



GANDHI – THE IDEA... ...WHOSE TIME HAS COME...OR GONE?



“H istorians of the future, I believe, will look upon this century not as the atomic age but as the age of Gandhi.” - Eknath Easwaran.

Every Indian city has a Mahatma Gandhi Road. Almost. But how many actually walk down the road that the Mahatma illuminated through his thoughts and credo? Over generalised and simplified, Gandhi has been reduced to a synonym for non-violence without any attempt at understanding the brushstrokes of thoughts that panned the Gandhian canvas and their nuanced hues that today, more than ever, need to be revisited under new light.

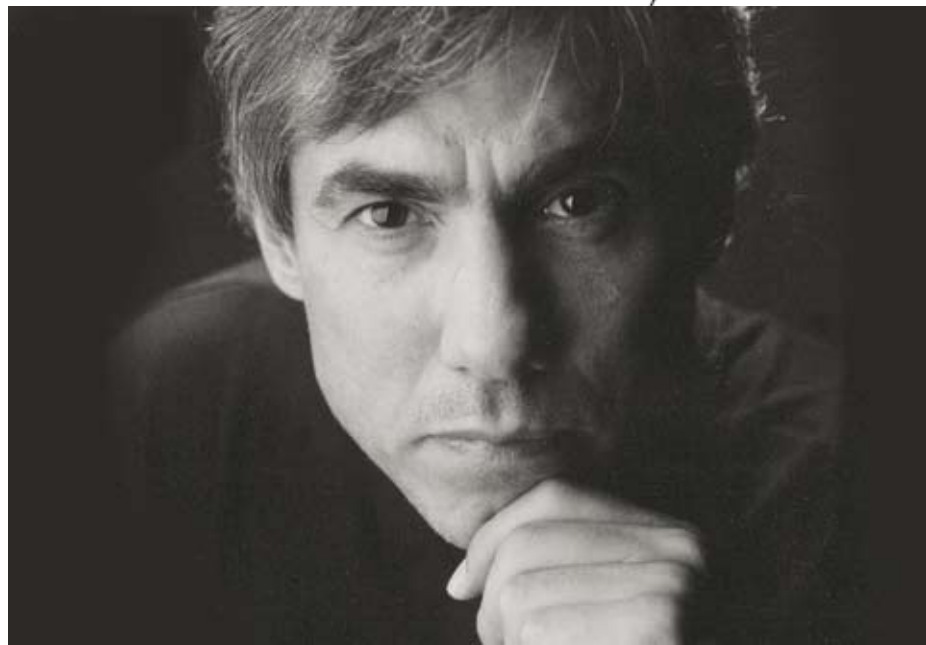
Gandhi's firm backing of his basic principles – that of ahimsa and satyagraha – were evident in his calling off the non-cooperation movement after an irate and incited mob went on a violent rampage in the small town of Chauri Chaura in Uttar Pradesh, dousing a police station killing 22 policemen on February 4, 1922. The shockwaves of Chauri Chaura sharply divided the protagonists of India's freedom struggles the moderates and the extremists, most noted among whom was Bhagat Singh – ‘He believed in action which Gandhi

did not take up’ says his nephew, Abhey Singh Sandhu (See the story on page on Bhagat Singh) – parted ways.

Dr. Douglas Allen, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Maine who is writing a book on the Mahatma provides an intriguing perspective, ‘Especially relevant and significant today is a greatly misunderstood position from the non-violent Gandhi. Rather insisting on some utopian, absolutist position, Gandhi grants a surprising number of cases in which there are no good non-violent alternatives and violence is necessary. But we should never glorify such violence. The fact that we may need to resort to violence is tragic, should sadden us, and is an indication of human failure.’

Today, Gandhi's philosophy permeates pop culture in a relatively superficial manner like Raj Kumar Hirani's "Lage Raho Munnabhai" or tongue-in-cheek Gandhigiri cards. But his message, the unique stamp of which finds an echo in the voice of a Desmond Tutu or a Aung San Suu Kyi (See story on Suu Kyi on page 52) needs to spread more because in a more complex and nuanced world ‘his philosophy may provide all the answers’ as Dr. Allen says, ‘yet Gandhi's philosophy is remarkably insightful, relevant, and desperately needed.’





