

## MEDIA PORTRAYAL OF GANDHIAN ETHICS AND NON-VIOLENCE

Dr. Rohit Moonka & Ms. Silky Mukherjee<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

*Mahatma Gandhi the name itself invokes vivid imageries of the Saint himself sitting up in his perch with an old mike in the middle of a teeming multitude of masses with his medallion watch dangling atop his chest along with his Khadi. This Research paper will strive to inculcate the themes of Non-violence, the seething Satyagrahas of burning foreign clothes in the maelstrom of the Indian Independence Struggle. It attempts to surmise that India has been portrayed as a quintessential Oriental and Media personages of the order of Mark Tully have been castigated for a one-dimensional portrayal of India as “The Land of saints, serpents and cows” and the attendant paraphernalia of Premchand’s India. The paper will investigate into the details of portrayals in the Cinematic productions and other attendant mediums of Literature, Press and Electronic Media. The aim would be further to look into the facts and incidents of the life of Gandhiji in order to have a panoramic view of the Independence struggle of our country. The Research paper will delve into the role which the attendant Media portrayals have played in forming favorable or otherwise negative Public-Opinion about the Mahatma in all his simplistic splendor and nationalistic candour.*

*This paper suggests that a multi-dimensional and “happening” interpretation is what the need of the hour and the call of duty for academics of today. Gandhian thought is a theme which one does not need to assert again and again. What is the call of the day is the drive to reemphasize and assert “the do-gooder spirit” and the Universal and timeless quality of Gandhian thought. Thus, the relevant section that we need to look upto is a resettlement and the contemporary relevance of the Gandhian discourse in the commercially driven twenty First Century where-in, “The Fien the Siecle,” is unattainable sans a return back to the roots in the context of our Commercial Colossus which our country is bound to transform into in the twilight age of a fast paced Globalization.*

### BACKGROUND

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<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, Institute of Law, Nirma University, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India; Email: [rohitmoonka@gmail.com](mailto:rohitmoonka@gmail.com), [silkym.08@gmail.com](mailto:silkym.08@gmail.com)

Mahatma Gandhi was being perceived as a have been in the contemporary context of the Indian Nation State. The name itself provokes a Dyspepsia in the framework of the Indian Polity and society which is meandering forward in the context of a World which is entering forth and progressing in the direction of a-Non Trusteeship World where-in, the dictates of the crass Commercialism leads on to an obfuscated World. India, comprising of “We the People,” seems unconstituted in an age of rapid fire growth and bamboozling of the Denizens of the country in an age of rhetoric and marketing gimmicks. Mahatma Gandhi aims to vivify the milieu of Globalization in times truncated by the pyrotechnics of a seething stream of Globalization. The Mahtama stood for his ideals and not Idealism as, being interpreted these days. This singularity is associated with interpretations of Mahatma Gandhi seem to be too trite an observation emanating from the learned commentators of the yore. A Multi-dimensional and “happening” interpretation is what are the need of the hour and the call of duty for academics of today. Also, the idiom of “Globalization”<sup>2</sup> needs to be restressed here once again in the language of the much discussed “Interdependence”, which is calling the shots since its coinage in the early nineteen seventies.

We need to look askance for evidence. Mahatma Gandhi in one of his ubiquitous quotes commented wryly “I support the trend of Industrialization, without sidelining the spirit of a village based economy where villages can combine together to form a big Ocean of survival and productivity.”<sup>3</sup> The simpleton saint, believed in the dictum of “the Oceanic Concept of State” in line with the Mechanistic and the Organic concepts of State in tune with the ideas of Political Studies. What the Mahatma opined was a Divine interconnectivity which, initiates itself from the rubric of a self-sufficient and prosperous Village economy. What matters the most is the coalescing together of the disparate strains of “Ruraldom” combining themselves to form the rubric of a “Taluka”. A few “Talukas” conjoin themselves to spawn a District, a few Districts come together to create a City. A few cities conjoin together to lead forth to a Country and finally the Global Colossus comes forth beginning from the originating source of a self-sustaining village or a “Dhani” in the terminology of the Rural Rajasthan.

