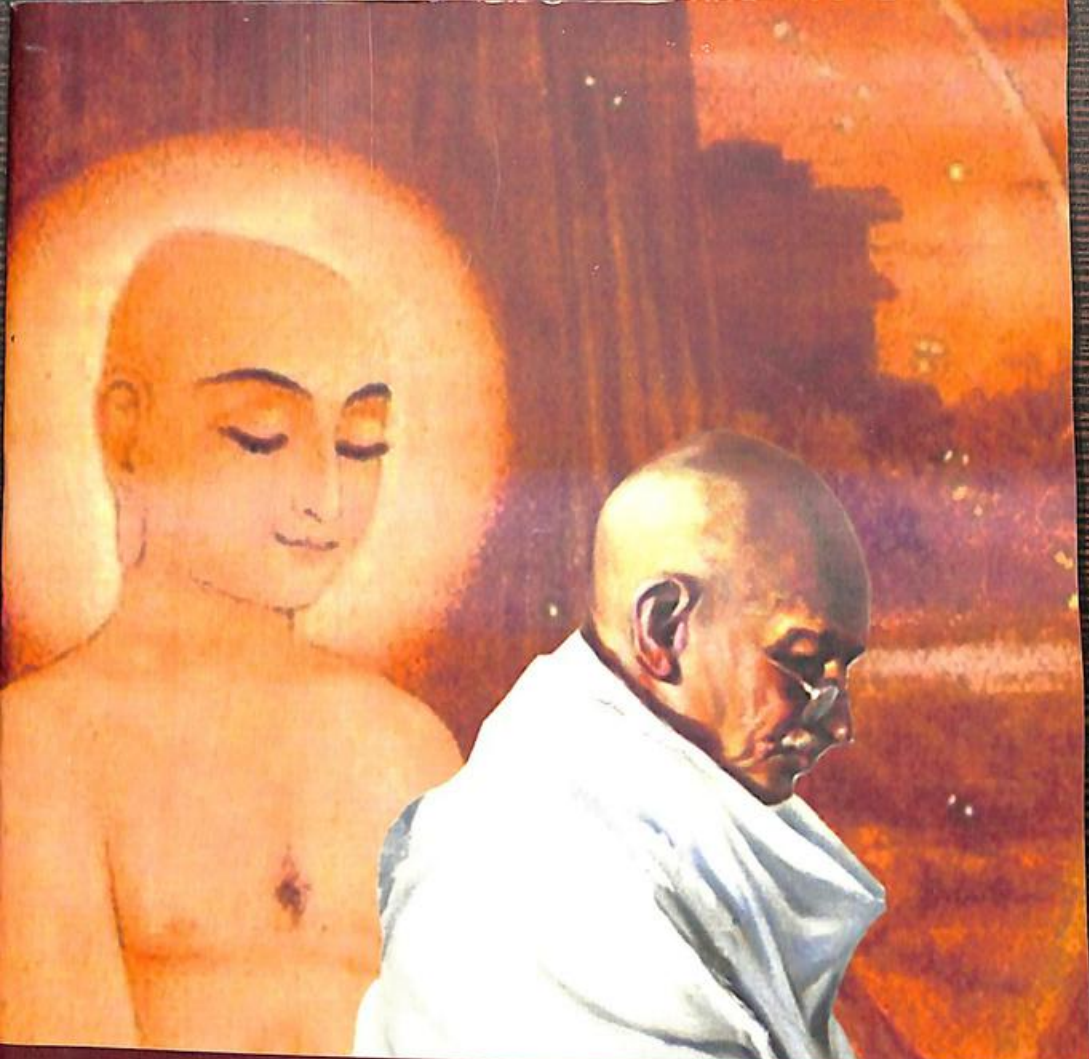




MAHATMA GANDHI AND JAINISM

Amit Rai Jain

Foreword by

Rashtrasant Gurudev Shree Namramuni Maharaj

FOREWORD



The basic tenets of Jainism are Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truthfulness), Achaurya (non-stealing), Brahmacharya (chastity), Aparigraha (non-attachment) and Anekantvada (many-sidedness). Ahimsa refers to the desire of non-violence of any kind.

On occasion of 150th birth anniversary of the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, it would not be wrong to say that Mahatma Gandhi, although not born a Jain, followed all the tenets of Jainism in his life. His simple living, truthfulness and non-attachment as well as

belief in Ahimsa illustrates his Jain way of life.

Satyagraha and non-violence were the chief principles of Gandhiji's character through which he mobilized the Indian populace to stand against the atrocities of the British and 'fight' for independence.

Evaluating Gandhiji's life, one realizes that his desires for worldly things to the minimal and his non-possessiveness towards them, reflects that the tenet of Aparigraha (non-attachment) was woven in each and every aspect of his life.

Bhagwan Mahavir had proclaimed that, 'Condemn the sin and not the sinner.' Gandhiji's ideology too, 'Censure the oppression and not the oppressor', on basis of which he fought the battle of Satyagraha, mirrors the principles of Jainism in Gandhiji's every breath.

Amit Rai Jain, himself is a staunch believer and follower of Jainism and his works towards the society are truly commendable. The way Amitji has exquisitely analysed and correlated influence of Jainism in Gandhiji's life, distinctly exhibits his devotion and dedication towards the propagation of Jain doctrine.

Indeed, this attempt is noteworthy and highly appreciable.

20.02.2020
Rajghat, Gandhi Smriti, Delhi.

Rashtrasant Param Gurudev
Sh. Namramuni Maharaj

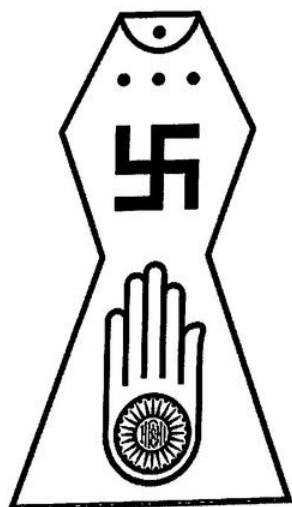
MAHATMA GANDHI

AND

JAINISM

Mahatma Gandhi has been an inspiration for all throughout his life - not just because of his practice of truth and non-violence, but also because he struggled with his fears and was tormented over his restrictive beliefs to learn to practice them. Gandhi was an irredeemable crusader, but he was also a thoroughly practical one. He never followed any principle or concept thoughtlessly, but he also never shied away from experimenting, asking questions, or going against the course. Initially, his experiments were meant for his own individual self, but as he grew older and bolder, these experiments became more and more public and political oriented.

Mahatma Gandhi's principles of non-violence and truth became the most important messages of his life. His doctrine of non-violence was the keystone to achieving India's freedom without bloodshed. It was such a powerful message that it inspired personalities such as Martin



परस्परौपगृहो जीवानाम्

Luther King, Nelson Mandela, John Lennon, and many others, including Barack Obama most recently.



If one thinks of "Thou shalt not kill" as a Christian directive for non-violence, that would just be the beginning of the word. Many other religions have some kind of non-violence as one of their directives: "See all beings as your own self" for Hindus, "Love thy neighbor as thyself" in Judaism, "Right acts include abstaining from taking life, from stealing, and from lechery" for Buddhists and "Slay not the life that God has made sacred" for Muslims.

Nevertheless, **Jainism** takes the practice of *Ahimsa* (nonviolence) to a whole new level. In Sanskrit, *Ahimsa* means non-injury. But by *Ahimsa*, Jains don't just mean physical harm to human beings, but also refraining from harming **ALL** living beings including plants and micro-organisms and most crucially to one's own self. So any action that disturbs the balance of nature is considered as an act of *Himsa* (violence) - this also includes polluting the environment with injurious thoughts, desires, passions and intentions.

When we can comprehend that anything we do, speak or think will all come back to us in the form of the same energy that we put out, it is simple to understand the message of **Jainism**. Who we really are is aptly reflected in this world. What we send out is what we receive. This is what inspired Gandhi to spread peace and non-violence in the world. He believed it,

experimented with it and proved that it worked. He developed the philosophy of *Satyagraha* which literally means "the force of truth" as a method to passively resist violence, fundamentally making it his only weapon to fight against the British. He used *Satyagraha* over and over during all of his political battles until he attained perfection and eventually, gained Independence for India from British rule.

Throughout his life, Gandhi only wore simple white clothes, remained a vegetarian, never ever carried a weapon and practiced celibacy in his later life. Though he was a revolutionary and a radical who never feared to demand drastic political, economic and social changes in India and the world, he remained a spiritual seeker at heart. So even though by birth, Gandhi was a Hindu, his philosophy and ideals were deeply influenced by Jainism in practice.

