Keynote Address: Mahatma Gandhi 1869 - 1948: Seventieth Year Memorial Lecture (2018)

Mahatma Gandhi, 1869 - 1948: Interrogating the Practice of Politics

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It is my privilege to give this keynote lecture to mark the 70th anniversary of the death of Mahatma Gandhi. You will all know that in late January 1948, just months after India gained independence from British rule, he was shot dead as he walked to conduct a prayer meeting in Delhi: shot by a fellow Hindu who in some twisted way held him responsible for the partition of the subcontinent to give Indian Muslims Pakistan, the actual form of which nobody (Hindu or Muslim or British) had planned or wanted. In death as in life Gandhi evoked powerful and opposing reactions – suspicion, fear, even hatred, as against reverence, honour and deep affection. Jawaharlal Nehru, now Prime Minister of India, to whom Gandhi had been friend and mentor, probably spoke for the majority of Indians when he broadcast to the nation hours after the assassination and said that a light had gone out of their lives, leaving darkness everywhere[1].

Seventy years on from this brutal act it is fitting for us to mark the anniversary and to think afresh about this remarkable 20th century man. But this is a difficult task – for a number of reasons. Firstly, there are in a real sense now many Gandhis[2]. He has become international property. Since his death many different people have appropriated and invoked his name from the ubiquitous Indian restaurants which call themselves after him, to, more seri-

[1] Nehru's broadcast to the nation on 30 January 1948. *SWJN – Selected works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (2). Volume 5: 355 - 356.

[2] See the excellent account by Hardiman, in his *Gandhi in his Time and Ours: The Global Legacy of his Ideas.* New Delhi: Permanent Black (2003).

Print ISSN 1023-1757; Electronic ISSN: 2519-5476; DOI https://doi.org/10.29086/2519-5476/2021/sp38c02

ously, political activists and organizers, particularly those with a commitment to non-violence. People use him, often with the best of intentions, to further their own agendas, citing his name as a readily recognisable sign of their own integrity. Another problem is that many of our contemporary concerns and certainly the way we express them would have been foreign to him. There are scholars and political activists alike who condemn him for his attitudes or his supposed failure on issues which are dear to them or deeply concerning in their own lives. Just take one example: issues around gender. This is a concept he would have found difficult to understand, along with most of his contemporaries. However, if we dig a little deeper he understood the significance of many of the issues relating to gender, even though he addressed them in a rather different linguistic genre. He did talk a lot about what constituted being a good Indian man or a good Indian woman, and indeed challenged many contemporary notions and expectations. Moreover, he argued for greater freedoms and status for women in the particular circumstances of Indian society. These difficulties point to another, which is perhaps the most basic and underlying. Many of those who take on themselves now to comment, condemn, or praise Gandhi are not historians and are often not even familiar with the India which was the environment in which he worked, and with whose problems he wrestled. So, they tend to de-contextualise him, to lift him out of his own time and place – the real historical context which both invited him to creativity yet also limited him.

I am, as you know, a historian of India in the later 19th and 20th centuries[3]. It is from that position and experience that I approach Gandhi and offer you these reflections which I have sub-titled 'Interrogating the practice of politics'. My main theme is that the major contribution he made to Indian public life – and by extension to a far broader public environment – was by interrogating, questioning and radically challenging the practice of politics. By politics I mean broadly the way people think about power within their various types of community, the way they organize to acquire it, and what they hope and try to do with it. He did this from a spiritual, moral and practical perspective; and he also attempted to provide an alternative mode of public and political action.

[3] Much of my work has been on Gandhi: see for example my *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope* 1989); and also my edition of *Mahatma Gandhi: The Essential Writings* (2008), which has a substantial Introduction.

