

Lessons in
Non-violent Civil Disobedience

(Satyāgraha)

From the life of M. K. Gandhi

And

His Legacy

By

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Preface

There are many armed conflicts going on all around the world everyday. Many countries have amassed so many nuclear weapons that they can destroy all life on earth many times over. Some nations have already used these weapons of mass destruction to kill hundreds of thousands of civilian children, women, and men. Too many nations are spending enormous amounts of money and other resources on developing, acquiring, and using their military might while hundreds of millions of their citizens go hungry. The 'military industrial complex' and powerful media are manipulating and / or controlling major policies in many democratic and not so democratic governments to spend billions of dollars in acquiring arms and creating conflicts.

A lot of us would like to change the world for better but do not know 'how'. Life of Mohandās K. Gāndhi can be a good 'role model' to study and emulate. He was a very scared, shy, scrawny, ordinary child and a failure as a young lawyer. By his own admission he was:

"I claim to be no more than an average man with less than average ability."

How did he transform himself from a tongue-tied lawyer to a fearless leader of four hundred million people in their successful fight for independence from the brutal, well armed, and established British Empire? His transformation was so great, Albert Einstein said:

"For generations to come...people will scarcely believe that such a one as this, ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth."

Who guided him? Who were his guru-s (teachers)? Can we learn from his life? He said:

"I have not the shadow of a doubt that any man or woman can achieve what I have, if he or she would make the same effort and cultivate the same hope and faith."

He did not have one single person who can be called his guru. A guru gives us knowledge and removes the darkness of ignorance. A lot of people, experiences, books, his own self-analysis, determination, and perseverance transformed an ordinary Mohan in to a Mahātmā (a great soul) and a bold leader of 400 million Indians. His ideas in the fields of politics, philosophy, economics, education, etc., more than half a century after his death, are still being taught in universities all over the world . Eknath Easwaran, a professor at University of California Berkley has said that:

"Historians of the future, I believe, will look upon this century (20th) not as an atomic age, but as the age of Gāndhi"

World leaders like Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Jr., President Barak Obama have quoted from Gāndhi's writings and have tried to follow in his foot steps.

“Throughout my life, I have always looked to Mahātmā Gāndhi as an inspiration, because he embodies the kind of transformational change that can be made when ordinary people come together to do extraordinary things,”

President Barak Obama in an interview with ‘Outlook’ magazine.

When I was in school, I had seen Gandhiji only once, that too from a distance. Many adults in India, including some of my family members, had taken part in the struggle for India’s independence. I was 12 years old and in high school, in 1948 when Gandhiji was assassinated. In school and all over the country, we had celebrated India’s independence a few months before that. At that time I did not realize the sacrifices and contributions of so many Indians in this struggle or the reasons for it. Later I read his autobiography, other books about him, and saw Gandhi movie by Sir Richard Attenborough. After retiring from work, I had the opportunity to volunteer with a committee that celebrated his birth day, Gandhi Jayanti, by inviting people who had distinguished themselves by following the path of public service to improve the lives of less fortunate people. I came to learn more about Gandhiji, his work, and influence he was having in the world. I was impressed by his humble beginning and how he rose to such eminence, and decided to write about his evolution from quite an ordinary boy in to man of the century.

He wrote his autobiography to tell people about his life and called it “the story of my experiments with Truth”. It is actually a study in the ‘art of living’ for all of us. It is one of the most honest and truthful personal account written by anyone. He debated for a long time about whether to write his autobiography or not. The story of his earlier years when he had struggled to develop his own character and the methods he used to bring about changes in society — experiments in the spiritual field — were not well known. The main reason for his writing the autobiography was the hope that people will try some of the experiments in their own lives and live according to the highest values common to all mankind. Later part of his life had become an open book.

We all have a desire to improve ourselves at sometime in our life. The questions most of us face are ‘What to change’, ‘How to decide’, ‘How to go about improving ourselves’, etc. Lots of books, videos, seminars, and experts are available to guide us. Sometimes learning from the life of a real person who changed, evolved, metamorphosed himself may help. This book is about an ordinary boy with no unusual talents, who changed himself and in turn, improved lives of millions around the world. What can we, ordinary people learn from his life? This book is a study of the life of Gāndhi to find some ways to see ‘How he transformed himself’ and ‘see if we can learn from his methods’. It may help us transform our own lives and make this planet earth a better and safer place to live for all creatures. There may be some repetition of ideas and incidents in this book. I do not expect anyone to read this book from cover to cover in one day. It would be preferable to read small portions, think and digest the idea or incident and try to see if that is something applicable to their life and change accordingly.