THE MONK WHO SOLD HIS PEACE

THE FIRST AMERICAN ORDAINED A BUDDHIST MONK IN BURMA, ALAN CLEMENTS HAS BEEN WITNESS TO THE WORST OF ATROCITIES EXACTED BY THE MILITARY JUNTA THROUGH HIS STAY IN A RANGOON MONASTERY IN THE 70S. AUTHOR OF "BURMA: THE NEXT KILLING FIELDS?", ALAN'S CONVERSATIONS WITH AUNG SAN SUU KYI IN '95-'96 BECAME THE BOOK "THE VOICE OF HOPE" (EDITED EXCERPTS ON FACING PAGE) THAT PROVIDES REMARKABLE INSIGHT INTO ONE OF THE MOST COURAGEOUS NON-VIOLENT REVOLUTIONS OF THE WORLD AND ITS EXEMPLARY LEADER.

Do you think the success of a "non-co-operation movement" has more to do with the presence of a charismatic leader (Gandhi, Aung San Suu Kyi) than the ideals themselves (satyagraha, non-violence)?

In his book "Long Walk to Freedom", Nelson Mandela mentions how important it was for him as one of the principal leaders in the ANC

to keep the idea of freedom alive in the hearts of the people. So in that sense... many people in the world have beautiful values but they cannot be activated unless there is someone who knows how to water those values in their heart. Gandhi was one of those who knew how to moisture the seeds of liberation and truth and commitment to non-violence in the

minds of millions.

Compare and contrast Gandhi and Daw Suu.

I would say that she'd feel remarkably honored to be in any comparison to Gandhiji; she's very quick say that I'm an ordinary person doing the best I can. (Is) remarkably committed to the power of non-violence and love, and non-cooperation with oppression... Daw (Madam)

Suu has transcended a state of mind beyond forgiveness; she's not even asking the people to forgive the generals – she's actually trying to say we want you as part of the solution, which is hard to believe... In that sense, she has many comparisons to Gandhi. At the same time, she is alive in this modern world with contemporary understanding of things that didn't exist in the 40s and 50s.

What do you think is the motivation in facing ruthless torture and violence?

The people of Burma know that they are on the right side of right, so to speak; they have history on their side. They know that dictatorship, fascism, always fall. They know that Mahatma Gandhi overthrew the domination of the British; the white apartheid machine in South Africa seeming impenetrable collapsed; the Berlin Wall fell. They know the power of freedom. There is a great power in the moral ethical integrity of their revolution. Yes, they are deeply tested all the time – they are a country under siege. There are 50 million prisoners held against their will; 3000 villages have been completely burnt to the ground; million refugees live outside the country; two million people displaced in the country; the country is starving... a country oppressed by this very wicked dictatorship, supported by the money of China, Russia, and also India. Where do they get their stamina, their vitality? I think they draw on the wellspring of compassion, of self-respect. They are thinking of their children's children's children, in dedicating to freedom, and history has proven them right that at one point in the future, there'll be a free society in Burma. **ISI**

Indira Parthasarathy

ALAN CLEMENTS (AC): When you reflect back over the years, what have been the most important experiences and personal lessons that have had a significant effect on your growth as an individual??

AUNG SAN SUU KYI

(ASK): What I have learned in life is that it's always your own wrongdoing that causes you the greatest suffering. It is never what other people do to you. My mother instilled in me the principle that wrongdoing never pays, and my own experience has proved that to be true. If you have positive feelings towards other people... they can't frighten you. I think only when you stop loving other people do you really suffer.

AC: What is the core quality at the center of your movement?

ASK: Inner strength. It's the spiritual steadiness that comes from the belief that what you are doing is right, even if it doesn't bring you immediate concrete benefits... and helps to shore up your spiritual powers.

AC: On one level, you speak of genuine reconciliation, but at the same time, are you also speaking to the need of the population to steadily increase their dissatisfaction towards SLORC (the military junta)...?

ASK: It's not really the need to grow "uncomfortable." Our principal task is to encourage people to question the situation and not just accept everything. Acceptance is not the same as serenity. Some people seem to think they go together... (it) destroys the sense of serenity and inner peace, for you're in conflict with yourself.

AC: Daw Suu, how effective is non-violence in the modern world, and more specifically, with regimes that seem devoid of sensitivity or any

sense of conscience?

ASK: Non-violence means positive action. You have to work for whatever you want. You don't just sit there doing nothing and hope to get what you want. I know that it is often the slower way and I understand why our young people feel that non-violence will not work. Especially when the authorities in Burma are prepared to talk to insurgent groups, but not to an organization like the National League for Democracy (NLD) which carries no arms. That makes a lot of people feel that the only way you can get anywhere is by bearing arms. But

I cannot encourage that kind of attitude, for if we do, we will be perpetuating a cycle of violence that will never end.

AC: Is non-violence an immutable ethical & spiritual principle that will never alter in your approach...?

ASK: We have always said that we will never disown those students and others who have taken up violence. We know that their aim is the same as ours. They want democracy and they think the best way to go about it is through armed struggle. And we do not say that we have the right methods of achieving what we want. But, we cannot

guarantee their security. We can't say, "Follow us in the way of non-violence and you'll be protected," or that we'll get there without any casualties. That's a promise we can't make.