Let us start by looking at the context and in particular the improbability in his early years that he would make any such contribution to Indian life, let alone become an international figure. Gandhi's family and geographical background were not the usual training ground for the new type of political activism developing in the later 19th century in India, particularly in response to the presence of the imperial rulers and their polices. Most of those who made their mark in those politics came from regions where British rule had been longest established, where there was provision for new styles of western education, using English as the medium, where the modern professions – particularly law - flourished in urban societies, and where men gathered in professional and political associations to further their intellectual and professional interests and to establish themselves in political life. Gopal Krishna Gokhale, who of course came to this country at Gandhi's invitation, was a much more 'normal' political figure in terms of his social and educational background which enabled him to become a significant political figure. By contrast Gandhi came from something of a provincial backwater – a small princely state in coastal western India where British rule was only lightly felt, where western education was limited and where there were none of the new associations which even-tually culminated in the foundation of the Indian National Congress, which from the 1880s drew together men from Bengal, Madras, Bombay and the United Provinces in particular. Gandhi had none of the social or professional connections which drew others into provincial and eventually national politics. Nor did he appear to have the aptitude. Even a legal training in London, financed by his family who hoped he would help to secure their future on his return to India, failed to instil in him the confidence to succeed in the law courts in Bombay, let alone to participate in political activities. The London experience so vividly described in his autobiography may have failed to provide a springboard into Indian public life: but it did begin in him the process of radical questioning about the assumptions, beliefs and expectations which informed his very traditional upbringing. Moreoever, I would argue that it was precisely Gandhi's status as an outsider to new styles of Indian politics, and to the webs of social and professional connections which undergirded them, which eventually helped him to question and challenge those politics.

Gandhi's position as an outsider to Indian politics was of course confirmed by his two decades here in southern Africa. His time here, initially chosen as professional and financial rescue tactic, came eventually to work the most profound changes in him. Those changes concerned his inner world and

his sense of a moral if not spiritual calling to a public role: they also concerned a more readily observable opportunity to become politically active, to learn new skills for political work and to question most deeply how he might engage with the world of politics. Indeed, one of the most significant sea changes in scholarship on Gandhi in recent years has been the far greater attention paid to Gandhi's African decades – compared with an earlier and almost total concentration on the last three decades of his working life back in India from the beginning of the First World War. New research has filled out and refined the broad picture sketched by Gandhi himself in his autobiography about the critical and many-layered influence of his South African experiences on him[4]. The inner change is perhaps symbolised by the fact that the young, failed lawyer who accepted a temporary legal contract in 1893 was by the time he left finally in 1914 known by many as a Mahatma or Great Soul. Smuts himself used the word, 'saint' in rather mocking gratitude that this troublesome man was at last going home to India![5] Gandhi's religious convictions, and his sense of an undergirding Truth calling him to action as well as to prayer and simplicity of life, had developed in unforeseeable ways, as he was exposed to Hindu, Muslim and Christian scripture and to the writings of radical critics of religion, and as he associated closely with men and women of deep religious conviction from traditions other than his own. From being a Hindu in nothing much but name he developed an eclectic but profound sense of the Divine and a belief that true religion meant serving others, particularly those who were despised, ill-treated and helpless. In order to respond to that sense, to pursue that vision he transformed his personal life-style from that of an increasingly successful lawyer and *paterfamilias* to a life of great simplicity, to celibacy, and eventually to a home in the extended family of an *ashram* community[6].

The outer and public changes were almost as dramatic, as Gandhi re-

[4] See, for example, Guha (2013).

[5] 'The saint has left our shores. I sincerely hope for ever'. J.C. Smuts to Sir Benjamin Robertson, 21 August 1914, quoted in W.K. Hancock (1962: 345.

[6] On these changes see Gandhi's autobiography which was subtitled *The Story of my Experiments with Truth*. It was first published in serial form in 1927 and it has been republished in book form many times since. The most recent critical edition of the English translation by Gandhi's secretary and close associate, Mahadev Desai, introduced with notes by Tridip Suhrud was published in 2018 by Yale University Press and Penguin Random House India.

sponded to the challenges of his new situation; and in particular to the varieties of discrimination on grounds of race and colour to which Indians were subjected. His surprise, anger and injured pride at treatment such as he had never experienced either in India or in London is symbolised by his autobiographical account of his train journey soon after his arrival, which ended in his being ejected from a First Class Carriage and on to the station platform in Pietermaritzburg. His eventual decision to stay in Africa and fight discrimination and ill treatment gave him the space to learn new skills of political organization and action, and to hone ways of communication through public speaking, the writing of political petitions and above all through journalism. But this newly equipped political activist who emerged over the next few years became profoundly discontented with the mode of contemporary politics in Africa and in India – on ideological and practical grounds. A sense of paralysis and incompetence in the face of social attitudes and official policy led him and some of his associates towards the idea and practice of non-violent but direct resistance – to which he gave a new name, *satyagraha* or truth force. The moral theorising behind this took time to mature in Gandhi's mind, just as there was a steady refining of the practice itself. But already by 1910, when he wrote one of his most famous and enduring political tracts, *Hind Swaraj*[7] or 'Indian Home Rule', it was clear that the author was one who might challenge and destabilise Indian politics, just as he had helped to stir up major changes in South African political life. In this tract, which he stood by for the rest of his life, he challenged the contemporary assumption that Home Rule might just mean freedom from British rule. He believed that India was ensnared by what he called 'modern civilisation', in which many Indians were complicit. Not until the manifestations of such supposed civilisation were abandoned could India begin the process of reconstructing her social and political order. The transformation here envisaged was far broader and deeper than merely ejecting the British. It was what they had brought to India which had to go. In the process non-violent pursuit of the true and good would be far more important than any violent modes of change, not least because ends and means were intimately connected. Good and worthy ends could never justify bad means including violence, as the one would pollute and distort the other.