GANDHI AND JAINISM

Mohandas K. Gandhi, the Father of the nation, was not a Jain by birth. His parents were practicing Vaishnavas and he was born into that Hindu family in Porbandar, Gujarat on 2nd October, 1869. Jainism still holds a strong influence in Gujarat and many Jains live there till date. His mother was a pious lady and growing up in that province, in that environment, Gandhi was continuously exposed to the Jain doctrines. Although he was not Jain by letter, he was Jain in spirit because of his ideology and philosophy. Therefore, Gandhi was and was not a Jain.



How can this be right? The principle of relativism, *Syadvada*, permits us to make this apparently contradictory statement. Gandhi was not a Jain from the perception of his birth and by what he regarded himself to be. Alternately, Gandhi can also be called a Jain, considering his beliefs and actions. An instance from the life of Mahatma Gandhi depicts this wonderful, conflict-resolving principle of relativism.

When Gandhi was 18 years old, he traveled to England to study law. His mother was perturbed to let him go to England as she had heard that young, married men became corrupt when they went to England. For the same reason, she took the advice of Becharji Swami, a Jain monk, who told her that Mohandas should take a solemn oath in front of his mother and only then he can be permitted to go to pursue his studies in England.



Putli Bai
(Mother of Gandhi ji)

The promises that were taken up by Gandhiji before he left for England are as follows:

- Not to taste the Alcohol.
- Not to eye other women in the country.
- Not to eat the meat.

"He administered the oath and I [Gandhi] vowed not to touch wine, woman and meat. This done, my mother gave her permission." (p. 33)

While living in England, Gandhi's observance of the oath was tested several times. Once, someone suggested him to eat eggs because eggs were not meat. After taking eggs for some time, Gandhi realized that in the eyes of his mother, meat included eggs also, so he quit eating them. This incident taught the young Mohandas the significance of interpreting an oath in the spirit of the person who administers it; in this case his mother. *"One golden rule is to accept the interpretation honestly put on the pledge by the party administering it."* (p. 50)

Mohandas Gandhi did have the choice of adhering to the spirit of the vow or interpreting it explicitly. Both courses of action could have been taken but to follow a pledge, it is necessary to follow the essence of the pledge and not the letter to maintain fairness. Fairness and honesty prevent conflicts and disputes. Gandhi endeavored for this attitude of equality and that is why he was a Jain in spirit.

The central belief of Jainism is *Ahimsa* (Non-violence) and Gandhi's ideology rested upon it. He created a method of political activism called *Satyagraha* which was wholly based upon truth and non-violence (*Sat*: truth, *Agraha*: firmness) (p. 266). It

has been translated as 'non-cooperation' and 'passive resistance.' Gandhi said, "*Satyagraha* is essentially a weapon of the truthful. A *Satyagrahi* is pledged to non-violence..." (p. 389).

He used this principle of *Satyagraha* in the Kheda district at the time of crop failure. The British officials wanted to collect taxes from the poor farmers even when they knew the crop had been bad and the poor farmers would not be able to pay the tax. After trying to petition the officials, the volunteer political activists and the farmers signed a pledge saying that they would not pay the taxes because the crops had legitimately failed. They were also ready to face imprisonment or other legal action the government may impose on them. Instead of rioting and demonstrating, the farmers were throughout the movement remained civilized and non-violent so that the government had no choice but to give in. The officials could not arrest everyone of course! This victory established the power of truth and non-violence which Gandhi had instilled in the people of India.

Like any follower of Jainism, Gandhi was also a vegetarian. Rather, he became a complete fruitarian and lived on a purely fruit diet.

"[His] diet consisted, among other things, of groundnuts, ripe and unripe bananas, lemon, olive oil, tomatoes and grapes. [He] completely eschewed milk, cereals, pulses and other things." (p. 297).

This was how strong his belief in *Ahimsa* was. His entire autobiography is devoted to it. "*The exercise [of writing my autobiography] has given me ineffable mental peace, because, it has been my fond hope that it might bring faith in Truth and Ahimsa to waverers.*" (p. 419)

Gandhi believed in the Jain doctrines and undoubtedly, this helped him to achieve greatness.

GANDHI AND NON-VIOLENCE

As mentioned above, Gandhi was born in Porbandar, Gujarat, place that holds a considerable Jain population. His mother was a deeply religious woman. In spite of being a Vaishnava, she strongly believed in Jain philosophy and often visited Jain monks and introduced some of them to young Gandhi. Hence,

since his early childhood, Gandhi developed a special affection towards this peace loving community. He was impressed by the lifestyle of the monks and nuns of Jain *Sangha*.

In the words of Mahatma Gandhi,

"Nonviolence is an active force of the highest order. It is soul force or the power of Godhead within us. Imperfect man cannot grasp the whole of that essence - he would not be able to bear its full blaze, but even an infinitesimal fraction of it, when it becomes active within us, can work wonders."

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi had many opportunities to meet people of all faiths. He had many Muslim and Christian friends, as well as being deeply influenced by Jainism in his youth; Gandhi followed the religious principle of 'Ahimsa' (doing no harm) very seriously and from it, he developed his own famous principle of *Satyagraha* (truth force) later on in his life.

Ahimsa in Jainism

The basic elements of Gandhi's philosophy were rooted in the Indian religions of Jainism and Buddhism. Both of these religions advocate *ahimsa*, which is "absence of the desire to kill or harm" (Chapple 10). The *Acaranga Sutra*, a Jain text, defines the basic need for non-violence: "All beings are fond of life; they like pleasure and hate pain, shun destruction and like to live, they long to live. To all, life is dear" (Chapple 11).

Bhagwan Mahavira shed new light on the perpetual search of the soul with the truth and discipline of *ahimsa*. He said: 'There is nothing so small and subtle as the atom nor any element as vast as space.' Among the Jains, one of the greatest virtues was to show compassion and kindness to fellow living beings. The clear rule for Jain monks is that all possible care must be taken not to harm living things while walking, acting, speaking, begging, or performing excretory acts.

In Jainism, *ahimsa* is the supreme religion. According to the Jain tradition, *ahimsa* is a great vow of compassion in body, mind

and spirit. According to their scriptures: 'Don't injure abuse, oppress, enslave, insult, torment, torture, or kill any creature or living being. The Jains believe that life (which equals soul) is sacred regardless of faith, caste, race, or even species. Harm done to other beings is considered harm to oneself since it attracts much *karma*. Any injury to the material or conscious vitalities caused by passionate activity of mind, body, or speech is certainly called violence; certainly the non-appearance of attachment and other passions is *ahimsa*.' (*Purusharthasiddhi-upaya* iv: 43-4)

The most forceful statement is found in the *Jñanarnava*: 'Violence alone is the gateway to the miserable state, it is also the ocean of sin; it is itself a terrible hell and is surely the densest darkness'.

"If a person is accustomed to committing injury, then all his virtues like selflessness, greatness, desirelessness, penance, liberality, or munificence are worthless. (8.19-20)

Jainism has become synonymous with *Ahimsa* and Jain religion is considered as the religion of *Ahimsa*. (Acharya Mahapragya: 'Non-Violence and its many Facets') *Ahimsa* is the first of five precepts or ten precepts that the Buddha taught - "do not kill." *Ahimsa* is certainly not cowardice; it is wisdom. And wisdom is the cumulative knowledge of the existing divine laws of reincarnation, *karma*, *dharma*, the all-pervasiveness and sacredness of things, blended together within the psyche or soul of the Hindu. Ramana Maharishi states: 'You do not like to suffer yourself. How can you inflict suffering on others? Every killing is a suicide. The eternal, blissful and natural state has been smothered by this life of ignorance. In this way the present life is due to the killing of the eternal, pristine Being. Is it not a case of suicide? Tolstoy was the greatest apostle of nonviolence that the present age has produced.' (T-2-31)

Mahatma Gandhi as a strict follower of *Ahimsa*, wanted to win people over by changing their hearts and minds and advocated non-violence throughout his life. Although he himself remained a committed Hindu throughout his life, he was critical of all faiths.

Even as a child, his morals were put to test when an inspector visited his school during a spelling dictation test. Noticing an

incorrect spelling in his paper, his teacher gestured for him to copy his from neighbour's paper and correct the spelling, but he firmly refused to do so.

On being told that the power of the British colonial rule was their meat-eating habit, young Gandhi secretly started eating meat. However, he soon gave it up as he felt ashamed of deceiving his strictly vegetarian family.

Ahimsa, Satyadavad, and Anekantavad, these three tenets of Jainism were appreciated and practiced by Gandhi throughout his life. His political movements without using weapons, be it Satyagraha, dandi or non-cooperation everything was so Jain in methodology. Even the terminology he used like Anuvrata was particularly Jain. In Britain while studying, he met with the members of Theosophical Society, who encouraged him to closely study the Hindu texts, particularly the Bhagavad Gita, which he later described as a comfort to him. In doing so, he developed a greater appreciation for Hinduism, and also began to look more closely at other religions.