A brief history of India and biography of M. K. Gāndhi is followed by how he transformed himself from Mohan in to a Mahātmā. I have used Mohan, Gāndhi, Mahātmā Gāndhi, and Gāndhiji depending on his age and how people addressed him during that period. Modern day children are bombarded by TV, iPod, rap music, Hollywood and Bollywood movies, video games, etc. They learn their values from these sources which create their fantasy world. Study

of the life of Mahātmā Gāndhi may redirect their attention to other better and more important things in life.

Mohan's evolution is very much a part of the history of political struggles of Indians' in South Africa and India and hence both, history and biography, are considered simultaneously. Since this book does not report events as they took place in chronological order, a time line of Gāndhi's life and other relevant dates are included. There may be some repetition of events and quotes because of their relation to two different topics.

Author sincerely hopes that some of the readers will be inspired to learn more about the life and work of Gāndhiji, and fulfill one of his dreams for a non-violent, peaceful world.

Some words like Mahatma are spelled as Mahātmā to help with pronunciations - a is pronounced as in again and ā or Ā to be pronounced as in graft.

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Dedicated to:

Grandchildren Arjun, Anya & Ravi.

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Chapter I

Background History of India

The history of human civilization in India goes back to more than 8,000 years. There were well-planned cities with underground sewer system and public baths more than 5 to 6,000 years ago along the Sindhu (Indus) - Saraswati rivers. People had developed a very highly sophisticated language - Sanskrit. Epics like Rāmāyana and Mahābhārata, scriptures like Veda-s, Upanishad-s and Bhagavad Gitā were composed by saints and scholars. There were universities like Takshashilā and Nālanda where scholars from other countries used to come and study. The concept of zero and higher math, astronomy, practice of medicine, metallurgy, chemistry, etc., were far more advanced than in any other nation of that period. Recent archaeological, genetic, carbon dating, and other modern techniques have shown that there was no Aryan invasion from outside India. The so-called light skinned Aryans and dark skinned Dravidians are the same people that have lived in India for millennia and their culture has continued in to modern times. Analysis of position of stars as described in ancient Indian texts like Rāmāyana and Mahābhārata confirm the authenticity of these texts.

Some Western scholars and historians have said:

“India was the motherland of our race, and Sanskrit the mother of Europe’s languages; she was the mother of our philosophy; and mother through the Arabs, of much of our mathematics; mother through the Buddha, of ideals embodied in Christianity; mother, through the village community, of self-government and democracy. Mother India is in many ways the mother of us all.”

Will Durant (1885-1981), American Historian

“India is the cradle of the human race, the birthplace of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend, and great grandmother of tradition. Our most instructive materials in the history of man are treasured up in India only”

Mark Twain (1835-1910), American author

“The ancient civilization of India differs from those of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Greece, in that its traditions have been preserved without breakdown to present day.”

Arthur Basham (1914-1986), Australian Historian

There were many foreign invasions from North-West border of India. Alexander of Macedonia was one of the very early ones who invaded India in 326 BCE. Then from 11th century (CE) onwards came the Huns, Chinghiz Khan, Arabs, and Iranian invaders. Most of the foreign invaders’ aim was to plunder, destroy, and take slaves. Thousands of temples were destroyed, gold and jewels were looted, and millions of people were killed or taken as slaves. In one hundred years (from 1000-1100 CE) nearly 20 million, one-tenth of the population of India, was decimated by Muslim invaders. Muslims ruled over India for many years and then the British took over.

Vasco da Gama discovered the sea route to India in 1498. The East India Company was created in 1600 to trade with India. Just like their predecessors from other parts of Asia, it was the wealth of India that had attracted the Europeans to go to India. The first British ship arrived at the port of Surat on Western coast of India in 1608. East India Company slowly established more trade depots in other ports and made huge profit by taking spices and other goods from India to England and Europe. The British slowly established their monopoly in trade with India by removing all competition from the French, Portuguese, and Spaniards.

The trading posts were slowly converted in to forts with cannons, guns and ammunition without the permission of local rulers. In 1756, the ruler of Bengal attacked the English fort in Kolkata (Calcutta) and destroyed the illegal fort. Next year, Robert Clive defeated the ruler and took over Bengal. The British administrators would take more than a million dollar bribe and make someone a king. After a few years that ruler would be replaced by someone else who gave more money.

“The British conquest of India was the invasion and destruction of a high civilization by a trading company utterly without scruple or principle, careless of art and greedy of gain, over-running with fire and sword a country temporarily disordered and helpless, bribing and murdering, annexing and stealing, and beginning their career of illegal and ‘legal’ plunder which has now gone on ruthlessly for one hundred and seventy three years...”