It is important to recognise that Gandhi was not a philosopher, an ori-

[7] The best edition of this 1910 tract is A. Parel's 1997 *Gandhi: Hind Swaraj and Other Writings.*

ginal or even a trained thinker. He was pretty much self-taught when it came to thinking about moral and political issues and in educating himself he was eclectic – drawing ideas and inspiration from wherever he could find them – from Hindu scripture, from the Bible, from modern authors, many of them from far outside India. The Russian philosopher and novelist, Tolstoy, and Ruskin, British thinker and art critic, are but two examples. Gandhi was also a pragmatist, continually learning from events as well as other people's ideas, and willing to refine and change his own actions where these seemed necessary in the pursuit of truth. His originality in thought and action lay in how he put together all these diverse bits; how he welded them into a coherent ideological and practical whole which was to sustain him in new forms of public endeavour.

The last great stage in Gandhi's life was after he returned to India. India had changed markedly and was in the throes of even more radical change compared with the homeland he had left in the early 1890s. Then it had provided no hospitable space for the young Gandhi even to make a basic legal career. Now during and after the Great War it provided a stage on which he could try out and share his blossoming idea and his growing discontents – discontents with Indian society, with British rule, and with the practice of politics as it had developed. The details of these changes need not concern us here, and will be familiar to some of you[8]. In brief, the war helped to work a sea-change in Indian public life, and to undermine the stability of the British raj. This led to significant constitutional reforms which gave Indian politicians far more power particularly in provincial government. Even so, many articulate and politically-minded Indians were deeply discontented with the presence of imperial rulers and their own apparent inability to change British attitudes and behaviour, and to achieve radical change in the institutions and patterns of politics. This environment allowed Gandhi room to launch himself in national political life in a way impossible earlier in his life. Jawaharlal Nehru, who came under Gandhi's influence at this time, noted in his own autobiography how Gandhi seized the imaginations and hopes of his own younger generation who were frustrated with the politics of their fathers' generation[9]. Gandhi

[8] See Brown's 1972 *Gandhi's Rise to Power: Indian Politics 1915 - 1922.*

[9] Nehru (1936) wrote of his feelings in 1921 during the first Non-cooperation movement, 'Many of us who worked for the congress programme lived in a kind of intoxication during the year 1921. We were full of excitement and

discovered a new political space in which to operate: while those who responded to him with new hope felt exhilaration, liberation from fear, and expectation that change was now possible.

Gandhi brought to this new situation the ideas about the foundations of British rule in India that had informed his 1910 pamphlet, *Hind Swaraj*, but which he had expressed at least two years earlier in discussion of Ruskin's famous work, *Unto this Last*[10]. (These were ideas which later historians would consider well founded as they examined the frailties and vulnerabilities of the raj, whatever its apparent strength.) Gandhi had written that the British did not conquer India. Rather, Indians had handed their country over to the British because of their own divisions and the willingness of many of them to collaborate with the British for many different practical but often self-interested reasons. Consequently, he now believed that Indians could take back control of their own destinies by refusing to collaborate with the raj in ways which sustained it and allowed what he called modern civilization to rake root in India. But this would, in his view, also mean a radical consideration of what it meant to be Indian, what constituted Indian society and who belonged to the Indian nation. Achieving *swaraj*, independence, was not just a question of independence from the British, as so many of his contemporaries thought and worked for.