Refuge in Spiritual Crisis

Mahatma Gandhi is known to have positively influenced countless men and women around the globe. Yet, not many people know the key figure who influenced Gandhi in the most profound ways before he became known as "Mahatma," or Great soul (Maha: great, and atma: soul).

Who was responsible for making Mohandas Gandhi the Mahatma.

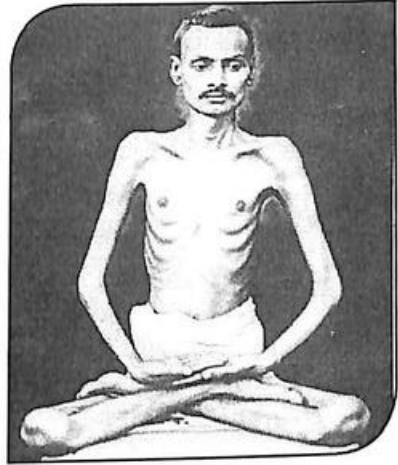
In his Autobiography, 'The Story of My Experiments with Truth' Gandhi says:

"I have... met the heads of various faiths, and I must say that no one else has ever made on me the impression that Raychandbhai (also known as as Rajchandra) did. His words went straight home to me... His intellect compelled as great a regard from me as his moral earnestness, and deep down in me was the conviction that he would never lead me astray and would always confide to me his innermost thoughts. In my moments of spiritual crisis, therefore, he was my refuge."

SHRIMAD RAJCHANDRA

Shrimad Rajchandra was a Jain poet, mystic, philosopher, scholar and a social reformer. He was born near Morbi and was a prodigy who claimed to have recollection of his past lives at the age of seven.

His mother, Devbai, was Svetambara Sthanakvasi Jain and his father, Ravjibhai Mehta and paternal grandfather, Panchan Mehta, were Vaishnava Hindu. So he was introduced to Jainism and Hinduism from early life. They were from Vaniya community and from Dasa Shrimali caste. He was initiated in Vaishnavism by a Sadhu named Ramadasji. He continued to study other Indian religions and was attracted to Ahimsa (non-violence) doctrine of Jainism. Later he chose Jainism because he considered that it provides best path to salvation. But Vaishnavism left a lasting influence on him.



His birth name was Lakshminandan Mehta. He was renamed Raichand by his parents when he was four years old. Later his name changed to its Sanskrit form, Rajchandra. Shrimad, an honorific, was added by his disciples posthumously. His disciples also refer to him as Param Krupalu Dev (Lord of the Highest Compassion).

He performed *Avadhāna*, memory retention and recollection test that brought him immense popularity, but he later discouraged it in favour of his spiritual pursuits.

Recollection of Previous Lives

Rajchandra claimed that he first attained *jāti smarana gnān* (recollection of previous lives) at the age of seven, in 1874. In a reply in 1890 to a question from Padamshibhai, his friend in Bombay, he described the incident:

"When I was seven years old, an elderly man named Anichand, well-built, stout and sturdy, a neighbor in my village, suddenly died of a snake bite. I did not know what death was. I asked my grandfather as to what was the meaning of death. He tried to evade the reply and advised me to finish my meals. I insisted on a reply. At last he said: "To die means the separation of the soul from the body. A dead body has no movement, it contaminates and decays. Such a dead body will be burnt to ashes near a river-bank as it has ceased to function."

"Then I went secretly to the cremation ground and climbing a Babul tree I saw the whole process of cremation of the dead man's body and I felt that those who burnt him were cruel. A train of thoughts started on the nature of the death and as a result I could recollect my previous lives."

This incident played a vital role in his perception of the world. He described his spiritual journey in one of his poems. He wrote that he professed on the path of spirituality he had already attained in his previous life. He claimed that he developed complete resignation and detachment to his mortal body and the rest of the world in 1897. He thanked the day of the experience in one of his poems written at the age of 30. The tree he climbed no longer exists, but a monument temple with a model of the event was erected on the site.

He experienced the same when he visited the fort in Junagadh. His experiences influenced him to live a religious life.

Rajchandra had an outstanding memory retentiveness and recollection. He joined the school at the age of seven and half but mastered the preliminaries in calculation in just a month. In two years, he completed the study of seven grades.

At the age of eight, he began composing poems. He composed verse synopses on *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* at the age of nine. He gained maturity in thinking and reasoning and by the age of 10 started public speaking. At the age of 11 He started writing articles in newspapers and magazines, such as in *Buddhiprakash* and won several prizes in essay writing competitions. He wrote a 300-stanza poem on 'a watch' at the age of 12. In 1880, he went

to Rajkot to study English, but very little is known about his education there. By 1882, he had studied and mastered several subjects. He became popular as a young poet and was referred to as Kavi due to it. He occasionally visited the residence of the ruler of Kutch as a writer and was praised for his penmanship. He started attending his father's shop at age of 13. He composed many poems on the lives of Rama and Krishna while managing the shop.

Last Years

In 1887 (Maha Sud 12, VS 1944), Rajchandra married Zabakben, daughter of Popatlal, the elder brother of Revashankar Jagjivandas Mehta, a Zaveri merchant family. He then engaged in the pearls and diamond business. They had two sons and two daughters. His in-laws wanted him to move to Bombay and establish business there, but he was interested in his spiritual pursuits.

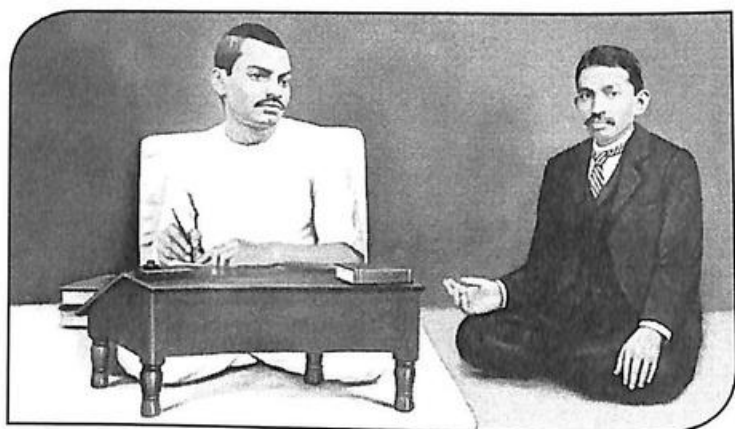
In 1890 (VS 1947), he experienced the self-realization for the first time at Uttarsanda where he was meditating under a mango tree near a lake. The tree no longer exists but a memorial shrine dedicated to the event is built there. He continued his householder life for more six years and had been successful in his business.

He is well known as a spiritual guide of Mahatma Gandhi. They were introduced in Mumbai in 1891 and had various conversations through letters while Gandhi was in South Africa. Gandhi noted his impression of Shrimad Rajchandra in his autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, calling him his "guide and helper" and his "refuge in moments of spiritual crisis". He advised Gandhi to be patient and to study Hinduism deeply. His teaching directly influenced Gandhi's non-violence philosophy.

Their First Meeting

Gandhi returned from London, England, via ship in 1891. On the very first day he landed in Bombay (now Mumbai), the twenty-two year-old Barrister-at-law – Mohandas Gandhi, was introduced to Shrimad (Honorable) Rajchandra or Raychandbhai – as a 'kavi' (poet). There was not much difference in age

between the two; the kavi, born in 1867, was barely two years older than Gandhi, born in 1869. Yet at this point the poet was spiritually far more advanced than Gandhi, who was like a freshman in the school of religion — knowing little, but eager to learn. Before Gandhi would come to know the deeper, spiritual side of the poet, he was first exposed to the “glamorous” side of this multi-talented, multi-tasking man with phenomenal gifts of memory, clairvoyance, and the knowledge of his previous lives as well.



RAJCHANDRA — The Many-Faceted Diamond

Not yet a hundred things at a time and reproduce them precisely in the same order as twenty-five, Rajchandra, or the “diamond connoisseur,” as Gandhi called him, was a successful Jain ‘zaverī’ (diamond-jeweller), highly respected for his integrity. He had also earned name and fame as a “mahajñani” (maha: great; jñani: the knower) with encyclopedic knowledge of all world-scriptures. Not only that, but Rajchandra was also a “shatavadhani,” meaning, one who can remember presented to him; the poet could also engage in many different activities simultaneously (e.g. counting money, playing cards, composing poems instantaneously) without ever failing. Because of performing such amazing feats of memory together with multitasking demonstrations, the poet had won many accolades, prizes and titles including even a gold medal!

The Memory Test

It is interesting to note that, while offering a word-memory test to Rajchandra, the western-educated, puffed up young barrister wanted to show off his own newly acquired knowledge of a few European words! As Gandhi narrated, "I exhausted my vocabulary of all the European tongues I knew, and asked the poet to repeat the words. He did so in the precise order in which I had given him." What Gandhi added next is even more revealing: "I envied his gift, without, however, coming under his spell," and he continued, "*I was impressed, but not inspired!*" What will it take to cast its spell on Gandhi, will be discussed after this.