Will Durant, in “The Case for India”, p. 5. 1930

Thomas Babington Macaulay was a conservative member of the British Parliament and later Secretary of War. He also served on the Supreme Council of India from 1834 to 1838. He believed that Britain was the most civilized nation in the world and Africans and Asians were barbarians. He introduced the British education system in India that would create a class of Indians who would serve the British:

“I have travelled across the length and breadth of India and I have not seen one person who is a beggar, who is a thief. Such wealth I have seen in this country, such high moral values, people of such caliber, that I do not think we would ever conquer this country, unless we break the very backbone of this nation, which is her spiritual and cultural heritage, and, therefore, I propose that we replace her old and ancient education system, her culture, for if the Indians think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their self-esteem, their native culture and they will become what we want them, a truly dominant nation.”

The British were able to achieve what they had planned. Not only while they ruled over India but even now (2013), sixty-five years after they left India, the same educational system, same laws as the British, and same policies of ‘divide and rule’ are being followed by successive governments of independent India.

The violent uprising called the ‘Sepoy Mutiny’ started in May 1857. Indian soldiers employed by the British to do all their dirty work were unhappy about many things. This was the first large

scale attempt to fight for independence from the British. It was very brutally and forcefully put down by the British with the help of their loyal Indian troops and superior firepower. The Indian sepoys (soldiers) and other fighters were not united and did not have a coordinated strategy. Hundreds of thousands of Indian soldiers and citizens were killed. In reaction to this mutiny, the famous author, Charles Dickens, wrote that he would “strike that Oriental Race . . . to blot it out of mankind and raze it off the face of the Earth”. A favorite way to punish Indians was to blow them to bits from the mouth of cannon. The British Government took over control of India from East India Company after the 1857 mutiny, increased their oppression and exploitation of the people and resources of India. They built railways to take raw materials to ports for export and distribute expensive imports to sell all over India. This practice impoverished Indians and destroyed all local industries. Poverty, famines and starvation became common because of British policies of excessive taxation and export of grains. Between 1854 and 1901, 28 million Indians died through starvation because of poverty and famines.

The British Government took over the control of Indian territories from the East India Company and paid the company handsome sum for the assets and also paid off the debt. The government in turn charged the people of India and the Indian peasants and workers who had to pay highest taxes in the world. One by one, states of India were taken over by the British by war, bribery or government decree. The cost of wars and army were again recovered from Indians through taxation. Transportation of troops from England to India and their maintenance in India and even the expenses of the war of independence in 1857 was charged to the Indian tax-payer. The national debt of India rose from \$35 million in 1792 to \$3.5 trillion in 1929. Indians were forced to fight for the British in wars to enslave Burma and First and Second World wars, just to name a few.

Britain was undergoing industrial revolution in nineteenth century. Their manufactured goods needed market. In India, they found this opportunity. Queen Victoria’s rule became the golden age for Britain and India became a poor nation. A British Viceroy stationed in New Delhi governed whole of India. The country was divided in to provinces (states) and governed by provincial governments. Then there were small semi-independent states within the provinces with Indian princes as heads of the state. They had nominal power since real power was with the British representative of the Viceroy in each princely state.

Will Durant, a Pulitzer Prize winning American historian, visited India in 1930 when he was working on “The Story of Civilization”. He was so appalled by what he read and saw how the British were ruling over India, that he wrote:

“...The more I read the more I was filled with astonishment and indignation at the apparently conscious and deliberate bleeding of India by England throughout a hundred and fifty years. I began to feel that I had come upon the greatest crime in history.”

“I have seen a great people starving to death before my eyes, and I am convinced that this exhaustion and starvation are due not, as their beneficiaries claim, to over-population and superstition, but to the most sordid and criminal exploitation of one nation by another in all recorded history.”

Will Durant, in “The Case for India”, p. 1. 1930

He wrote a book on his experiences in India called “The Case for India” because as a descent human being, he could not keep quiet. This book was banned by the British and was nearly lost to the public. Just recently (2007) it was published in Mumbai. It is very well researched with references to statements and statistics from British sources.

Gāndhi had organized three great *Satyāgraha*-s in India to achieve independence from the British rule. The first one of non-cooperation was in 1920, then the ‘Dāndi march’ in 1930, and last one ‘Quit India’ movement in 1942. More about the fight for India’s independence will be dealt with later on in the book.