We have chosen the way of non-violence for we think it's politically better for the country in the long run to establish that you can bring about change without the use of arms. Here, we're not thinking about spiritual matters at all. Perhaps in that sense, we're not the same as Gandhi... But he did say at one time that if he had to choose between violence and cowardice, he would choose violence. So even Gandhi, who was supposed to be the great exponent of non-violence, was not somebody who did not make any exceptions...

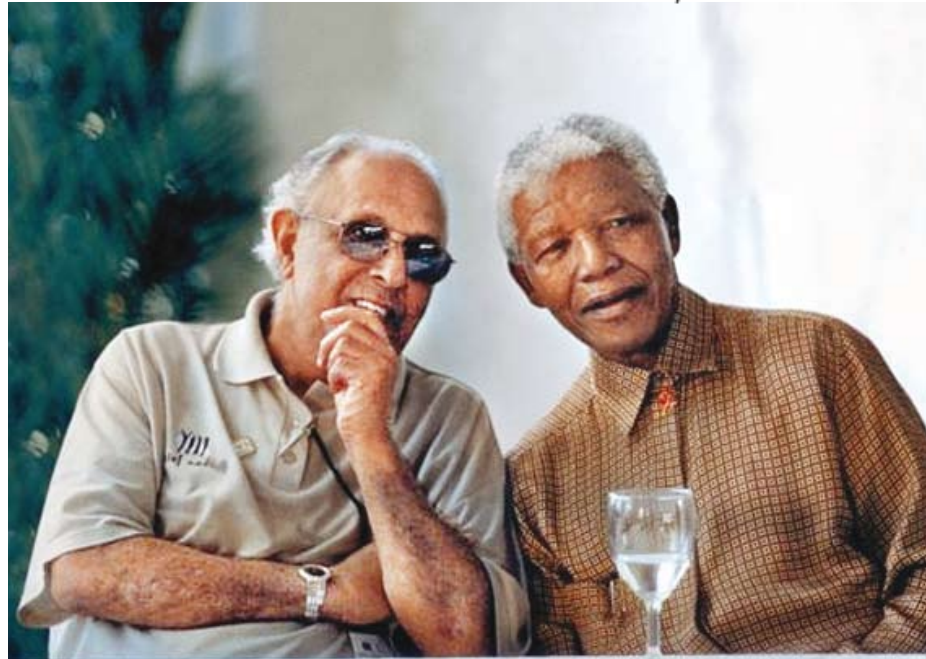
AC: What about the victims who don't have the resiliency that you and your colleagues have, and do feel violated by the atrocities committed to them?

ASK: Of course... This is why we are talking about the connection of truth and reconciliation. Certainly, their sufferings have to be acknowledged. You can't just wipe away the past. If you try, there will always be this ocean of festering resentment within those who have truly suffered... as though they've suffered for nothing; as though their sons and fathers had died for nothing. That there's an admission of the injustice done, will take away a lot of the resentment. Mind you, there will always be people who can never forgive. But we must always try to. In Chile they had a council for truth and reconciliation and there's one now in South Africa, under Archbishop Desmond Tutu. I very much believe in it. The admission of injustice, to a certain extent, will prevent it from happening again. **ISI**

THE REBEL SAINT

ALAN CLEMENTS IN CONVERSATION WITH AUNG SAN SUU KYI...





A PRISONER OF FAITH

A.M. KATHRADA, A SOUTH AFRICAN POLITICAL ACTIVIST ON THE SHAPING OF SOUTH AFRICA ON GANDHI'S IDEOLOGIES...

In my childhood years Gandhiji was already a household name in the Indian community. He was instrumental in the formation of the Natal Indian Congress (1893), which later was the largest component of the South African Indian Congress. Under Gandhiji's leadership, the Indian community in Natal and Transvaal provinces had (in 1906 and 1913) participated in courageous and historic campaigns of passive resistance, which can be regarded as the genesis of what was to develop into the Satyagraha movement in India.