What Cast a Spell on Gandhi

Though fascinated by these external, outstanding achievements of Rajchandra, Gandhi did not feel inspired until he came closer to know the real Rajchandra – the '*mumukshu*' – a serious spiritual seeker yearning to see God face to face; he now sought moksha or freedom from all worldly passions, possessions, attractions and aversions. Gandhi felt deeply connected to the God-hungry Rajchandra whose life was nothing but God-centered! In his Autobiography, Gandhi spells out his utter admiration for the poet:

"The thing that cast its spell over me ... was his wide knowledge of the scriptures, his spotless character, and his burning passion for self-realization."

Upon Closer Contact with Rajchandra

In the following months, Gandhi had a lot of opportunity to spend more quality time with the kavi. Gandhi observed Rajchandra closely in each one of his roles, watched his every move, and studied every detail of his life minutely. As Gandhi listened to the poet's discourses, questioned him, and engaged in deep philosophical-spiritual conversations with him, he said that *his attraction to him grew a thousandfold*. Gandhi felt such a deep, heart to heart and soul-to-soul connection with Rajchandra that he came to respect and trust him completely. He even aspired to be like this spiritual gem, who in the midst of 'samsara' (world),

remained "jala-kamala-vat" (jala: water; kamala: lotus, and vat: like) or as "unattached as a lotus floating on the surface of water!" Rajchandra, a 'spiritual role-model' for Gandhi, was a living example of a man who combined in him unadulterated spirituality and practical wisdom as well!

What inspired Gandhi most about the kavi was that despite his "burning passion for Self-realization," he never neglected his 'samsaric dharma' — his day-to-day worldly duties related to business, family, and community. He performed them all perfectly yet dispassionately, with patience, precision, proficiency and equanimity! Rajchandra saw no difference at all between mundane and spiritual, between secular or sacred. Under all vicissitudes of life, his mind remained calm, unperturbed, in a serene state of unbroken inward bliss. He practiced what he preached.

A picture of Rajchandra by Gandhi

First, the physical description of Rajchandra in Gandhi's own words:

"He accepted whatever he was served at meals. His dress was simple, a dhoti and shirt, an angarkhun (over-garment) and a turban of mixed silk and cotton yarn..... He used to walk slowly, and... was absorbed in thought even while walking. There was a strange power in his eyes; they were extremely bright and free from any sign of impatience or anxiety. They bespoke single-minded attention. The face was round, the lips thin, the nose neither pointed nor flat and the body of light build and medium height. The skin was dark. He looked an embodiment of peace. There was such a sweetness in his voice that one simply wanted to go on listening to him. His face was smiling and cheerful; it shone with the light of inner joy. He had such command of language that I do not remember his ever pausing for a word to express his thoughts."

Gandhi further states on some of the rare qualities of Rajchandra:

"These qualities can exist only in a man of self-control. A man cannot become free from attachments by making a show of being so. That state is a state of grace for the atman,... and it may be won only after a ceaseless effort through many lives... the Poet made me feel that this state of freedom from attachment was spontaneous to him."

Although Gandhi first said that "this state of freedom from attachment was spontaneous to him," he added right after, that it could not have been possible without "ceaseless effort" and the "grace of the atman." Gandhi further observes, that in order to have such freedom from attachment, one must have a "yearning for moksha." The converse is also true, as he says further that, "without genuine vairagyain the mind (mental renunciation), one cannot be possessed with a yearning for moksha. The poet was possessed by such yearning. "Therefore," according to Gandhi, "the first step towards moksha is freedom from attachment."

After three years, when he returned to India, he learnt about the sad demise of her mother. This heart-breaking news made him extremely sad. At such a time, Gandhi sought solace in the company of Raichand bhai (Rajchandra), a staunch follower of Jainism and a wealthy but down to earth business man.

Shrimad Rajchandraji not just consoled Gandhi but also uplifted his religious and spiritual esteem. Gandhi was so impressed by his knowledge on various subjects that he started taking advice of Raichandji in very crucial matter of his life. Rajchandraji, insisted Gandhi to read Gita, Quran and other religious texts along with Jain scriptures. And Gandhi always wondered "being Jain he never tried to convert me to his faith but always try to bring me more closer to my own beliefs such a selfless saint he is".

He wrote a lot of philosophical poetry including *Atma Siddhi*. He also wrote many letters and commentaries and translated some religious texts. He is best known for his teachings on Jainism and his spiritual guidance to Mahatma Gandhi.

"Such was the man who captivated my heart in religious matters as no other man has till now."

~ Mahatma Gandhi ~
(Modern Review, June 1930)

A Special Bond

What Shri Krishna was to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita, Rajchandra was to Gandhi — a trusted friend, a 'soulmate,' and a spiritual mentor-adviser-teacher as well! In his book of the same title, Thomas Moore defines a 'soulmate' as *"a relationship between 'two temperamentally well-suited individuals who have a strong affinity with each other, often at a deep spiritual and intellectual level.'"*

Being the spiritual guide of Mahatma Gandhi, Shrimad Rajchandraji had a tremendous and determinative influence on the Father of the Nation. Shrimadji shaped Gandhiji's views on important matters and guided his beliefs. He played a pivotal role in the making of the Mahatma, on the basis of which Gandhiji achieved India's independence and inspired generations. Their legacies continue to offer new paradigms to global peace and human progress.

"Spiritual yearning" bound them together, as if by some inscrutable divine plan! If Gandhi was drawn to Rajchandra as naturally as iron to magnet, Rajchandra too, was equally happy and grateful to find someone his own age, who was genuinely interested in *"the nature of the soul"* and *"subjects of the spirit."*

In one of his early letters to Gandhi, Rajchandra writes:

"It is very gratifying for me indeed to find that that you feel inclined to let your thoughts dwell on the nature of the soul to whatever extent you can,... that you are inclined to turn your steps to the path of enlightenment...and it is this prospect that pleases me so much, that's all."

In yet another letter, Rajchandra addresses Gandhi as a *"gunagrahi"* (guna: virtue, and grahi: one who grasps or appreciates). Not only were Rajchandra and Gandhi 'soulmates,' the former was also *the first mentor* to understand Gandhi's distinctive, but yet untapped spiritual power to become a 'Mahatma'!

As Erik Erikson observes, *"Rajchandra was the first spiritual anchor of young Gandhi's religious imagination during the very period of his life when he felt most lost"* (during his South-African years, to be discussed later).

If Rajchandra was the first mentor to understand the hidden quality of spirituality within Gandhi's soul, Gandhi also felt rejuvenated by a new sense of self-awakening! Erikson continues,

"No doubt young Gandhi recognized in the twenty-five-year-old friend something of his own essence... He found in this friendship the first affirmation of his yet deeply articulate ethical direction..."

Srimad Rajchandra helped Gandhi in unearthing his true self – his inherent divinity! The seasoned spiritual sadhak or seeker – was opening up to Gandhi a whole new world of the inner possibilities of '*atman*' or the soul; he was demonstrating to Gandhi what infinite powers lay within the human soul, especially when touched by the divine! Perhaps the most powerful practical lesson that Shrimad taught Gandhi by his own life example was that spirituality cannot be divorced from the demands and responsibilities of everyday life, that the proof of the spiritual pudding is in whether it holds life together as a whole or crumbles under its daily pressures!

When presented with the opportunity to work in South Africa, Gandhi left India again. In South Africa, Gandhi was deeply disturbed with the treatment given to the Indians by the white settlers. He exhorted his countrymen to observe truthfulness in business and reminded them that their responsibility was much greater, since their conduct would be seen as a reflection of their country. He asked them to forget about religious and caste differences and to give up their unsanitary habits. He wanted his countrymen to demonstrate their suitability for citizenship by showing they deserved it. Gandhi spent twenty years in South Africa fighting for, and finally gaining Indian citizenship rights.

His experience in South Africa was not spent in merely political pursuits. He had been interested in religion since he was a child, but in South Africa, he began a systematic study of religion. In his first year there, he read over 80 books on religion.

In South Africa also, Gandhiji stayed in touch with Shrimadji through letters. He was deeply touched by Shrimadji's insightful thoughts on philosophy.

Long before he became Mahatma, M.K. Gandhi faced a spiritual crisis in South Africa. His Christian and Muslim friends

were pressing him to convert to their faiths. Gandhi wrote about his dilemma to his friend and mentor—Shrimad Rajchandra.

About him Gandhi has written in his autobiography,

"He was a connoisseur of pearls and diamonds. No knotty business problem was too difficult for him," Gandhi wrote. "But all these things were not the centre round which his life revolved. That centre was the passion to see God face to face.... I have since met many a religious leader or teacher. I have tried to meet the heads of various faiths, and I must say that no one else has ever made on me the impression that Raychandbhai did. His words went straight home to me.... In my moments of spiritual crisis, therefore, he was my refuge.... Though I could not place Raychandbhai on the throne of my heart as Guru,... he was, on many occasions, my guide and helper. Three moderns have left a deep impress on my life, and captivated me: Raychandbhai by his living contact; [Leo] Tolstoy by his book, The Kingdom of God is Within You; and [John] Ruskin by his Unto this Last."