The British troops left India after her independence. There was no sign of animosity or bitterness against either Indians or against the British at that time. The troops were cheered and not jeered when they took off in ships. Arnold Toynbee, British historian wrote that:

“Gāndhi had not only liberated India, he had also liberated Great Britain” (from their sinful exploitation of colonies).

Chapter II

Biography of M. K. Gāndhi

First Twenty Years

Mohandās Karamchand Gāndhi was born on 2 October 1869, twelve years after the rebellion by the Indian soldiers, in Porbandar, a small town on the Western coast of India. Mohan is one of the names of *Shri Krushna* (Krishna). Mohandās means servant (*dās*) of God (Mohan). He was the youngest son of Karamchand Gāndhi, prime minister of Porbandar, a small state in Gujarat, India.

Mohan's father, Karamchand, was an experienced and able administrator (*Diwan*). He was a courageous, dedicated, and skillful negotiator who did not hesitate to tell the king unpleasant truths. He had sympathy for the common people and was interested in bringing people of different faiths together.

His mother, Putlibai, was very religious, fasted frequently, visited temple every day and prepared vegetarian food for the family. Mohan was very fond of her and she was equally fond of Mohan.

Mohan was an unusually shy boy. He used to run back home as soon as the school was over because he did not want to talk to anyone and was afraid other boys will make fun of him. In school, he did not show any great intelligence, talent, or outstanding skill. All elementary school children in India were required to memorize the multiplication tables. Mohan had difficulty remembering these tables. Three books that he had read as a child influenced him a lot all throughout his life. One was a story of a young man named Shravana, who carried his sick parents to fulfill their last wish to go on a pilgrimage before they died. It taught him devotion to parents. Another story was about a king called Harishchandra who always told the truth. Instead of telling a lie, he preferred to be a slave to an evil man. Mohan learnt how important it is to always tell the truth. The epic of Rāmāyana is well known to all children in India. Prince Rām gladly went to live in forest for 14 years to fulfill the promise his father had given to his stepmother. When he came back, Rām established an ideal kingdom - Rām Rājya. This was the kind of government Gāndhiji wanted to establish in India after her independence, where everyone was respected, well taken care of, and their talents utilized for the good of all.

When Mohan was in high school, he and his friends could see how the British were controlling and ruling over Indians. They felt that the English were big and strong because they ate meat. One of his friends persuaded him to eat meat to become strong so that they can fight with the British rulers and gain independence for India. He could not sleep at night after eating goat meat. He felt goats jumping around in his stomach. He had to give up this experiment in getting strong.

In his autobiography, he describes himself as a 'coward'. He was afraid of 'thieves, ghosts, and serpents'. This fear bothered him so much that after dark he had to have a light in his room.

Shyness and fear were with him even when he started his practice of law in India. At one of the first trials, when he stood up in front of the judge to defend his client but could not utter a word.

When he was 13 years old he was married off to a 13 year old girl named Kastur . Mohan was passionately in love with her. This made him a very jealous husband. He would think about her during the school hours and at night, talk to her for hours. Mohan also thought of himself as her teacher and guardian. He expected Kastur to ask for his permission if she wanted to go out. She was equally headstrong and would deliberately go out without asking him. Such incidents would lead to angry arguments between them. A man was supposed to be strong and brave but it was Kastur who was not afraid of anyone or of going out in the dark. It was Kastur, who taught Mohan that he could not make her do anything against her wishes by force. Later in life, Mohan used this lesson in his fight against the British.

His father died in 1885 when Mohan was fifteen years old. He was an average student in high school. He went to college after finishing high school. He wanted to be a doctor and take care of sick people. Mohan had a lot of problems learning all the subjects in college and failed in all. He worked hard but could not make it. After five months, he had to give up college and go back home, as a failure. His dream of becoming a doctor was destroyed and now Mohan did not know what to do.

One of his uncles suggested that he should go to England and become a barrister. It would take only three years of study in London to get his degree and then with a British qualification his success in India would be guaranteed. A degree from London had great value in India during the British rule. This education would cost a lot of money for the Gāndhi family. His wife, Kastur, had to sell her jewelry to buy his ticket to London by boat. Selling all jewelry for a young, 18 year old wife in late nineteenth century India was a great sacrifice. Before he left for England, Mohan's mother made him promise that he will not to eat meat, have any relationship outside of the marriage, and drink alcoholic beverages.

Student In England

Mohan was 18 years old when he set sail for London to get his law degree. He was still very shy and kept to his cabin during this trip. Young Mohan was afraid of talking to strangers and did not want to look like a fool with his knowledge of English. He missed his family, the meals cooked by his mother, and familiar home surroundings. Above all, he missed his wife, Kastur .