It must now be clear from my broad brush picture that Gandhi was now positioned to challenge many of the assumptions which both British and Indian made about Indian politics. It is to this challenge, this unexpected interrogation of political assumptions and practices, to which I now turn. But first let us remind ourselves that although Gandhi, the Mahatma, was by now seen as a spiritual leader whose home and base of operations was an *ashram*, he was no religious recluse and he did not shun public action in the name of religion, as did many contemporary Hindu holy men who became *sanyassis*, those who

optimism and a buoyant enthusiasm …. Above all, we had a sense of freedom and a pride in that freedom. The old feeling of oppression and frustration was completely gone'. J. Nehru 1936. *An Autobiography.* London: John Lane, The Bodley Head. (p. 69.)

[10] Gandhi paraphrased Ruskin's work in 1908 under the title, *Sarvodaya*. This was published in 9 parts in his newspaper, *Indian Opinion*, and can be found in *CWMG*, Vol.8. It was later published as a pamphlet. [*CWMG* refers to the 100 volumes of *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* published by the Government of India, New Delhi.]

renounced worldly life. He was convinced that for himself the call to follow Truth meant involving himself in politics in the service of his countrymen, particularly those who were poor and underprivileged. He made this explicit as he concluded his autobiography in the later 1920s[11].

The most radical challenge Gandhi launched was aimed at the very heart of what his contemporaries and most of us would consider to be the political enterprise. He understood well enough that politics is about power in the various communities in which humans find themselves: but he questioned and refuted the idea that politics should fundamentally be about state power, and that India's national and nationalist politics should be about control of the state. His quarrel lay at heart with the modern state itself. He believed that it was necessarily violent and coercive, whatever the ideology of those who controlled it; for its essence was control of the levers of public power, and those who went into state-related politics did so to gain access to those levers. Such an institution was inevitably corrupting and could never produce moral communities or moral individuals. In its place he believed that India should set an example to the rest of the world by creating small scale, self-sustaining and self-determining, rural communities which would resolve their problems by face to face solutions. Because people in these communities would know each other they would have to confront issues of social and religious difference, and of poverty and inequality in terms of neighbours and individuals. There could be no hiding behind the idea of faceless social groups who were 'them' rather than 'us'. Moreover, self-sustaining communities founded on agriculture and local small-scale industries would enable all to share in the means of production and sustenance, and so would prevent what he saw as the evils of industrial society – evils of over-consumption by some and poverty for others, and gross inequalities of wealth and power. Gandhi claimed that this move towards small scale rural communities was in fact a return to India's traditional village society. However, many, both then and now, argue that in this he was

[11] In the 'Farewell', concluding his autobiography, Gandhi wrote, 'To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics; and I can say without the slightest hesitation, and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means'.

mistaken – both in the matter of India's history and in his socioeconomic analysis. Villages were and still are places of violence and inequality[12].

Gandhi questioned the very nature of contemporary Indian politics, and particularly the assumptions on which self-professed nationalists based their actions and associations. *Swaraj* as he saw it was very different from political independence. So much of his writing and his personal actions were about ways in which Indians might create this new sort of nation from the roots upwards[13]. Several themes dominated his vision of the future. Many of them are well known but the cursory observer may not see how they all hung together in his mind. Indeed in his own life time many thought he was idiosyncratic and curiously unpolitical in what he emphasised as necessary change in public life. Unity among people of different religious traditions was a constant trope in his discourse and his own action. This of course reflected his opinion that India's divisions had allowed British imperial rule. More fundamentally for him all religious traditions were pathways to truth, and all had an honoured home within an India in the making. For somewhat similar reasons he argued vehemently against the practice of treating those considered ritually impure in Hindu society as untouchable, and more generally about the many caste divisions in Hindu society. These ideas and practices divided those who should come together as brothers and citizens, and were totally contrary to true religion as he understood it, condemning those at the base of society to poverty and degradation. Another great theme in his development of an alternative politics was that of *swadeshi*, using things made in one's own country – and particularly using things grown or made by manual labour. He

[12] Gandhi was influenced by a classic late 19th century work by H.S. Maine 1871. *Village Communities in the East and West.* London: John Murray, and he cited it in the appendix to *Hind Swaraj* as one of his authorities. Maine was a famous legal scholar who from 1862 - 1866 was Legal Member of the Viceroy's Council. This book among others was the substance of lectures he gave as a Professor at Oxford on his return from India. Maine believed that Indian villages had traditionally had representative institutions and village councils had once enjoyed considerable judicial and legislative power. This gave strength to Gandhi's argument that villages were the key unit of an India which enjoyed *swaraj*.