The Oceanic conception of State parades itself for perennial scrutiny in the World of Academia.<sup>4</sup> Still, the dynamics of the Oceanic imagery is very efficacious and nobody can easily contest the veracity of the Paradigm. Mahatma Gandhi is known for more important

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<sup>2</sup> Sushil Kumar Saxena, *Ever Unto God : Essays on Gandhi and Religion* 200 (1995)

<sup>3</sup> Vijay Kumar, *Gandhi : The Man, His Life and Vision/Vijay Kumar* 146 (2007 )

<sup>4</sup> Parmeshwar Dayal, *Gandhian Theory of Social Reconstruction* 380 (2006)

elements of his work culture and ethics but it still evokes imageries of a Village ensconced in the rubric of a Village oriented pattern of Development and progress. Thus, “the Periphery” can too find its place in the Sun in tandem with the larger State Actors of fast paced and Globalizing World Economy. How India aims to progress forth once “Swaraj” has been attained, is what all later Gandhian thought is all about. He himself supported checked and limited Industrialization and does not go against the “Temples of Today” (The Industries and Infrastructural Development) drive initiated by Jawaharlal Nehru’s socialist Raj in the earliest times of the Indian Independence struggle of the good old hoary days.<sup>5</sup> Gandhian thought is a theme which one does not need to assert again and again. What is the call of the day is the drive to reemphasize and assert “the do-gooder spirit” and the Universal and timeless quality of Gandhian thought. Thus, the relevant section that we need to look upto is a resettlement and the contemporary relevance of the Gandhian discourse in the commercially driven twenty First Century where-in, “The Fien the Siecle,” is unattainable sans a return back to the roots in the context of our Commercial Colossus which our country is bound to transform into in the twilight age of a fast paced Globalization.

## **THE LOGIC BEHIND THE GANDHIAN PORTRAYALS**

We need to underline, the way in which our Indian Mahatma gets portrayed in the Movie productions and the News Reels of today’s turbulent times. Mahatma Gandhi was a trailblazing icon for the founding fathers of the country and it is this Foundation myth of the country which needs to be re-emphasized again and again in order to let the Youth of the nation to assimilate the Gandhian thought pattern into a belief which serves as a substratum for their future and challenging lives. India does not search forth into Bollywood production as the fundamental ideology is well written and commented upon. To use a politically incorrect word, “marketing” Gandhi needs to become a need of the hour if the efficacy and the non-redududamncy of the Gandhian experience have to be enshrined into the Cultural language of the country without getting relegated to the backburner as an arcane and obsolete thought in the age of Mercedes and merciless competition.

Stretching from Richard Attenborough’s “Gandhi”, “Hey Ram” and “Maine Gandhi Ko Nahin Mara”. This cinematic discourse will culminate with the modern day epic of “Lage Raho Munna Bhai.” Also, the terrain of Globalization and Gandhi will be studied in detail.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid

An appraisal will be made of the new idiom of “Gandhigiri” which drew criticism from some newspapers as it was similar to “Dadagiri”. “Because of his profoundly sensitive, fresh and Beautiful verse, by which with Consummate ease, he has made his poetic thought, expressed in his own English words, a part of the Literature of the West” These remarks are from the Personage of Rabindra Nath Tagore, who was a great admirer of Mahatma Gandhi.

One of the interviews with the recently released Film on Mahatma Gandhi points to the general incommunicado status of people and celebrities finding the mention of Mahatma Gandhi as near-to-Anachronistic, in the “World of Madonna’s and False Gods of the order of Acharya Rajneesh (Osho) and the likes of Westernized Gandhi’s of the order of Deepak Chopra who succeed in a troubled and scarred World Courtesy the want of information and knowledge about our Father of the Nation. In the ensuing Interview, the Matinee star, Akshay Khanna, pointed out that, “I hardly knew anything about Harilal (as the movie is based upon Gandhiji’s Son). Many people in this country don’t know much about Gandhiji’s family, and his son Harilal. Not many people know about the incidents, which transpired in their lives. Even I did not know much about the relationship the two shared. It was only when I read the script for the first time that I got to know about these things. I was both shocked and surprised, thinking about what happened with Gandhiji’s sons.”

Structured in similar vein to the granddaddy of all epics, LAWRENCE OF ARABIA, the film opens in 1948 with the shooting of Gandhi whilst out walking. After a spectacular funeral sequence, the film cuts back to the end of the 19th Century, where we meet a young lawyer, Mohandas. K. Gandhi (Kingsley) already under persecution in South Africa who is turned off a train by racist guards and is prompted to burn the passes that all Indians are required to carry at an outdoor ceremony. Predictably, he is beaten and persecuted for his troubles, but with help from a local clergyman (the late Ian Charleston (CHARIOTS OF FIRE)) he manages to overcome oppression, initially from a local bigot (Daniel Day-Lewis in an early role) and begins to make waves amongst his community. After a spell in South Africa, Gandhi returns to India where he continues his mission to walk the land and spread the good faith.