After Gandhiji's departure from South Africa in 1914 there was a lull in Indian politics which continued until 1946. In June, 1946, under the newly elected leadership of Dr. Dadoo and Dr. Naick-

er, the South African Indian Congress launched a Passive Resistance campaign against an anti-Indian law, during which about 2,000 volunteers were imprisoned. This had the full backing of Gandhiji and the Indian National Congress. It was during the 1946 Passive Resistance campaign that I (at the age of 17) served my first prison sentence of one month. Although in 1947 the leaders of the South African Indian Congress and the African National Congress (ANC) had signed a pact of unity, the ANC continued to be led by conservative leaders who were wedded to the politics of resolutions, petitions and deputations. Mandela and the leaders of the ANC Youth League were not satisfied with this conservatism. So, in 1949, the conservative lead-

ership was replaced and a Program of Action was adopted. The practice of passive resistance was significantly taken further when the South African Indian Congress and the ANC jointly launched the Campaign for the Defiance of Unjust Laws in 1952. Both, African and Indian volunteers were called upon, in an organised way, to defy specific apart-

MAHATMA GANDHI'S PRINCIPLES CAN BE UNIVERSALLY AND ETERNALLY RELEVANT

heid laws. Over 9,000 volunteers were imprisoned in this campaign where Mandela was appointed the National Volunteer-in-Chief. It is important to note that Mandela and other leaders of the ANC were engaged in a debate as to whether the campaign should follow the Gandhian belief of non-violence or not. In 1960, the ANC was outlawed. It was in these circumstances that Mandela initiated a debate stating that the liberation movement should consider moving away from our non-violent struggle towards an armed struggle. After vigorous debate, both, the African and Indian Congresses accepted the idea and permission was given to establish an armed wing called 'Umkhonto we Sizwe' (Spear of the Nation), but strictly avoided any injury to people. At this stage, Mandela and others were arrested and charged with sabotage. I was amongst the other eight people to serve life imprisonment. Mandela served 27 years in prison while I spent 26 years.

Coming to the present times, the negative aspect is that Gandhiji's teachings and the passive resistance struggle that he waged, both in South Africa and India, are not generally known. But Mahatma Gandhi's principles can be universally and eternally relevant. It remains for countries and people not only to embrace them but to actively promote them. Even in South Africa, our transition to democracy in 1994 was a result of a peaceful settlement. The aim was to build a united nation, based on forgiveness, friendship and reconciliation leaving no room for negative emotions such as bitterness, hatred and revenge. 

as told to Neha Sarin

THE RELEVANCE OF GANDHI

ELA GANDHI ON THE SIMPLE, YET PROFOUND, TEACHINGS OF THE MAHATMA




had their turns to work in the kitchen, cleaning or taking care of the ablution facilities. People took pride in what they did no matter how menial the task was. It was a lesson on the dignity of labour which does not exist in the world today. Bapuji's idea was based on the dignity of all labour with no status attached to any job. Today it may sound utopian.

Being ready to do menial tasks, no matter how qualified a person is, helps dispel the myth of caste and class barriers. I was taught that independence is being able to take

ries to sleep in and ablution facilities. This can only happen if each one takes care to clean up after they have used these facilities. Bapuji's life has many examples of work in as much as cleaning of facilities himself during the plague outbreak in South Africa and during the march in South Africa in 1913 and many others in India.

Simplicity was another value that I experienced living in Phoenix and in Sevagram. Growing up I had many role models who, in turn, were inspired by Bapuji. My mother Sushila Gandhi and her sister Tara Mashruwala were great inspirations for me. Tara *masi* started a Kasturba Ashram in Madhan. She chose a life of celibacy and simplicity living with bare minimum possessions and worked tirelessly for the upliftment of rural women. My mother chose a life of austerity and worked tirelessly to promote the teachings of Gandhiji.

Living in the shadow of such luminaries one cannot but develop resistance to expensive ornaments, jewelry and fine clothes. It is these fads that lead to dissatisfaction and a feeling of wanting more all the time, leading to gross consumerism and growing inequalities. Bapuji said, "If we do not waste our wealth and energy, the climate and natural resources of our country are such that we can become the happiest people in the world." 

As told to Neha Sarin

(The author is the granddaughter of Mahatma Gandhi and a peace activist. She was also a Member of Parliament in South Africa from 1994-2004)

Growing up in Bapuji's (Gandhiji's) first ashram, the Phoenix Settlement in Durban and later for a few weeks living at the Sevagram Ashram as a child, taught me many lessons on the value of community life, the value of simplicity, the value of not wanting to compete for access to various items but rather creating your own beauty. One can write about many lessons from Bapuji's life as his teachings span over so many areas but I'll limit my scope to these

simple but profound values.

At Sevagram, where as a seven year old, I spent some two-three weeks living with Bapuji, I learnt many things. Unlike Phoenix, where each family maintained their own household, at Sevagram there was community cooking and sharing of ablutions. Adjusting to a common kitchen was difficult but over time I began appreciating the simplicity of community life. In Phoenix settlement and Sevagram, people were simply people without any distinction. Everyone

care of your essential needs yourself. Bapuji's biography records how he took on the task of keeping the ablutions clean at the first Congress conference he attended. When we contemplate the spread of global epidemics today, concern for good sanitary habits becomes an important lesson from Bapuji's book.

