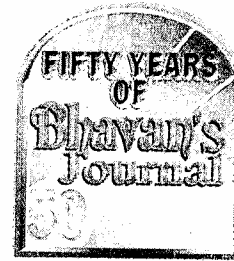


Navajivan, could boast of a circulation of more than a few thousand copies. But such was his acute understanding of the power of the printed word and the grasp of the basics of mass communication that he ensured that his daily outpourings of "my heart and soul" reached all the people of British India from Baluchistan in the Northwest to Kanyakumari in the South and from Bombay (now Mumbai) in the West to Guwahati in the Northeast. Every newspaper in every Indian language carried his message as soon as it got the first copy. The English newspapers, quite shy of offending their British rulers, still had to publish camouflaged versions of the Mahatma's utterances and writings.

If one were to ask the question as to who came first - Mohan Das Gandhi the freedom fighter or Mahatma Gandhi the media crusader for human dignity and equality, the truthful answer would be the latter. M. K. Gandhi, the journalist, pre-dated Mahatma Gandhi the freedom

fighter by at least twenty years. In fact, his stint in South Africa aroused his rebellious instincts and fighting qualities. Gandhi realized the need for becoming a journalist if he had to fight for the rights of the Indian community in Africa. And he brought to his journalism the highest qualities the profession could boast of - courage in the face of adversity, unswerving adherence to truth and non-violence, pursuit of public causes without bitterness or hatred, fairness and objectivity in the presentation of news and views and a meticulous collection of facts and arguments.

We have today media, which reach out to people across continents and to every home and yet they have no messages other than commercial advertisement and debased entertainment. The mass media need a Mahatma; no, not a Mahatma but the Mahatma we lost at the dawn of Independence and we recall ritually on two days every year.



## Mahatma Gandhi: An Angel of Peace

R. Venkataraman

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 nonviolence 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



R. Venkataraman

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 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 nonviolence 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 root 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

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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 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

**He considered violence a clumsy weapon which created more problems than it solved, and left as its legacy a trail of hatred and bitterness.**

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 trail of hatred and bitterness, because of which harmony and reconciliation became almost

impossible. He did not regard nonviolence 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 nonviolence aimed at liberating men and women from inner as well as outer violence.

Gandhiji, more than anyone else in India 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 Sant Mankikavasagar 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, Peace and Fraternity.

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