The Film, “Gandhi” has much strength in its favor.<sup>6</sup> As well as a towering performance, which deservedly one Ben Kingsley an Oscar as Best Actor,<sup>7</sup> the screenplay flows with passion and the cinematography is carefully orchestrated to make the film have its own individual personality within every scene and frame. This is not just a British film, but a world film and, as the posters put it at the time. This great and simple little man made India an Independent nation state and was anti all variants of prejudices extant, since racial prejudice until the religion’s one. He gave vent to his anger with, the dastardly British Empire, when he was going to South Africa, and was evicted from the Train because he was in the first class, and the prejudice of that time could not allow any non-white man, specially being Indian or black to have the same rights as the white men. From that time, until his death, he made people from India and the English to perceive the prejudice and the fact that all people should have similar rights. He was also followed suit by many white people, in the movie showing the clergyman, Charlie Andrews and Miss Slade. One of the larger-than-life, personas has seen Mahatma Gandhi and one of the commentators has aptly concluded, “A thing that I discovered watching this movie was the fact that Gandhi was an attorney...I would never imagine that the peaceful leader made Law School!”

“Gandhi, My Father” is based upon a brilliant rendition of a classic Play. The movie, Gandhi My father, is based on the same play by Feroz Abbas Khan. Says Khan, “For me to direct this film meant that I would not sacrifice the creative aspect for the commercial ones.” The original play portrayed the ace actor, Naseeruddin Shah as Gandhi, and Kay Kay Menon, as Harilal. Naseer was, as usual, superb in his rendition of the life-time goal. The Mahatma he represented was uptight, rigid, yet every bit disarming. The internal struggle to keep his feelings to himself is so strong and desperate, that he eventually ends up a wretched, forlorn man. All that can be managed at that moment is to get up and congratulate him. So strong was the portrayal.

Manilal, played by Menon, was equally telling and impressive in his performance. His depiction of a soft-spoken, obedient son, turned into a drunken degenerate was equally heartbreaking. One feels for the son, who is desperately seeking his father’s attention and love, the latter being national property, and out of reach. A father with whom he could not

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<sup>6</sup> Cole Moreton, The dark family secret that drove Ben Kingsley to success (July 14, 2015) <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/moslive/article-1277638/Ben-Kingsley-The-dark-family-secret-drove-success.html>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

share his ambitions, or his grief. There were some particularly moving situations of the order of: Manilal carrying an apple, and blabbering drunkenly in his bedridden mother's lap, the apple he begged for in her name, for he could not afford it; Manilal fighting with a group of Muslims, and getting bashed up badly, the arrival of news that the Mahatma has been assassinated, and the Muslims realizing it. It is the Mahatma's son they are thrashing, and finally leave him.

## ART, COMMUNICATION AND GANDHI

What if a great man of the last century-Gandhi, say had had access to the communications networks of our age when he made one of his most important speeches? The result is "Telecom Italia Gandhi", an astonishing 60-second spot that began airing in Italy. In fall 2004, Telecom Italia, released a commercial using Gandhi's feature and excerpts of his speech at the Inter-Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, 1947. Apart from the movie Portrayal of Mahatma Gandhi's personage, painting is another seminal medium where the saintly leader and our founding father have been depicted in all colors and shades of Black and White. The notion being to relate all that is positive with India and Gandhiji as part of India, the Spiritual, endeavor.<sup>8</sup>

The reputed French novelist, dramatist, essayist, mystic, pacifist, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1915. Romain Rolland<sup>9</sup> came to a learned conclusion that "Art" must be a part of the struggle to bring enlightenment to people. In his work he attacked all forms of Nazism and Fascism, and struggled for social and political justice. Rolland never joined any party but he acquired a reputation as "an ardent Communist."<sup>10</sup> In Politics, he has always been a Republican with advanced Socialist sympathies, and an Internationalist at heart, and, as they said in the eighteenth century, a "citizen of the world." He has always fought social injustice. He can be equated as a personage who depicted Mahatma Gandhi in all his totality and spiritual splendour. "Mahatma Gandhi: The man who became one with the Universal Being" the book, comprises of a frank and illuminating commentary on Gandhiji and his ideals by the illustrious French philosopher, Romain Rolland. As a great European and contemporary of the giant Mahatma, his views are very much archetypally dear to our human

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<sup>8</sup> Dennis Delton, Gandhi on Freedom, Rights and Responsibility (July 14, 2015) <http://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/freedom.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Romain Rolland, Mahatma Gandhi : The Man Who Became One with the Universal Being 100-145 (2003)

<sup>10</sup> J.S. Mathur, Gandhi : In the Mirror of Foreign Scholars 110 (2007)

experience. The appraisal and assessment of Gandhiji's ideals of truth and non-violence and of the strategy of passive resistance against the mighty British Empire is of particular interest as it comes from a brilliant mind of the materialist-oriented West.