Once, when Gandhiji was faced with a troubling crisis over identity and religion, he resorted to Shrimadji for guidance by penning 27 questions. Shrimadji's answers resolved his doubts and inspired Gandhiji to delve deeper into his own religion.

He asked his mentor Srimadji some questions such as:

Q.1. What is Arya Dharma?

A. In defining Arya Dharma, everyone has his own religion in view. Commonly a Jain describes Jainism, a Buddhist describes Buddhism and a Vedantin describes Vedanta as Arya Dharma. But seers describes only that Arya—noble—path as Arya Dharma which enables the soul to realize its true nature, and rightly so.

Q.2. Do all Indian religions originate from the Vedas?

A. It is impossible that all religions had their origin in the Vedas. I know from experience that great souls like the [Jain] Thirthankars¹ have revealed knowledge of a thousand times deeper import than what the Vedas

contain. I, therefore, believe that, since something imperfect cannot be the origin of a perfect thing, we are not justified in asserting that all religions had originated from the Vedas. We may believe that Vaishnavism and other sects had their origin in the Vedas. It seems that the latter existed before the time of the Buddha and Mahavira, the last teacher of Jainism; it also seems likely that they are really ancient works. But we cannot say that only that which is ancient is true or perfect, nor that what came later is necessarily untrue or imperfect. Apart from this, the ideas propounded in the Vedas and in Jain doctrines have existed from the beginning of time; only the outward forms changed. There is no totally new creation or absolute destruction. Since we may believe that the ideas propounded by the Vedas and in the doctrines of Jainism and other religions have existed from the beginning of time, where is the room for controversy? All the same, it is only right that you and I and others should reflect and consider which of these systems of ideas has more power – truth – in them.

Profound Impact

"I have often declared that I have learnt, and learnt much, from the lives of many persons. But it is from Kavishri (Shrimadji's) life that I have learnt the most. It was from His life that I understood the way of compassion."

~ Mahatma Gandhi ~

(Speech at Ahmedabad, November 1921)

Their close association contributed in defining Gandhiji's moral constitution. Shrimadji's inherent adherence to the Jaina principles of truth, compassion, and non-violence, later crystallized as the fundamental tenets of Gandhism.

Heartfelt Tribute

"We are all worldly people whereas Shrimad was not of this world. We will have to take many births whereas for Shrimad perhaps one birth is sufficient. We will perhaps

be running away from liberation whereas Shrimad was advancing towards liberation at a very fast pace."

~ Mahatma Gandhi ~

(Some Recollections of Raychandbhai)

Even after Shrimadji's sad demise at a young age of 34 in 1901, Gandhiji contemplated upon his letters and compositions from time to time. Gandhiji would often write about Shrimadji, speak about him in speeches and discuss him with close associates. He continued to be deeply inspired by his relationship with Shrimadji, and his spiritual works.

Contribution to the Nation

"The more I consider His (Shrimad Rajchandra) life and His writings, the more I consider Him to have been the best Indian of His times."

~ Mahatma Gandhi ~

(Letter to HSL Polak - April 26, 1909)

What started as an honest friendship, developed into Gandhiji proclaiming Shrimadji as his spiritual mentor and guide. Celebrated as the global messenger of non-violence, Gandhiji remained indebted to the teachings of Shrimadji. Their bond initiated a brilliant new chapter in the cultural, political, and spiritual history of India, and of the world.

Rajchandra also became a role model for Gandhi in considering women neither as sex-objects, nor as an impediment to a higher spiritual sadhana. Both were against child-marriages, ill-fitted marriages, and other social discriminations against women. Both emphasized women's enormous "shakti" or "power" – their intrinsic moral and spiritual potential for forbearance and forgiveness, their ability to suffer but not yield to any injustice.

Gandhi's Life in South Africa

When a young woman, Millie Downs travelled from London to South Africa towards the end of 1905, she thought she was going out simply to marry her fiancé; Henry Polak. But Henry had already become Gandhi's right-hand man and Millie realized

that she was also marrying into the great Gandhian experiment, one that began with his domestic arrangements.

Millie and Henry lived in the same house in Johannesburg with Mahatma Gandhi, his wife, and their three sons; they started each day together grinding corn for the household's bread and they ended each day with a communal vegetarian meal.

Within a span of a few months the whole extended family moved to Gandhi's first large-scale communal experiment, the Phoenix Settlement outside Durban, which was to become the base for his political campaign and where his paper *Indian Opinion* was produced.

As Gandhi's campaign of non-violent resistance developed, he found in Millie Polak a constantly challenging conversational sparring-partner. She questioned him about the treatment of women in Indian culture, about his renunciation of sex, about his ever changing food-fads, and about the nature of his religious beliefs.

To her, he was not yet the 'Mahatma': he was a difficult, witty and contradictory man; and perhaps nothing reveals more about the young Gandhi than the conversations Millie Polak recorded. She places them in the context of communal life at Phoenix, where the dogs were expected to be vegetarian and there was endless heart-searching over whether green mambas could be killed.

When he returned to India from South Africa, his immediate concern was to settle his small band of relatives and associates in an ashram, which was a 'group life lived in a religious spirit'. His ashram depicted a small model of the whole moral and religious ideal. It did not enforce on its residents any ritual or theology, but just a few simple rules of personal conduct. It was more like a large family than a monastery. He was the moral father of the ashram and would fast as penance whenever any wrong was committed within its premises.

Gandhi's rising influence over the Indian masses with 'Satyagraha', which he first coined in his South Africa campaigns, was no less different. His involvement with politics in the region meant that he had to tread carefully around the delicately conflicting notions of the Hindus and Muslims in

the Indian National Congress. He knew that to be truly equal, Indians would need independence from British rule.

On 9 August 1942, when he and other members of the Congress were arrested for encouraging the idea of independence, a wave of violent disobedience swept the country. Dismayed by the violent turn of events, he entered into a long correspondence with the Government, but civil unrest continued during and after the war period. It was only the deep love that he had inspired in the Indians, both Hindu and Muslim, for him, that enabled him to control the violence when he threatened to fast until death.

BBC's Research on Gandhi's Personal Traits

In 1954, the BBC decided to record a series of interviews with people who had known Mahatma Gandhi well. For this purpose, the one person they turned to was a then quite elderly Englishwoman, Millie Polak.

Millie Polak knew Gandhi as well as any European woman ever did and this is the only known recording of her voice. It was with her pen that she revealed far more about the privileged and somewhat prickly friendship she had with Gandhi.

In her interview, she mentioned about a small notice under the headline 'Congratulations' in the Durban weekly *Indian Opinion* on January 5th, 1906. Over the previous two years, the paper had established itself as the mouthpiece of Gandhi's campaign for the rights of South Africa's Indians: and the following week it gave its readers a more detailed description of the newlyweds.

And the suburban Johannesburg home of Mr M.K. Gandhi was also, the young Millie Downs soon found out, to be the home in which she was to begin her married life. As she later wrote, it had been clear from the moment of her arrival in South Africa that in marrying Henry Polak she was also marrying Gandhi's cause.

And Millie soon discovered that the middle class comforts of London, to which, no doubt, she'd been accustomed, had no place in the Gandhi household.

Over the next nine years, until his final departure for India in 1914, the Polaks - both in Johannesburg and later in Durban -

were to be part of an extended family that was at the very heart of Gandhi's experiments with how best to live. As he himself put it in the autobiography he published in the late '20s.

Gandhi also acknowledged that Millie Polak's arrival in January 1905 was a significant and potentially a fraught moment for the entire household, particularly, as he thought, for his wife, Kasturba.



Gandhi called his autobiography 'Experiments with Truth', and to Judith Brown - Professor of Commonwealth History at Oxford and Britain's

leading authority on Gandhi's life and thought - his family life was his first great experiment, breaking away from strict Hindu domestic traditions that he and his wife would have followed ever since their arranged marriage at the age of thirteen years.

And it can only have been difficult for Kasturba Gandhi, who was still at this time illiterate, to experience her husband's close intellectual relationship with such untouchables - both male and female. From what she wrote later, Millie Polak seemed well aware of the delicacy of the situation.

Gandhi and Millie Polak conversed frequently, about every subject under the African sun, and in the evenings she would write down about their conversations to each other in her notebook. Nearly three decades later, in 1931, she published a small volume of reminiscences about her time as part of the Gandhi household in South Africa. Her book, which has never been reprinted, is called simply '*Mr Gandhi, the Man.*'

Gandhi had acquired the land at Phoenix because in 1904, after reading a book that Henry Polak had given him, on a train from Johannesburg to Durban. The book was John Ruskin's moral and aesthetic critique of industrial capitalism *Unto This Last*, and it convinced Gandhi that the trappings of western materialism were indeed traps. He brought his extended family to Phoenix to experiment with living as simply as possible. But Millie Polak, for one, didn't much like what she saw.