Community living demands not only sharing of tasks but also being cognizant of and sensitive to others needs. We all love to have neat and tidy kitchens to work in, dormito-



GANDHI IN BLACK AND WHITE

CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER AND US PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE IN 1984, THE REVEREND JESSE JACKSON HAS KNOWN 'CHANGE' FROM CLOSE QUARTERS. ONE OF THE EMINENT FIGURES IN AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE, THE REVEREND HOLDS FORTH ON THE IMMUTABILITY OF GANDHIAN PRINCIPLES TO **AAKRITI BHARDWAJ**...

er of non-violent thrust, they can win the quest for a two state solution. It'll never be achieved through missiles and rockets...

'Resisting evil with non-cooperation' – do you think it works in ruthless and mindless genocide cases like Rwanda or Cambodia?

Absolutely! I think it can work in Rwanda, West Bank, in Gaza, Zimbabwe – the use of non-violence as a form of moral power has the ability to mobilise international support and can work anywhere. Because inherent in non-violence is the ability to sacrifice for the greater good and there is power in sacrifice. Unarmed suffering, Dr. King would say, is redemptive and suffering breeds character, character breeds faith and in the end faith will prevail.

In these frighteningly insecure times driven by religious fanaticism and terror strikes, is it possible that Gandhian ideals may have been rendered "old-fashioned" or "ineffective". Considering the massive civil unrest around us, how do you think the current generation perceives the Gandhian ideology?

Gandhi's philosophy and traditions are eternal and universal. Violence is old fashioned and will not work. Violence has been tried over and over

again, and never really works. Old systems of violence, slavery, colonialism, apartheid, they haven't been able to withstand people's will for self-determination.

Many movements, without calling his name, embrace his philosophy. Major change in America, massive youth involvements, multi-cultural voting, electing an African-American President – all this came through a non-violent political movement. A peaceful non-violent movement enabled us to get the right to vote, and now non-violent voting brought about the change.

What would happen if Gandhi's principles were applied

to the war in Iraq?

It would usher in the day of conflict resolution. Sunnis and Kurds and Shiites must learn to live together and coexist and not co-annihilate. They must choose life over death; choose to go forward with hope and not backward by fear. Get in their minds and heart. So, the decision to coexist and not annihilate will apply to Iraq as well.

Civil Rights Movement in America right up to Obama's victory – how much of an influence has Gandhi or Gandhism had on it?

Absolute influence. Gandhi's philosophy helped bring down walls of segregation. The use of his technique got us the right to vote. The use of non-violence enabled us to build coalitions across racial lines and begin healing. It enabled us to build appreciation for each other, and to overcome past fears. This is Gandhian. Leadership by faith and hope, not by fear, prevailed. Gandhi's philosophies of non-violent direct action, using available resources, building coalitions and building mutual appreciation for each other, keeping our eyes on the prize of peace and an end to global poverty, marches on. **ISI**



Gandhi and Gandhism has been at the centre of liberation movements around the world, be it America, Myanmar, South Africa, and needless to mention, India. What scenario in today's age could make do with Gandhian ideals and how?

Gandhi knew that there was power in the force of our souls; not just power in military might. When one is morally right, that is a strong

weapon. Secondly, Gandhi knew that there is power in non-cooperation, in resistance and in resisting oppression. Gandhi showed us that you can save the oppressed and the oppressor – it is victory without destruction.

Gandhi knew there is power in caring about yourself, adequately, and about your opposition, because both occupy the same real estate, the earth. He knew that if your goals

were clear, and heart pure, you have the power to change conditions. He inspired the movement against legal segregation in the USA and Apartheid in South Africa, sowing the seeds to end those systems, without destruction. In US, Martin Luther King embraced the philosophy, and non-violent, direct action led to change in the laws in this country.

We won the battles in South Africa, India and North

JUST AS EYE FOR AN EYE AND TOOTH FOR A TOOTH WILL LEAVE YOU BLINDED AND DISFIGURED.

America. I so fervently wish that someone in the Middle East, that the Palestinians, would see the value in a non-violent movement for change and shared power and see the value in coexistence over co-annihilation. Just as an eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth will leave you blinded and disfigured. Exchanging missiles and rockets will leave us all losers and nobody wins. If they could appreciate the pow-



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Gandhi's principles cannot prove to be effective in today's world, though even Bhagat Singh did not participate in violence. He believed in action which Gandhi did not take up. Bhagat Singh had only injured one Britisher who was responsible for Lala Lajpat Rai's demise. Also, the bomb that he had thrown in the parliament was not really a bomb. That was a cracker which was only meant to send across a message. Bhagat Singh was not in favour of violence and certainly did not want bloodshed of innocent people. The British had proposed the Trade Dispute Bill against which Bhagat Singh had raised his voice. The Bill was later withdrawn. So, it was determination more than anything else that Bhagat Singh played on.