The Portrayals depicted in "Gandhi" was more than a pristine panegyric to Mahatma Gandhi as it features the indecisive part of Gandhi's personality, too. The epiphenomenal scene in which a large aggregation of actress get involved in the assassination scene of Mahatma Gandhi, then, there, it boasted of the largest ever aggregation of Junior Artists ever to be featured in a movie production till the year, 1982 when the epiphenomenal film was released.

Some are ascribing the sudden renewal of interest in the Mahatma to the movie Lage Raho Munnabhai, or Carry on Munnabhai (the British Carry On films are bizarrely popular in India). The big Bollywood hit of the year, the film depicts Munnabhai, a small-time Bombay goonda, or gangster, and his attempts to win the heart of a radio announcer. After he crams for a radio quiz on Gandhi's life to impress her, the spirit of Gandhi appears to Munnabhai and advises him on how to cope with the obstacles in his life without violence. The film has won universal praise for its success in incorporating a completely uncompromised portrayal of Gandhi and his teachings into a seriously funny comedy. One reviewer described it as "something to watch before you die". He's a huge box-office hit. He's at the top of the Indian music charts. He's on the front cover of magazines. One hundred years after Gandhi first called on his compatriots to resist white colonial rule without violence, he is back in fashion once more.<sup>11</sup>

Other observers contend that the "Carry on Munnabhai" didn't start the wave of new interest in Gandhi - it was not the precursor element of the Gandhigiri show.<sup>12</sup> Observers contend that, there have been signs of growing interest in Gandhi for some years. Publishers have been astonished to see translations of his books in some of India's regional languages sell hundreds of thousands of copies over the past five years. The number of applications to Gandhi's Estate for the rights to publish his works has doubled in the past two years.

## EPILOGUE

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<sup>11</sup> Justin Huggler, Mahatma Gandhi: A Century of Peaceful Protest (June 14, 2015), [www.commondreams.org/headlines06/0916-03.htm](http://www.commondreams.org/headlines06/0916-03.htm)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

There are some vignettes out of the life of Gandhiji, which can shed enough light on the character of the saintly Gujarati, which can be further developed in a dramatic form and narrative structure, akin to a Film of mammoth proportions and scale. Most of the time, Mahatma Gandhi, as a child kept to himself. In the beginning he did not like some of the subjects that were taught to him, but with encouragement from his teachers he studied them, and began to enjoy them. From then onwards he took his studies very seriously. Mohan was very shy. As soon as the school bell rang, he collected his books and hurried home. Other boys chatted and stopped on the way; some to play, others to eat, but Mohan always went straight home. He was afraid that the boys might stop him and make fun of him. One day, the Inspector of Schools, Mr. Giles, came to Mohan's school. He read out five English words to the class and asked the boys to write them down. Mohan wrote four words correctly, but he could not spell the fifth word 'Kettle'. Seeing Mohan's hesitation, the teacher made a sign behind the Inspector's back that he should copy the word from his neighbor's slate. But Mohan ignored his signs. The other boys wrote all the five words correctly; Mohan wrote only four. After the Inspector left, the teacher scolded him. "I told you to copy from your neighbour," he said angrily. "Couldn't you even do that correctly?" Everyone laughed. As he went home that evening, Mohan was not unhappy. He knew he had taken the right decision.

Life was entirely different in England for a starter akin to Mohan Das Kramchand Gandhi. The style of dressing, eating habits, everything was all new to him. He was totally confused and bewildered for some time. However, he soon got adjusted to the new environment. He had promised his mother that he would not eat non-vegetarian food, or drink alcohol, and he remained true to his word. Many attempts were made to make Gandhiji accept Christianity as his religion. Gandhiji remained firm. However, he studied the Bible, Geeta and Quran and came to the conclusion that the principle tenets in all religions are the same. So whether the person was Hindu, Muslim or Christian, Gandhiji felt that as long as he followed the religion principles, he attained salvation. It is from this ideal of "Sarva Dharma Sambhava"<sup>13</sup> and "Vasudev Kutumbukam" that the tenet of Satyagraha emanated. Satya Graha, the word can be broken into two semi words: "Satya"<sup>14</sup> being the Truth and "Agraha" being the insistence on Truth as Truth for Mahatma Gandhi was all about Collective ownership and partial renunciation by the rich class in order to set right the social and economic disparities in the Indian nation State. Satya comes not in the idyllic form of the Platonic "Ideal State" but in the

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<sup>13</sup> Sibnarayan Ray, *Gandhi, Gandhism and Our Times : An International Symposium* 65 (2003)

<sup>14</sup> K.S. Bharati, *Encyclopedia of Gandhian Thought* 156 (2005)

form of a persistent and ceaseless insistence on the trials and tribulations of the commoners of the country as they took up the three tenets of Petition, Prayers and Plebiscite.