[13] For a compilation of some significant texts on understanding and making *swaraj*, see Brown (2008: Section IV, pp. 133 - 307).

consciously cultivated the image of himself using the spinning wheel – and to the surprise of most Congress politicians insisted that they too should spin daily! Image was to reinforce the spoken and written word in his interrogation of nationalist politics.

Implicit and often explicit in Gandhi's interrogation of contemporary politics was another fundamental belief which set him apart from most of his contemporaries. I have already referred to it but let me reiterate it: his utter commitment to the belief that ends and means cannot be distinguished and separated. He was convinced that means and ends were, as he put it, like the seed and the tree[14]. Immoral and violent means would inevitably produce results in politics and society and individual lives which were violent and corrupt. Only good and moral means would create the good. It was a commitment which was sorely questioned in India towards the end of British rule. But it was a core element in Gandhi's radical challenge to politics as normally understood. And it was yet another reason why Gandhi argued for the reconstruction of a nation from the roots upwards rather than seizing political power from the imperial ruler, and stepping into their shoes.

Let me turn now to how Gandhi tried to work out these fundamental challenges to the political enterprise; how he tried to put his ideals into practice, to give substance to an alternative political path. I want to emphasis three of them: his *ashrams*, his programme of 'constructive work', and the practice of non-violent resistance to wrong, *satyagraha*. The last one is the most well known: but the other two were to him equally important.

On his return to India after some hesitations Gandhi made his home and his public base in two *ashram* communities: first in Ahmedabad, a major industrial city in his home region of Gujarat, and then from the mid-1930s in Sevagram, in deeply rural central India. (A Congress supporter actually had to finance a road to Sevagram so that Gandhi's political followers could keep in touch with him!) He maintained that these were his best creations, whatever the scepticism of his political associates and their discomforts at having to share his Spartan life style whenever they visited him. For Gandhi the *ashrams* were not merely his home, but they were training grounds for people who gathered round him, and were in microcosm places where his ideals were put into practice. So, for example, there were no caste barriers in these communities and everyone was expected to do all kinds of work, including the

[14] Gandhi used the image of the seed and the tree in *Hind Swaraj*, Chapter XVI.

menial and the polluting. People of all faith traditions were welcome and were expected to participate in and actually contribute to his religious observances. He assumed, for example, and often erroneously, that Christians would be able to lead the singing of his favourite hymns[15]. In Sevagram in particular he laboured to solve the problems of poverty and ill health among his village neighbours, hoping that if he could do this in such a remote and poor place it would be a microcosm of wider change in Indian society. For Gandhi personally the *ashrams* were the context in which he experimented with non-violence resolution of problems and differences, and worked out the disciplined way of life which he thought was the precondition for non-violent action. It is important to remember that Gandhi did not think one could adopt non-violent means and then put them down again as if they were just like any other political tactic. For him non-violent action had to be rooted in a disciplined life honed by self-denial and simplicity. So his *ashrams* were particularly important as training grounds for *satyagrahis* he could rely on for their understanding of non-violence and commitment to it even under severe provocation. This was why, for example, he drew on *ashram* members to be his companions in the Salt March of 1930 as he challenged the government salt monopoly in a dramatic piece of political theatre.

As Gandhi's experience of India deepened and broadened he became committed to what he called 'the Constructive Programme'. Widening out from *swadeshi* and the spinning wheel, he argued the necessity of a total programme of socio-economic reconstruction as the precondition of successful *satyagraha* and eventual *swaraj*. He wrote a crucial pamphlet on the subject in December 1941 which was as significant for his mature thinking as *Hind Swaraj* had been three decades earlier[16]. The timing was remarkable. 1941 of course was well into the Second World War when Congress had withdrawn from cooperation with the raj in expanded legislatures and as the actual party of government in large swathes of India, and was planning different types of non-cooperation. Now here was Gandhi making absolutely plain what for him was the nature of a true national politics. His programme covered many topics, ranging from ones he had long publicly addressed such as communal unity, the

[15] On the significance of his ashrams in Gandhi's thinking see the texts in Section IIIb of Brown (2008: 105 - 132.)

[16] This is available in *CWMG*, vol.75, pp. 146 - 166. It is also reproduced in full in Brown (2008: Section IVb, pp. 164 – 184).

removal of untouchability and *khadi* (hand-made Indian cloth) to prohibition, village health and industries, new forms of basic education, changes in social attitudes towards women, the use of local languages and so on. For him this was the essential and effective path towards *swaraj*. No challenge to prevailing types of politics could have been clearer.