Bhagat Singh wanted to harness the energy of India's youth and channelise it to attain independence. If you look back, Bhagat Singh's popularity had soared amidst the youth. So much so that Gandhi was threatened enough to dismiss his approach as not really ideal.

Bhagat Singh dreamt of independence too. He participated in the freedom struggle with Gandhi and attended the Congress sessions. The Asahyog Andolan (Non Cooperation Movement) made Bhagat

Singh drift away and choose his own means of mobilising the youth to take steps against suppression. During that time when Gandhi and Nehru were representatives of India, Bhagat Singh's uncle, Ajit Singh (who had been an associate of Lala Lajpat Rai) had met the two leaders and voiced his concerns on the Partition, and warned that the country would have to pay a heavy price for it in the years to come. But then the tug of

war between Jinnah and Nehru for the Prime Minister's post divided India into three parts. The words proved to be prophetic, for even today we continue to waste money and resources on issues to do with our borders, communalism and terrorism.

Bhagat Singh and his comrades smilingly sacrificed their lives for the nation. He was wrongly imputed the image of a young trigger-happy man. His trial and death was

unfair. Bhagat Singh was a learned gentleman and if he was alive, he would have been a true youth icon for the country today.

In this age of terror, one couldn't sit back and follow the so-called principles of Satyagraha. Bhagat Singh's struggle was always against the system and not against the people. We need that kind of an approach and not just sit around, waiting for peace. If we take examples of the battles of 1965 and 1971, only action had got the matter resolved. As a soft state, India's current approach is to avoid wars, but has that got us peace? Our citizens cannot be taken for granted.

Belonging to Bhagat Singh's family, we are often asked why we are not in politics like the Nehru family. My father, Kulbir Singh, was an MLA during 1962-67. He simply could not fit in with the system; corruption, greed for power and money put him off. I have my own business and I feel that I would not be able to deal with the hypocrisy and double standards. Today's youth is also fed up and lack an iconic leader. *India Today* had done a survey in which Bhagat Singh was voted as an apt leader by the youth.

Bhagat Singh stood for equality and denounced any kind of class distinction. Even in his *Jail Diary*, he had predicted that he would be sentenced to death and that India would be independent in another 15 years or so. He had sown the seeds of a revolt. Unfortunately, he died prematurely and Gandhi became known as the nation's hero, though the contribution of both was equal.

If Gandhi's ideologies and principles were adequate, then why do we still have so many problems today? **ISI**

SHAHEED-E-AZAM BHAGAT SINGH'S NEPHEW, ABHEY SINGH SANDHU (SON OF S.KULBIR SINGH, THE YOUNGER BROTHER OF THE MARTYR), TALKS TO *TSI* ABOUT HOW BHAGAT SINGH'S APPROACH DURING THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE REPRESENTED A CONFLICT OF IDEOLOGY BUT NOT INTEREST...



BHAGAT SINGH, IF ALIVE, WOULD HAVE BEEN A TRUE YOUTH ICON FOR THE COUNTRY TODAY

As told to Spriha Srivastava



★ PERSPECTIVES ON GANDHI: ★ YESTERDAY & TODAY

RAKEYSH OMPRAKASH, WHOSE FILM JOLTED A PASSIVE INDIA TO ACTION, CHOOSES GANDHISM OVER BHAGAT SINGH'S IDEOLOGIES FOR THE PRESENT TIMES...

Your film "Rang De Basanti" (RDB) was inspired by Bhagat Singh's revolutionary ideologies that contrast the non-violent ideologies of Gandhism...

My movie and Bhagat Singh's ideology were not about violence but anti-establishment. **What is Gandhism? Would you describe it to the cynics, who understand it simply as turning the other cheek when slapped on one?**

Gandhism is a reality, but sel-

dom when it comes to turning the other cheek. In today's times, it is the right approach to follow, and it is being followed by great thinkers all over the world.

In today's insecure times, what is the relevance of Gandhism?

It has always been given a clichéd treatment. It is about changing from within. Gandhi lived in South Africa, in the Tolstoy Farm. He completely disregarded the idea of

to advocate Gandhism to the world's oppressed youth?

It definitely would make sense. Misguided youth resort to violence, which leads to terrorism. We need to go back and imbibe our Indian cultural values.

What all was Bhagat Singh striving to achieve?