Today, it is now densely built over with small houses, but a hundred years ago this was virgin territory. The original settlers lived under canvas while they constructed from simple corrugated iron shacks, and each household was given a small plot for growing vegetables. Phoenix was described at the time as "a hundred acres of fruit trees and snakes", and what to do with the resident mambas was a constant problem for a community in which all life was held to be sacred.

Gandhi worked ceaselessly to expose and undermine the Hindu caste system. However while in South Africa, he knew that Millie Polak wasn't going to keep quiet about those aspects of Indian culture that she found offensive. Towards the end of their time together at Phoenix a middle-aged follower of Gandhi returned to the settlement from a trip to India bringing with him a newly-acquired child bride. Before Gandhi, finally left South Africa to return to India in 1914, he requested the polaks to remain at Phoenix. Millie Polak was anxious, after more than eight years away, to get back to England with her husband and the two young sons they now had. But Gandhi needed people he could trust to stay and continue his work at Phoenix; and when he asked the Polaks, they agreed. So it would have been with a heavy heart that Millie travelled down to the Cape to say goodbye to the brilliantly strange Indian man with whom she *had shared so much* over the previous years.

Gandhi's Philosophy on Non-Philosophy

With Gandhi, the philosophy of non-violence attained a special status. He not only theorized on it, he adopted it as an ideal way of life. He made us understand that the philosophy of nonviolence is not a weapon of the weak; it is a weapon, which can be tried by all.

Non-violence was not Gandhi's invention. He is however called the father of non-violence because according to Mark Shepard, *"He raised nonviolent action to a level never before achieved."*

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At the time when scholars were talking about an idea without a name or a movement, Gandhi was the person who came up with the name and brought together different related ideas under one concept: Satyagraha.

Gandhi's Views on Violence

Gandhi disapproved of violence and identified two forms of violence; Passive and Physical. The practice of passive violence is a daily affair, consciously and unconsciously. Gandhi studies violence from its Sanskrit root, "*himsa*", meaning injury. In the middle of hyper violence, Gandhi teaches that the one who follows non-violence is blessed. Blessed is the man who can perceive the law of *ahimsa* (nonviolence) in the middle of the raging fire of *himsa* all around him. We bow in reverence to such a man. The more hostile the circumstances around him, the intenser his longing for deliverance from *himsa*... Gandhi objected to violence as it perpetuates hatred. When it appears to do 'good', the good is only temporary and cannot do any good in the long run. A true activist of nonviolence accepts violence on himself without inflicting it on another. When Gandhi says that in the course of fighting for human rights, one should accept violence and self-suffering, he does not applaud cowardice. Cowardice for him is «the greatest violence, certainly, far greater than bloodshed and the like that generally go under the name of violence. For Gandhi, agents of violence (whom he referred to as criminals), are products of social disintegration. Gandhi feels that violence is not a natural tendency of humans. It has to be learned. There is need for a perfect weapon to combat violence and this is nonviolence.

Ahimsa denotes more than just avoidance of physical violence. *Ahimsa* implies total nonviolence, no physical violence and no passive violence. Gandhi translates *Ahimsa* as love. This is explained by Arun Gandhi in an interview thus; "He (Gandhi) said *ahimsa* means love. Because if you have love towards somebody, and you respect that person, then you are not going to do any harm to that person."

Gandhi regarded nonviolence as the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than any weapon of mass destruction. It is much superior to brute force. It is a living force

of power and no one has been or will ever be able to measure its limits or its extend. Gandhi's non-violence is also the search for truth. Truth is the most fundamental element of Gandhi's Philosophy of nonviolence. His whole life has been "experiments of truth". It was in this course of his pursuit of truth that Gandhi discovered non-violence, which he further explained in his Autobiography thus *"Ahimsa is the basis of the search for truth. I am realizing that this search is vain, unless it is founded on ahimsa as the basis."*

Truth and nonviolence are like two sides of a coin. For non-violence to be strong and effective; it must begin with the mind; otherwise it will be nonviolence of the weak and cowardly. A coward is a person who does not have the courage when facing a dangerous and unpleasant situation and tries to avoid it. A man cannot practice ahimsa and at the same time be a coward. True nonviolence is dissociated from fear.

Gandhi considers possession of arms to be not only cowardice but also lack of fearlessness or courage. Gandhi stressed this when he says;

"I can imagine a fully armed man to be at heart a coward. Possession of arms implies an element of fear, if not cowardice but true nonviolence is impossibility without the possession of unadulterated fearlessness."

As the world's pioneer in nonviolent theory and practice, Gandhi unequivocally stated that nonviolence contained a universal applicability. In his letter to Daniel Oliver in Hammana Lebanon on the 11th of 1937 Gandhi used these words:

"I have no message to give except this that there is no deliverance for any people on this earth or for all the people of this earth except through truth and nonviolence in every walk of life without any exceptions."

In this passage, Gandhi promises "deliverance" through nonviolence for oppressed people without exception. Speaking chiefly with regards to non-violence, Gandhi emphasizes the power of nonviolence to emancipate spiritually and physically. It is a science and of its own can lead one to pure democracy.

Satyagraha, the Centre of Gandhi's Contribution to the Philosophy of Nonviolence

Stanley E. Jones calls Satyagraha as "the centre of Gandhi's contribution to the world". All else is marginal compared to it. Satyagraha is the essence of Gandhism. Through it, Gandhi introduced a new spirit to the world. It is the greatest of all Gandhi's contribution to the world.

WHAT IS SATYAGRAHA?

Satyagraha (pronounced sat-YAH-graha) is a compound of two Sanskrit nouns *satya*, meaning truth (from 'sat'- 'being' with a suffix 'ya'), and *agraha*, meaning, "firm grasping" (a noun made from the *agra*, which has its root 'grah'- 'seize', 'grasp', with the verbal prefix 'a' - 'to' 'towards'). Consequently, Satyagraha literally means devotion to truth, remaining firm on the truth and resisting untruth actively but non-violently. Since the only way for Gandhi getting to the truth is by nonviolence (love), it means that Satyagraha suggests an unwavering search for the truth using non-violence. Satyagraha according to Michael Nagler literally means 'clinging to truth,' and that was exactly how Gandhi understood it:

"clinging to the truth that we are all one under the skin, that there is no such thing as a 'win/lose' confrontation because all our important interests are really the same, that consciously or not every single person wants unity and peace with every other" Put succinctly, Satyagraha means 'truth force', 'soul force' or as Martin Luther Jr would call it 'love in action.' Satyagraha has often been defined as the philosophy of nonviolent resistance most famously employed by Mahatma Gandhi, in forcing an end to the British domination. Gene Sharp did not hesitate to define Satyagraha simply as "Gandhian Nonviolence."

Today as Nagler would say, 'when we use the word *Satyagraha*, we sometimes mean that general principle, the fact that love is stronger than hate and sometimes we mean more specifically active resistance by a repressed group; sometimes,

even more specifically, we apply the term to a given movement like Salt Satyagraha etc. It is worthwhile looking at the way Gandhi uses Satyagraha.'

Gandhi View of Satyagraha

Satyagraha was not a predetermined plan in the life of Mahatma Gandhi. The event in his life culminating in his "Bramacharya vow", prepared him for it. He therefore underlined:

"Events were so shaping themselves in Johannesburg as to make this self-purification on my part a preliminary as it were to Satyagraha. I can now see that all the principal events of my life, culminating in the vow of Bramacharya were secretly preparing me for it."

Satyagraha is a moral weapon and the stress is on soul force over physical force. It aims at winning the enemy through love and patient suffering. It aims at winning over an unjust law, not at crushing, punishing, or taking revenge against the authority, but to convert and heal it. Though it started as a struggle for political rights, Satyagraha became, in the long run, a struggle for individual salvation, which could be achieved through love and self-sacrifice. Satyagraha is meant to overcome all methods of violence. Gandhi explained in a letter to Lord Hunter that 'Satyagraha is a movement based entirely upon truth. It replaces every form of violence, direct and indirect, veiled and unveiled and whether in thought, word or deed.'

Satyagraha is for the strong not for the weak. A doubter or a timid person cannot practice it. Satyagraha teaches the art of living as well as dying. It is love and unshakeable firmness that comes from it. Its training is meant for all, irrespective of age and sex. It has some basic precepts mentioned below.

The Basic Precepts of Satyagraha

There are three basic precepts essential to Satyagraha: Truth, Nonviolence and Self-suffering. These three are called the pillars of Satyagraha.