The third and best-known challenge to contemporary political action was of course *satyagraha*[17] – non-violent resistance to wrong on an individual, local or national scale. Gandhi had become convinced that non-violent resistance worked profound changes in attitudes and actions, was if you like truly converting of situations of conflict, and so likely to produce lasting change. But, he had become aware quite early in his time in India of the profound dangers inherent in large-scale *satyagraha* movements. On a restricted scale he could control the issues at stake and the actions of *satyagrahis*. But on a larger stage many adopted his methods for their own very different reasons, and often proved impossible to control. So, earlier campaigns, as in 1919 and 1922, had fallen apart as a result of violence, dividing Indians from each other, and opening the way for British retribution. Consequently, he did his best from then on to control the issues on which non-violent resistance was used, and to exercise personal supervision and discipline on activists. At times he was prepared to withdraw *satyagraha* campaigns if he felt violence threatened, or more likely, if the majority of those active in Congress politics were evidently feeling constrained by his leadership and programmes and were, as in 1934, anxious to return to what seemed to them more normal and conventional political paths. It is a sad irony that the very form of political action for which Gandhi is now most renowned globally is one which he felt towards the end of his life that his compatriots had never really understood, and never properly practised.

Retrospect and Conclusion

As I draw this lecture to a close let us stand back from the details of his unexpected, idiosyncratic and often misunderstood intervention in Indian politics. I argue that we have to see Gandhi's creativity and stature in the context of his own time and place. This was not just the first half of the 20th century, but the specific context of late imperial India. This was a time when

[17] For key texts on *satyagraha* see Brown (2008: Section V, pp. 309 – 373).

the impact of two global conflicts, as well as ensuing economic disruption and deep ideological questioning, had severely weakened British rule in India as well as her global position. Consequently, Indians in public and political life were faced with urgent issues about the future of their country, the nature of any new national polity, and the question of who actually belonged to the nation. There were many possible answers to these questions. In the ensuing discussions and political changes Gandhi emerged as a towering if not dominant figure, challenging and interrogating the ideas about politics and the political practices of his compatriots.

He was an experimenter – with ideas and practices: as we have seen he was a synthesiser, willing to learn from anyone whose own ideological struggles spoke to his own concerns. But above all Gandhi was a man with a passionate commitment to understand what Truth might be in any given situation, and what that Truth might demand of him. This commitment took him right outside his comfort zone of Hindu tradition and to redefine his vision of the divine as Truth. It forced him to rethink what he meant by religion and what constituted religious authority; and eventually led him to seek new ways of challenging customs and assumptions which were often deeply rooted in religious beliefs and social traditions. His commitment to Truth did not just make him a social and religious reformer, which had seemed most likely on his return to India in 1915. It drew him quickly into the world of politics with its often murky practices and compromises. Interrogating the very foundations of political thinking and practice among his contemporaries, he worked to rethink the political enterprise, its goals in India, and the modes of action which would achieve a new society rather than seize control of an imperial state.

In many ways Gandhi failed. When the British left India in 1947 it was for reasons as much to do with global and domestic politics as the campaigns Gandhi had led. Independence was accompanied by partition of the subcontinent, in denial of Gandhi's belief that Hindus and Muslims were brothers, or the two eyes in the face of India as he once put it. Moreover, many of the issues raised in his Constructive Programme have still to be resolved – among them the treatment of the very poorest and least valued in society, despite the official legal abolition of Untouchability, and the treatment of women. And of course independent India never abandoned the structures and assumptions inherited from the imperial state, and state power has become stronger than ever it was in Gandhi's life time.

Nonetheless, Gandhi would become an international figure of great

note and influence. Undoubtedly the manner of his death contributed much to his global public image. But his continuing influence runs far deeper than that. He is in many ways now like a beacon to those who feel that so often conventional politics fails – whether these politics are totalitarian or democratic. It fails in the narrowness of its vision as well as its impact on the lives of citizens. People look to him and particularly his non-violent methods in search of ways of achieving real change in their societies, ways of empowering those whom those who seize the commanding heights of the state would prefer to ignore. Gandhi leaves us all with profound questions about the nature of our societies, where power lies within them, and how this power can be used and controlled for the public good.

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