He was foresighted. Bhagat walked down the gallows willingly. He had enough chances to escape, but he didn't. His friends had persuaded him not to throw the smoke bombs, but he did. He wanted to set an example. His fight was not with the Britishers but with exploitation. That time it was the British, now, it is our own people.

RDB took the risk of presenting a path of revolt...

See, that was a story, which I also happen to believe in.

When you have to make a statement, you have to take a risk. One cannot be safe and also follow one's beliefs.

Did you make a conscious effort to avoid anti-Gandhi remarks through RDB?

No, RDB wasn't an anti-Gandhi movie. So, there's no question of anti or pro remarks of any sort.

Bhagat Singh's beliefs had an anti-Gandhi undertone...

Whoever said that is wrong.

Both RDB and "Lage Raho Munna Bhai" were hit films.

Whose ideology do you think is more popular?

By and large, the public like the Gandhian approach. They are all ordinary people struggling every day to survive,

trying hard to make ends meet, to abide by the laws. They don't want to live in a hostile or violent situation. Having said that, to defend one's integrity or land, we have soldiers so that civilians can sleep peacefully. I'm sure the General or Chief of Army is not a violent person. Our Defence Minister, too, is not violent. Our Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who's finger alone can launch our nuclear weapons, is not violent. **So you feel defending one's integrity and land is not violence?**

There is no one reality to life.

Would you say that the success of the non-cooperation movement was more because of the charismatic leader driving it than the ideals themselves?

The movement was a well thought out belief in a way of life, meant to economically hurt the Britishers and promote indigenous industries. **Which ideology will be influencing your children?**

A combination of both. The two are not against each other, they serve the same purpose, but are just different routes to it. One cannot question their individual integrity. I think that the Gandhian approach is the right approach for present times. We've been drifting away from it. We need to remind ourselves how to love each other. One cannot counter hatred with hatred. **RS**

Neha Sarin



"THAT (RDB) WAS A STORY... WHEN YOU HAVE TO MAKE A STATEMENT, YOU HAVE TO TAKE A RISK"

untouchability and to prove so to the segment that targeted them as untouchables, he chose to live with the Harijans. If you believe in something, don't just speak about it, but do it yourself. If you believe in non-violence, there should be no hatred, no communal divide. To change from within, is the only way forward. War is a problem not a solution.

Would it be a good idea



★ NOTES TO MYSELF ★

BETRAYAL AT CHAURI CHAURA

The harm that good men do, was an essay by Bertrand Russell that I never finished reading but was a heading I often thought about whenever I heard the name Gandhi being discussed... I had often witnessed disparate schools of thought converging on the notion that Gandhi the man, as well as Gandhi the idea, had often done more harm than good to the cause of this nation's freedom, from both communalism and colonialism.

Many years ago, on this very day, the 4th of February, near the town of Gorakhpur, there once lay 22 charred bodies and a few blackened bayonets. And amidst the rubble and ruins of that day, there also lay the smoking ruins of a nation's aspirations. The year was 1922 and the place – a little known police station in a town called Chauri Chaura.

At Chauri Chaura that day, a non-violent protest march, part of a nation-wide Non-Cooperation movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, turned violent when policemen opened fire on unarmed protestors, killing three of them. The angry mob went on the rampage and burnt down the police-chowki. Twenty-two policemen, too, were burnt alive inside the police station. Gandhi felt he had been betrayed, perhaps even shamed by his followers. For him, violence was not an option. His followers had committed themselves to ahimsa. And yet, they had weakened and given in to their impulses, thus jeopardising the movement around the country. He wanted to disown the action of the protestors at Chauri Chaura and therefore he denounced them and withdrew a movement that had galvanised a nation. photo-op

The protestors too felt betrayed. Not only were they being hunted down, but their leader had, in effect, given them up, holding them accountable for not just the death of the policemen but also the withdrawal of the movement.

But the sense of betrayal was greatest amongst the masses that had burnt their bridges and committed themselves to the Non-Cooperation movement. Men, women and even little children had been carried away by the wave of nationalism only to be left stranded. That day in Chauri Chaura cleaved a deep divide between the methods and mission of a betrayed Mahatma and that of those who felt betrayed by the Mahatma. Amongst the latter were two little children in Punjab whose meteoric lives streaked across our national consciousness, in a blaze of glory that many say rivals the aura of even a Gandhi. One of them, a lad called Bhagat Singh lived a well documented life, but the other, a certain Sukhdev Thapar, has been reduced to a foot note.

