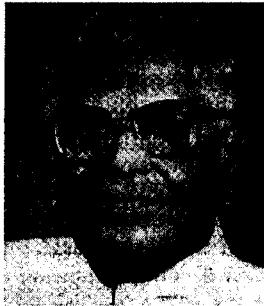


From the President
Mahatma Gandhi

An Angel of Peace

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The people of India cherish the memory of Mahatma Gandhi as the Father of the Nation. He was not merely the leader of our struggle for freedom but he was the leader of social changes which transformed India from a medieval society into a modern one. His teachings on the equality of man, religious tolerance, adherence to truth and non-violence and on freedom of thought and expression at once lifted him from a mere mortal to the level of sage and saint. His exhortations for a higher quality of life did not confine themselves to the narrow limits of his own country, or his own

times. He stood for universal brotherhood and for a life of peace and harmony among the nations of the world. He inspired and led three revolutions in, our own lifetime—a revolt against racialism, a crusade against colonialism and a campaign against violence.

Gandhiji lived to see the success of his first two revolutions, viz. the revolt against racialism and the crusade against colonialism but before he could achieve the third, namely, his campaign against violence, he became the victim of violence at the hands of a religious fanatic. In his martyrdom,

Gandhiji is now regarded as the apostle of non-violence and an angel of Peace. But the movement against violence is still on and nations are trying hard to grapple with the monster of terrorism.

Gandhiji did not claim either originality or infallibility for his ideas. "I represent no new truths," he said, "I do claim to throw a new light on many an old truth." He described himself simply as a man "who claims to be a humble searcher after truth, knows his limitations, makes mistakes, never hesitates to admit them." He was a born radical. He went to the roots of each and every problem, and drew his own conclusions and formulated a unique plan of action.

Deeply religious as he was, he rejected the idea of a State religion for India; he regarded religion as a private matter. Against social abuses and iniquities he waged an unrelenting war. On the position of women, some of his

views were remarkably similar to those of leading women reformers and activists today. As a lawyer, he did not think it was his duty to defend a client, whether he was right or wrong. Equally unorthodox was the code he evolved for himself as a political leader. Politics were not for pursuit of power; he ruled out any personal gain from public service. Gandhiji edited journals without commercializing them, accepted no advertisements; and he held the view that journalism was a vocation rather than a profession.

Though Gandhiji expounded his ideas vigorously and with simple eloquence on almost every conceivable subject over half a century, through thousands of letters and articles and editorials, he never tried to build them up into a 'system'. He was continually developing and outgrowing his own ideas; this was because he was engaged in a ceaseless effort to match his 'deeds' with his

thoughts and beliefs. 'Truth', for Gandhiji had to be revealed in action, and not mummified in textbooks.

When accused of inconsistency, he replied that he was consistent with Truth, not with the Past. What he wrote of Tolstoy was equally true of himself: "He often seemed inconsistent because he was continuously outgrowing his own doctrines. His failures were public; his struggles and triumphs private."

Some of Gandhiji's ideas have acquired a new relevance in our own days. He was an apostle of non-violence in a world in which violence prevailed. He was a great national leader, but equally, he was a great internationalist. His warnings against the ruthless exploitation of Nature have been exemplified by the looming ecological disaster that faces the world today. His pleas against the use of liquor, intoxicants and drugs can no longer be laughed at as mere puritanical fads.

His denunciations of runaway industrialism and militarism have acquired a fresh validity because of the incalculable hazards of nuclear weaponry. How relevant is Gandhiji today!

Gandhiji devoted the best part of his life to one crucial issue: how to perfect the technique of *ahimsa* and extend it meaningfully to human relationships. He objected to violence not only because an unarmed people had little chance of success in a situation of armed conflict, but because he considered violence a clumsy weapon which created more problems than it solved, and left as its legacy a trial of hatred and bitterness, because of which harmony and reconciliation became almost impossible. He did not regard non-violence simply as an avoidance of physical injury to animate beings. He knew that daggers and guns and bombs take just as much toll of human life as ill will, malice and hatred,

which cramp and kill humanity slowly but surely. Gandhiji's non-violence aimed at liberating men and women from inner as well as outer violence.

Gandhiji's passion for peace and amity between nations inspired his closest colleague and political heir,



Jawaharlal Nehru, who sought, through the pursuit of co-existence and non-alignment in international relations, to reduce tensions and expand areas of peace. Nehruji brought to international relations the vision, fervour and methods of

a statesman. He passionately pleaded for a détente and co-existence between the super-powers. He faithfully implemented Gandhiji's ideals of peace and non-violence. Gandhiji, more than anyone else in India in the twentieth century, is a symbol of the evolving image of our culture, ancient and hoary in time and tradition, moored to eternal human values, yet not divorced from the realities of modern life and pressures—a culture that is steeped in universal love. Addressing the universal Spirit, the great Tamil Saint Manikavasagar

sang: "To me who strove against obstinate enemies, not knowing the way to emancipation, He taught the way of love".

So did Gandhiji teach us all the path of Love & Brotherhood and Peace & Fraternity.