These three fundamentals correspond to Sanskrit terms:

- *Sat/Satya* - Truth implying openness, honesty and fairness
- *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence - refusal to inflict injury upon others.
- *Tapasya* - willingness to self-sacrifice.

These fundamental concepts are:

1. Satya/Truth

Satyagraha means the force of truth. Truth is a relative term. Satyagraha implies working steadily towards a discovery of the absolute truth and converting the opponent into a trend in the working process. In his life, Gandhi made numerous experiments with truth. In holding to the truth, he claims to be making a ceaseless effort to find it.

Gandhi's conception of truth is deeply rooted in Hinduism. The emphasis of *Satya*-truth is paramount in the writings of the Indian philosophers. "*Satyannasti Parodharmati (Satyan Nasti Paro Dharma Ti)* - there is no religion or duty greater than truth", holds a prominent place in Hinduism as well as Jainism. Reaching pure and absolute truth is attaining moksha. Gandhi holds that truth is God and maintains that it is an integral part of Satyagraha.

He explained it thus:

"The world rests upon the bedrock of satya or truth; asatya meaning untruth also means 'nonexistent' and satya or truth, means that which is of untruth does not so much exist. Its victory is out of the question. And truth being 'that which is' can never be destroyed. This is the doctrine of Satyagraha in a nutshell."

2. Ahimsa

Gandhi considers that Satyagraha or truth is inseparable from Ahimsa. Ahimsa expresses as ancient Jain, Hindu and Buddhist ethical precept. The term *Ahimsa* appears in Hindu teachings as early as the Chandoya Upanishad. The Jain Religion constitutes Ahimsa as the first vow. It is also a cardinal virtue in Buddhism.

According to Mahatma Gandhi, the root of *Satya* and *Ahimsa* is love.

3. Tapasya (Self-Suffering)

It is true that the classical laws of self-restraint and self-discipline are vital elements in Indian culture. Self-suffering in Satyagraha is a test of love and is detected first of all towards the much persuasion of one whom is undertaken. Gandhi separated self-suffering from cowardice. Gandhi's choice of self-suffering is a sign of voluntary help and is noble and morally enriching.

He himself says;

"It is not because I value life so I can countenance with joy Thousands voluntary losing their lives for Satyagraha, but because I know that it results in the long run in the least loss of life, and what is more, it ennoble those who lose their lives and morally enriches the world for their sacrifice."

The three elements: Satya, Ahimsa, Tapasya must move together for the success of any Satyagraha campaign. It follows that Ahimsa - which implies love, leads in turn to social service. Truth leads to an ethical humanism. Self-suffering not for its own sake, but for the demonstration of sincerity flowing from refusal to injure the opponent while at the same time, holding to the truth, implies sacrifice and preparation for sacrifice even to death.

Satyagraha in Action

For Satyagraha to be meaningful, it has to be established. When the principles are applied to specific political and social action, the tools of civil disobedience, noncooperation, nonviolent strike, and constructive action are cherished. South Africa and India were 'laboratories' where Gandhi tested his new technique. Satyagraha was a necessary weapon for Gandhi to work in South Africa and India. Louis Fischer attests that:

"Gandhi could never have achieved what he did in South Africa and India but for a weapon peculiarly his own. It was unprecedented indeed; it was so unique he could not find a name for it until he finally hit upon Satyagraha."

Satyagraha was employed to fight for the civil rights of Indians in South Africa. In India, Gandhi applied Satyagraha

in his socio-political milieu and carried out several acts of civil disobedience culminating in the famous Salt March.

Another wonderful way of seeing Satyagraha in action is through the fasting of Mahatma Gandhi. Fasting was part and parcel of his philosophy of truth and nonviolence. Mahatma Gandhi was an activist - a moral and spiritual activist. And fasting was "one of his strategies of activism, in many ways his most powerful."

Qualities of a Satyagrahi (Nonviolence Activist)

Gandhi knew that there was need to train people who could continue with his Satyagraha campaigns. He trained them in his "Satyagraha Ashrams". Here are some of the basic qualities of expected of a Satyagrahi.

- A Satyagraha should have a living faith in God for he is his only Rock.
- One must believe in truth and nonviolence as one's creed and therefore have faith in the inherent goodness of human nature.
- One must live a chaste life and be ready and willing for the sake of one's cause to give up his life and his possessions.
- One must be free from the use any intoxicant, in order that his reason may be undivided and his mind constant.
- One must carry out with a willing heart all the rules of discipline as may be laid down from time to time.
- One should carry out the jail rules unless they are especially dense to hurt his self-respect.
- A satyagrahi must accept to suffer in order to correct a situation.

It can be summarized that, Satyagraha is itself a movement intended to fight social and promote ethical values. It is a whole philosophy of non-violence. It is undertaken only after all the other peaceful means have proven ineffective.

An attempt is made to convert, persuade or win over the opponent. It involves applying the forces of both reason and conscience simultaneously, while holding aloft the indisputable

truth of his/her position. The Satyagrahi also engages in acts of voluntary suffering. Any violence inflicted by the opponent is accepted without retaliation. The opponent can only become morally bankrupt if violence continues to be inflicted indefinitely.

Several methods can be applied in a Satyagraha campaign. Stephen Murphy gives primacy to "noncooperation and fasting". Bertrand Russell has this to say about Gandhi's method-

"The essence of this method which he (Gandhi) gradually brought to greater and greater perfection consisted in refusal to do things, which the authorities wished to have done, while abstaining from any positive action of an aggressive sort... The method always had in Gandhi's mind a religious aspect... As a rule, this method depended upon moral force for its success."

Interpretation and Understanding of Gandhi's Philosophy of Nonviolence

Through Satyagraha, Gandhi has provided the world with a universal and timeless philosophy. Like Kant, he focused much of his attention to motives and intentions, but moved a step further to emphasize the primacy of morality.

Gandhi highlighted an integral relationship between means and ends. One cannot use impure or immoral means to achieve worthy goals. The utilitarian philosophers in the west enunciated the concept of greatest good of the greatest number as the aim of state policy. This has failed to take a holistic view of the entire human race and ignored man; that is to say each and every man, as the prime concern of the state... As against this, Gandhi propounded the theory of *sarvodaya*, which means the rise of all that too in the fullest measure each man is capable of. In order to understand this 'timeless philosophy' propounded by Gandhi, it will be good to see the various interpretations given to it.

Essential Principles of Gandhi's Philosophy of Nonviolence

The principles of Gandhi's Philosophy comprise; Truth, Ahimsa, Trusteeship and Constructive Action/Programme. While at

private level we have; Respect, Understanding, Appreciation and acceptance.

The Essential principles at public level are: -

- 1) **Truth:** The imperfect translation of the Sanskrit *satya*, the meaning of truth is, of course obvious. It must be noted that truth has many sides and is ever changing. What appears true today may not be the same tomorrow, or what appears true to us may not be same for others. We must develop the ability to look at everything from varying perspectives. However, we have to aim at the absolute truth, which Gandhi identifies with God. Aiming at this absolute truth implies numerous experiments with the truth, which Gandhi applied at public level.
- 2) **Ahimsa:** This is nonviolence in thought, word and deed. Far from meaning mere peacefulness or the absence of overt violence, Gandhi understood it to denote active love. It is used at public level to bring about positive changes.
- 3) **Trusteeship:** For Gandhi, violence is an integral part of our present economic, social and industrial systems. He aims at bringing a change through the application of his concept of Trusteeship. Trusteeship according to Bader means *"Having faith and confidence in a process of taking responsibility for assets and social values and administering their rightful and creative usage for benefit of others now and in the coming ages."*

Its aim is to create non-violent and non-exploitative relationships. Gandhi believed that the concepts of possession and private property were sources of violence. All wealth belongs to all people. He recognizes that the concept of ownership cannot wither easily and that the rich cannot be easily persuaded to share their wealth. He therefore invites those people who consider themselves today as owners to act as trustees; that is, owners, not in their own right, but owners in the right of those whom they have exploited. This principle seeks to destroy capitalism, not the capitalists. Trusteeship

provides a means of attaining an egalitarian society. The basis of this socialism is economic equality.

- 4) **Constructive Programme:** Gandhi devoted his life to the social, economic and spiritual regeneration of the country and believed this would be achieved by the efforts of the people themselves. Gandhi therefore emphasized on what he had originally conceived as "spiritual socialism", the positive counterpart of non-cooperation and civil disobedience and eventually called the constructive program.

To win independence, Gandhi felt the only truthful and nonviolent way would be through the constructive action. Gandhi therefore feels that the constructive programme should be called "Construction of Poorna *Swaraj* or complete independence by the truthful and nonviolent means." It denotes working towards finding constructive solutions to problems.

Mahatma Gandhi strongly believed that the constructive programme is another form of Satyagraha, which could bring about a non-violent agrarian revolution.