Bhagat and Sukhdev met each other while in college in Lahore and became the best of friends. And from the day they met they matched each other step for step, all the way to the gallows and that is a well documented story. But what after that? What happens after a freedom fighter has made the supreme sacrifice? Well, there were many who actually didn't have to die. They managed just fine with a series of protest marches, lectures and mild-mannered discussions around a few tables. The situation required consistent and delicate handling, but in return, the British bureaucracy and our democracy allowed them, and many of their descendants, the right to define our past, present and future. But what of those who did go all the way? In order to find out, I went in search of Bharat Bhushan Thapar, paternal nephew of the great Sukhdev. It wasn't a pretty picture...

Sukhdev's family had always supported his cause. His father Ram Lal Thapar ran a successful business and "...on occasions, Sukhdevji would come and take the day's earnings because the party (Hindustan Socialist Republican Association) needed funds. His father and brothers of course were all happy to support him as much as possible," recounted Bharat Bhushan.

But soon their world was to come crashing down on the Thapars. Sukhdev was hanged and his father was arrested and deported. "Neighbours, not wanting to be seen around the family of a revolutionary, avoided us like the plague. After numerous raids, the family business collapsed. We were on the verge of



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destitution. We've seen terrible times, and no one did a thing to help..." said Bharat. Freedom had demanded far more than death from Sukhdev Thapar.

The Thapars saw terrible times, and it didn't matter if the nation was being run by those who Sukhdev fought against, or those who he fought alongside. The apathy of free India was as painful as the persecution of the British India. It is said that Bharat's father, Sukhdev's younger brother, Prakash Chand Thapar had to pull carts and sell grass to make ends meet. "We've only now begun to eat three square meals a day... I'm in my 50s now but for as far back as I can remember, life has been about survival. I wish I had the opportunity to sit with my grandparents and listen to the legend of my brave

uncle, but I never had the time... its been hard...really hard", lamented Bharat. Naughara, Sukhdev's ancestral house in Ludhiana, where nine Thapar families lived together was handed over by Bharat to the local administration, in the hope that it would be made into a memorial or a library. "I didn't want a penny...", said a disgusted Bharat. "All I wanted was to hand over the property but they made me run from pillar to post and kept me waiting outside their office for hours...can you believe that? Recently, they renamed the Ludhiana bus stand in my uncle's honour and that is all my uncle has been reduced to – a photo-op for politicians. I wasn't even called. They picked up a random 'Thapar' to attend the event while I stood there unrecognised."

Sukhdev's battles aren't over yet. One of his compatriots, Hansraj Vohra, had become an approver and he was the one responsible for the conviction and death of Sukhdev, Bhagat Singh and Rajguru. Vohra later became a journalist, but to add insult to injury, the cowardly Vohra tried to justify his actions by saying that he did it because Sukhdev, his guru, had turned approver first and also because... you're not going to believe this... he ridiculously enough, wanted to complete his final year of college (??). And so he bought his freedom with their blood, which he now had tainted. Noted journalist Kuldeep Nayyar who investigated the allegations once said in an interview that had Sukhdev compromised, "he wouldn't have been hanged. It was Vohra, an insider who spilled the beans."

Vohra claimed he was shown a signed testimony by Sukhdev which is why he believed Sukhdev had betrayed them, but as a friend and fellow revolutionary, Vohra was bound to have known better. Sukhdev, when a small boy in school, had refused to salute visiting British military officers in spite of a severe caning. And only such a boy could have embraced the hangman's noose with a song on his lips.

Just before being hanged, Sukhdev had written a letter to Gandhi, declaring that he believed his country would be served better by his death. He also requested Gandhi not to ask the revolutionaries on behalf of the British to 'give up violence'. This would only serve their intention of maligning revolutionaries in the eyes of the masses. But Gandhi did not stop appealing to the revolutionaries, and while all of India begged Bapu to plead for the lives of the trio and not sign the Gandhi-Irwin pact, Gandhi went ahead and signed, thus sealing their fate. Many historians believe, Gandhi could have saved them. He chose not to... he would have had his reasons.

As for Sukhdev, on the 23rd of March 1931, at 1933hrs, his tall figure cast a long shadow as he joined his best friends on their way to the gallows. And the walls of Lahore Central Jail echoed his voice as he sang ... *Shaheedon ki chitaoon par judenge har baras mele/ Watan par mitne waalon ka yehi baaki nishan hoga; Kabhi yeh bhi din ayega jab apna raaj dekhenge/ Jab apni hi zameen hogi aur apna aasmaan hoga.*

Martyrdom is not a martyr's alone for there are those that love him, miss him and suffer for him in his wake. And whether it is a Sukhdev Thapar or a Sandeep Unnikrishnan, a nation that cannot honour its heroes, surely doesn't deserve any...

IIPM
THINK TANK

(SMS your views with your name and topic at 0-9818101234)