In London, his problems got worse. The clothes people wore, the food they ate, weather, customs, everything was different and foreign to young Mohan. It was quite a culture shock when he arrived in London. In the late nineteenth century, England had been ruling over India for 200 years and every Indian worth his salt wanted to dress and behave like an Englishman. Gāndhi did not know anyone to talk to or turn to for advice or support. He was desperately home sick and wanted to return home. He knew he would feel like a great fool if after spending all that of money, if he returned home without a degree. He had to stick it out in London. He had no choice.

Then Mohan came across an acquaintance who had been around in London for some time and knew how to survive. The British were looked up to by most Indians because of the political power they had in India. Whole education system in India was created to glorify the British and most Indians believed in what they learnt in schools and universities. Everything 'Indian' was inferior and everything 'British' was the best. Indian dress, culture, languages were being abandoned in favor of what was British or European. The friend told Mohan that his main goal should be to learn the 'British' way of life while he was in London. The way they dressed, carried themselves, their manners, their behavior, etc. This advice appealed to young Mohan very much. He decided to move in with an English family instead of living in a hotel. This way he would get a first hand experience of how the English people lived. Then he could imitate them and become as smart as them. Mohan bought expensive English suit, top hat, hired tutors to learn French, ballroom dancing, violin, and how to eat with fork and knife.

These experiments in becoming an 'English gentleman' lasted a few months. This life style was very expensive and Mohan was not earning any money at that time. His elder brother in India was supporting him. Mohan also realized that he would never be accepted as a true 'English gentleman' however much he tried to change his external appearance and life style. He was born with the looks of an Indian and raised in India with Indian culture. He also realized that he was not living according to what he believed in. The difference between his convictions and his day to day living was widening. It was an artificial life style and he was not happy about it. He decided to be true to himself and simplify his life. Mohan gave up French and dancing lessons, sold his violin, adopted simple vegetarian diet and concentrated on his studies.

After getting his law degree from London in 1891, Mohan returned to India. His mother had passed away when he was studying in London. His relatives in India did not inform him about this news because he was very close to her and this news might interfere with his studies. He was very sad to hear the news about his mother. Mohan started his legal practice in Rajkot, India. He had no knowledge of the Indian law and had great difficulty arguing cases in court. Later he tried his luck in Mumbai (Bombay) but he was tongue tied and could not speak a word in defense of his client in front of the judge. He had to ask another lawyer to take care of his client. Other lawyers started making fun of him by calling him a 'brief-less barrister'.

Lawyer In South Africa

Mohan was becoming desperate. In 1893, a firm in South Africa offered him a job and he took the offer. It was not a good job and he would have to leave his wife and two sons. He took the offer to run away from the miserable situation in India but there were more trials waiting for him in South Africa. There was a lot of discrimination on the basis of the color of his skin. In late nineteenth century only whites were allowed to travel by first class in South African trains. Gāndhi was traveling by train to Pretoria. He had a first class ticket but when a white man saw him sitting in the first class compartment, he was thrown out of the train at Maritzberg station. He had never felt worst humiliation in his life. It was very cold and he was all alone at the station. He spent that night pacing up and down, and thinking. He felt like going back to India. On other occasions he was also asked to sit at the feet of a white man in a coach, refused hotel

room, and kicked off a sidewalk (footpath) by a policeman. All Indians in South Africa were treated very badly by the Europeans.

All these failures and humiliations made him analyze his situation. He was always running away from difficult situations but that did not help. Every time he tried to run away, he ended up facing even more difficult challenges. Instead of running away to some other place, he decided to face his problems. He immersed himself in the job at hand and tried to find the best solution for the involved parties. In the end, he was able to avoid long and expensive court case, save money for his client, remove bitterness in clients' families, and satisfy his client and their opponents too.

Gāndhi's work was done and he decided to go back to India. His client decided to give a farewell party in appreciation of the work he had done. On the day of the party, Gāndhi read in the news paper that the Government was taking away the right of all Indians to vote for the Legislative Assembly. Everyone at the party requested him to stay and fight for the rights of all Indians in South Africa. This was the turning point in his life. He formed a committee, wrote petitions and letters to newspapers, and organized public meetings to fight this injustice. Natal Indian Congress was created in August 1894. This became a long crusade and Gāndhi spent 21 years in South Africa before permanently returning to India in 1915.

In India, Gāndhi's life became synonymous with the non-violent struggle for independence and will be covered in chapter on Civil Disobedience.

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