Gandhi's Philosophy of Nonviolence at the Private Level

According to Hector Ayala, true Gandhian peace can be derived "through the proper understanding and practice of non-violence based on the four principles of non-violence at personal level which includes respect, understanding acceptance and appreciation". If we learn to build good relationships based on the four cardinal principles, then conflict will be minimized.

The essential principles here include:

- 1) **Respect:** This is a behaviour pattern and attitude, which reflect one's ability to see the worth and value in people, situations and institutions. Lack of respect between people leads to conflicts and violence among them. Gandhi therefore advocated fearlessly for the dignity between humans. Gandhian Nonviolence teaches us to respect ourselves and others and all of creation if this respect is cultivated at personal level, we will be open to respect different cultures and belief systems.

- 2) **Understanding:** This can be achieved when we learn who we are and what our role in creation is. In our arrogance, we believe that humans are not part of nature. We are therefore prone to destroying our habitat and cannot expect to survive for very long. By understanding ourselves, and our reactions to life's events, we can become better and are able to make changes we wish to see. Gandhi advocated for understanding and dialogue between people. When well practiced at personal level, the philosophy of nonviolence will help to foster dialogue.
- 3) **Acceptance:** Acceptance is the first step to tolerance. Acceptance does not essentially equate to approval. However, it is a conscious decision to see value and inherent worth of others. One needs to learn to be humble to develop acceptance. This is attained when we accept differences, both physical and philosophical between human beings. When these differences begin to diminish, then we accept each other as human beings and can dispense with the label that keep people apart.
- 4) **Appreciation:** This is the recognition of the value and worth of all living creatures having the ability to see goodness by learning to focus on the good, in people rather than on the bad even with some difficulty, to see God in all of life. Appreciation is a by-product of nonviolence. It implies developing an ability to recognize the value and worth in other human beings.

The Place of Civil Disobedience in Gandhi's Political Philosophy

The two crucial points in Gandhi's Politics are those of obedience to the law and the employment of Force. He was deeply concerned with the duty of the citizen in the imperfect states of the world. He cooperated with the Government but never abided by laws that disregarded the human person. In his Famous letter to the Viceroy, Inaugurating the Noncooperation Movement in 1921, Gandhi confessed openly that "From a staunch loyalist and cooperator, I have become an uncompromising, disaffectionist and noncooperator".

In Gandhian Satyagraha Civil disobedience is justified. One should disobey such laws as are in themselves bad and obedience to which should be inconsistent with one's self respect. One should disobey Laws of state that lack moral turpitude. He warns however that: Disobedience to the civil must be sincere, respectful, restrained, never defiant, must be based upon some well understood principle, must not be capricious and above all must have no ill-will or hatred behind it.

Hence it can be easily derived that Jainism had a deep impact on the life of Mahatma Gandhi.

Virchand Raghavji Gandhi, a Gandhi before Gandhi

As for all of us Indians, 15th August, is a day dedicated to Indian Patriots; August is also the birth and death month of Gujarat's legend, Virchand Raghavji Gandhi.

Whenever, there is a talk about Hindu philosophy, one eminent name comes to mind and that is of Swami Vivekananda. Everyone knows that Swami Vivekananda received recognition chiefly because of his speech in the first-ever World Parliament of Religions in 1893, where he represented Hinduism. However, hardly anyone knows that one more Indian legend boldly expressed his patriotism at the same event, by defending Indian culture and Hinduism and represented Jainism and this eminent person was Virchand Raghavji Gandhi. His captivating speech was appreciated at the World Parliament of Religions.

A true patriot is someone, who feels or voices expressions of patriotism, love, and devotion to one's country. Virchand Raghavji demonstrated his patriotism, devotion and love for mother India and its spiritual heritage. His speech reflected the true spirit and culture of India. He received equal attention, as did Swami Vivekananda. Hence it is sad to see that many people today do not know about him, who was contemporary to Mahatma Gandhi and Swami Vivekananda.

In 1910, Bhagubhai Karbhari, a renowned scholar, who was the editor of Prajabandhu, Patriot and Samlochak newspapers, wrote that Virchand Gandhi was awarded a silver medal at the parliament. He delivered 535 lectures largely in Chicago, Boston, New York, and Washington DC, in the USA, England,

France, Germany and other European countries and was both nationally and internationally felicitated with several medals. His fascinating speeches were based on the fundamentals of Jainism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Indian culture. Virchand Gandhi also spoke on a plethora of subjects such as Indian economic and industrial outlook, Indian international trade system, yoga, real estate, occultism, ancient history of Indian civilization, science of eating, hypnotism, concentration, vegetarianism and astral vision and astral body.

He may be rightly called as 'Father of USA's NRI Gujaratis', as he was the first Gujarati to visit the USA at the age of just 29 and died at the early age of 37 due to lung hemorrhage. But in his short life span, so-called lion of the season, his great success was covered by the leading US newspapers, and periodicals like New York Times, St. Joseph Gazette, The Jamestown New York, Editors Bureau, Chicago Daily Sun, Chicago Herald, Chicago Suburban Star, Light of Truth, Cincinnati, Buffalo Times, The Illustrated Buffalo Express, Morning Star, Buffalo Evening Times, Buffalo Express, Buffalo Courier, The Evangelist, Evening Post, Rochester Democrat Chronicle, and The Rochester Herald.

At every place, he was felicitated and awarded with medals. Being well-versed in 14 languages, this great scholar of all world religions was the first in world to translate 'Unknown Life of Jesus Christ' from French to English, a manuscript found from Tibet.

Virchand was only son of Mahuva's (Gujarat) business tycoon Raghavji Tejpalji Gandhi. Virchand Gandhi was a visionary too. He talked about economic and political freedom five decades before India became independent. In one of his speeches to the American public, he declared: "You know, my brothers and



Virchand Gandhi

sisters that we are not an independent nation, we are subjects of Her Gracious Majesty, Queen Victoria, and the "Defender of the Faith."

"But if we were a nation in all that that word implies, with our own government and our own rulers, with our laws and institutions controlled by us free and independent, I affirm that we should seek to establish and forever maintain peaceful relations with all nations of the world."

Today this statement appears as a prophecy that Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) proved in attaining India's freedom through peaceful means.

Recently, the government of India had issued commemorative postal stamps to honor this legend.

Virchand Gandhi gave lectures on the political and industrial outlook in India in Large Hall of William Science building on December 19, 1898. He attained Bar at Law at Britain. Virchand Gandhi also succeeded in resolving disputes of Palitana on tax and Sammetshikarji on piggery case.

Virchand Gandhi reveals that at many occasions, Mahatma Gandhi was misunderstood as V.R. Gandhi.

On June 13, 1931, Mahatma Gandhi clarifies to Miss Emelia Mac Bean of Chicago in a letter when she mistook him as Virchand Gandhi, "Madam, I have your letter for which I thank you. You are giving me credit of which I am wholly undeserving. You are thinking of another Mr. Gandhi my namesake but in no way related to me. He and I were, however, friends and lived together for some time. You will be sorry to hear that he died many years ago, leaving an only son. It was he, who visited America and made many friends. I have never had the privilege of visiting your continent."



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“On the occasion of 150th birth anniversary of the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, it would not be wrong to say that Mahatma Gandhi, although not born a Jain, followed all the tenets of Jainism in his life. His simple living, truthfulness, Satyagraha and non-attachment as well as belief in ahimsa make him a rigid follower of the practices of Jainism.”



Mahatma Gandhi interact with Jain Sadhavi Ujjawal Kumari ji



Mahatma Gandhi giving food to the Jain Sadhavi Ujjawal Kumari ji
at Birla House Mumbai ; September 1944



Dr. Amit Rai Jain is an independent scholar. He was involved in the study of the wide range of subjects linked to the field of History including Numismatics Science, Manuscriptology, Archaeology and religious literature. He is the founder of Shahjad Rai Research Institute, Baraut, Baghpat (UP). The institute was formed in 1994. Presently five research scholars are doing research on his collections at the Institute. He

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He is also working in the field of historical research in Western Uttar Pradesh where he explored a Harrapan burial site Chandayan and Harrapan Habitational Site Putthi. He is also documenting the sites linked to the 1857 War of Independence in Western Uttar Pradesh. He has written many books namely *History and Culture of Western Uttar Pradesh (in two volumes)*, *Cellular Jail in Andaman and Nicobar Islands*, *Coins in Ancient India*, *Coins in Medieval India*, *Coins in Modern India*, *Yoga- The Holistic System of Healing*, *Prachin Bharat mein Dharmik evam Darshnik Shiksha*, *Harappan Civilisation*, *Yogic Practices in Jainism*, *Cave Temples of India* etc. He has written articles for several newspapers and magazines. His next project focuses on *Hinduism: A Brief Introduction*. He made great efforts for the excavation of 'Barnava' Lakshagraha multiculture site and 'Sinauli' Mahabhart Period site by ASI.



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