justice, showcasing resilience and offering valuable lessons on perseverance and education. Through personal anecdotes and philosophical musings, the book explores human values and societal transformation.

Great Soul: Mahatma & His Struggle For India remains a timeless beacon of inspiration, urging each generation to strive better and be more compassionate.



There is no doubt in my mind that Gandhi had good intentions for all those he helped especially the poor, the downtrodden, the oppressed, suppressed and depressed India. This is clear to his many unselfish acts like not charging fees, insisting on third class train travel, understanding the plight of the poor etc. My impressions on this book is what I wish to share is the narrative which captivates me with Gandhi's meticulous portrayal of his life experiences. The text occasionally featured intricate vocabulary, the overall content proved enlightening, and offering valuable insights to glean from. From this book, I gained insight into the practice truthfulness and aspire to share its importance with others. Honesty and well-being serve as essential elements. That significantly influences the trajectory of our lives. I highly recommend this book to all individuals interested in embracing Gandhi's teachings and aspiring to effect positive change in the world. Gandhi with every line extends an invitation to all to embrace the principles of truth and non-violence in their own lives, fostering a world where a peace and understanding prevail.

This book remains a timeless beacon of inspiration, urging each generation to strive better and be more compassionate. A perfect awe-inspiring book those who want to reform or just follow Mahatma Gandhi's path. It was successful in humanizing him, my respect for him has grown all the more. However, mine is not to judge one way or the other. The point is, this book is an accurate account of one of the truly most well-known leaders of the turn of the century, in his own words. Today, we are enjoying the bliss of freedom is due to the industriousness, diligent work and dedication of this great leader—Gandhi clearly was a man of conviction. His simple living and simplicity of ideas is a source of inspiration to all. I highly recommend this book to all and it is a must read. ■



Salvation in a Strange Land

SAJI SALKALACHEN

It was almost a year ago. My spouse and I were sightseeing in Croatia and Slovenia and had reserved a two-bed aparthotel in Ljubljana for our arrival from Zagreb late evening. Our estimated check-in time was 10:00 pm, as communicated. However, by a twist of fate, the train from Zagreb was delayed at the border and ran progressively late, so we could only reach the hotel by 11:00 pm. The receptionist had left for the day, and with the main door locked and no access code provided, we tried to contact the hotel manager using the number printed on the door (also found in the booking order and on the website). To our shock, there was no response.

At this hour, there were very few people on the street to turn to, and our inability to communicate in the local language compounded the situation. A night caretaker of a nearby hostel saw our plight and inquired with a few known hotels and apartments for any available space for us to stay, but there was no success. Our senior citizen status didn't help either, as we had reached after a long and tiring journey with baggage. The time was past midnight, and we were concerned.

Finally, the caretaker managed, at this hour, to call a cab and told the driver to take us to various city hotels in the hope that one might offer a room for the night. After many inquiries and travel in vain, we reached the Park Hotel, whose receptionist also regretted the lack of space. At this time (2:00 am), we met a Bengali night guard who offered to take us to a downtown hostel (Tresor Hostel) where he felt sleeping space might be available. He walked us along the streets with our luggage in tow until we reached a hostel where, due to our fortune, a room was available.

Consider it divine intervention—our meeting with a stranger delivered us from misery and hopelessness. The vigil and long night ended at 3:30 am when we finally felt secure enough to rest, our bodies drained and our minds numbed. Someone had told us that even the railway stations would not offer us refuge without a valid ticket and schedule of travel.

As we recalled the distress and encounter with the aparthotel that night, the following events ran through our minds relentlessly. Our planning had compromised, and we were lost in the night in a strange land until help arrived from an unexpected source. How else would the chance meeting of a countryman turn into godsend redemption? In hindsight, what struck us was the absolute need for all of us to live out the true meaning of empathy and humanity that may restore hope and faith in one another. The rest of the tour was nondescript, but that moment continues to linger with us even today. ■

What struck us was the absolute need for all of us to live out the true meaning of empathy and humanity that may restore hope and faith in one another.

TRAVEL



LITTLE SISTERS OF THE POOR AT THE SERVICE OF THE ELDERLY POOR!



In 1839 in cold winter, Jeanne Jugan met and found God in the face of a poor elderly woman, blind and paralysed. She gave her bed to the poor woman, opened her home and her heart to her. Since then, many elderly people were welcomed by Jeanne Jugan and her daughters who are called "Little Sisters of the Poor" present all over the world in 32 countries. Jeanne said, "It is so good to be poor, to have nothing and to count on God for everything." She literally lived her saying and taught her daughters to trust in God's divine Providence.

**"Whatever you do to the least of my brothers you do unto me."
Would you like to take care of Jesus in the elderly poor?**



**If you hear the call to follow Jesus in the footsteps of Saint Jeanne Jugan,
COME AND SEE!**

Little Sisters of the Poor

26, Hosur Road, Richmond Town, Bangalore - 560 025
✉ bangalorelsp1900@gmail.com ☎ 080 - 22270273



INTEGRO
INFOTECH & CONSULTING



MOBILE APP DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE

**UNIQUE
MOBILE
APP DESIGNS**



MOBILE APP DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT

Android and IOS for institutions – Schools, Colleges, Nursing homes, Hospitals and NGO's

- User friendly platform based development that enables institutions and NGO to update NEWS directly
- Send NEWS and Notification directly to your target customer base [Students or Donors or Collaborators]

BUILD YOUR NETWORK AND SOCIAL MEDIA VISIBILITY

- As news and notifications in the APP are quick share enabled for all social media platforms
- Engage your stakeholders efficiently and Effectively – Send NEWS, PHOTOS & VIDEOS directly to their mobile phones.

WHY INTEGRO INFOTECH?

- Customised APP Development, each APP is unique
- Unlimited Storage for NEWS and Events
- Unlimited Push Notification Alerts
- APP based contact form /reply form/application form...

CONNECT WITH US
FOR YOUR NEEDS



Martin Patrick
Manager Marketing



marketing@integro.co.in



888 426 7304, 80 50074851



www.integro.co.in