

Mahatma Gandhi's Dialogues with Americans

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Mahatma Gandhi's Dialogues with Americans

Gandhi never visited America, but he met and corresponded with many Americans. Showing that satyagraha had a great potentiality, he helped to awaken some of the best in American traditions, and by his explicit connection to Christ and Thoreau, he made some Americans feel that these teachings were not so foreign. Gandhi helped to invigorate the idea of non-violent resistance in the west and to politicise it as he had done in India. His connection to America called forth many courageous non-violent activists and some powerful and sensitive American writing too.

LEONARD A GORDON

You're the top!
You're Mahatma Gandhi.
You're the top!
You're Napoleon brandy.

– Cole Porter,
'You're the Top!' (1934)

I

Mahatma Gandhi never visited the US. Nevertheless, he had numerous interactions with Americans and has had a wide, long-lasting impact on American thought and social action. The interactions were sometimes question-and-answer sessions, occasionally they were debates in person or through the media. They were dialogues involving a range of important subjects including the universal viability of non-violent resistance, religion/religions and the question of conversion, the use of modern technology in India, the nature of the relation between India and the west, fascism, birth control, prohibition, and comparisons between the plight of Afro-Americans in the US and the oppression of the untouchables in India. Gandhi's influence upon American life continued after his death in 1948. Some of these tales of Gandhi's connections to America have been told well, some only in fragments, and some hardly at all.¹

Moreover, he was a media expert who had early on discovered that spreading his point of view to concerned audiences was a vital part of successful political activity. His method of satyagraha necessitated converting the other, the opponent, if possible, or at least working out an acceptable compromise between the two sides. Explanation of one's point of view and having public opinion press upon the

opponent was essential. In opposing a mighty empire, Gandhi saw the importance of having public opinion in Britain and then in the US converge upon officials of the raj. He enlisted as his allies in the quest for positive public opinion all kinds of supporters both Indian and foreign, some American, in India and abroad, who would help him in this task.²

Up to 1947, Great Britain, India, and the US had a triangular relationship. Through the pre-independence period, Britain's concern was to monitor and control India's external relations, especially with the US. Through the period from 1905 to 1947, there was a propaganda war between Indian nationalists (or anti-imperialists) and British officials for the support of Americans. Both sides believed that Americans had special reasons for favouring their side. The British thought Americans would share their perspective on empire and sent speakers and agents to the US. They supported Americans like Katherine Mayo in visiting India. The Indians at home and abroad thought that Americans would favour a people struggling for its freedom from the British empire as the Americans had fought in the 18th century. American presidents, including Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt, talked of national self-determination for oppressed peoples. Some Indian leaders (such as, Lajpat Rai, Sarojini Naidu, Madame Pandit) visited the US, and lesser known Indians residing here worked for American support. Gandhi's intimate ally and British clergyman C F Andrews visited America in 1929 partly to combat damage done by Britain's most successful American propagandist, Katherine Mayo.³

In an early phase of this contact, some Indians plotted with German officials against the British empire. These conspirators were caught and tried in the Hindu Conspiracy Case, 1917, in California, and sent to prison. Subsequently, the efforts to enlist American support were peaceful, pressure group activities.

A small band of anti-imperialist Americans joined with Indians in the US and then kept contact with Gandhi and Nehru in these efforts. These included British and American Quakers, and others such as Roger Baldwin, A J Muste, Robert Morss Lovett, John Haynes Holmes, Pearl Buck, Will Durant, and J T Sunderland. Through the four decades before 1947, there were numerous organisations advocating Indian freedom, most of them short-lived. Once Gandhi came to the fore of the Indian national movement after first world war, he entered into this particular propaganda war as part of his general propaganda efforts. For most of the period, he thought that the British had the upper hand in the US because of their official establishment, extensive funds, and the general goodwill of Americans for Britain. They were aided by pro-British Americans, some of whom volunteered for service in the British imperial cause and by official and non-official Englishmen who were sent to the US. They were aided, too, by American ignorance of India and of Gandhi's methods. Again and again, when Gandhi was asked if he had a message for America, he began by saying that Americans should discard British propaganda and start to learn and study about what was really going on in India. That is, they should learn how he spoke his truth to British power and learn what he believed what was the truth about

the centuries of exploitation of India by the British.⁴

Gandhi was a vital and curious person and learned something about America through listening, reading, and asking questions of American visitors and Indians who had been there. He read some American history, and seminal texts such as Thoreau's *On Civil Disobedience*. He kept up his attention to international affairs and developments in important nations like the US through the media and through direct contacts, in person, and through mails with Americans. Over the years, he formed his own conception of the US. His America was both a source of inspiration for anti-imperialism and non-violent resistance, but also a materialist and imperialist power frequently allied with the British raj. He thought that America had accumulated its great wealth by exploiting others and was wary of industrial, capitalist, western society. However, he respected technical know-how and when pressed, he said that America should send technical advice, but not money or missionaries interested primarily in conversions.

As an advocate of prohibition, Gandhi was pleased when the US adopted it, but unhappy when it was repealed. But there was one aspect of American society that disturbed him for decades: racial discrimination against Afro-Americans. He listened to reports of ill-treatment and even lynchings and developed a special solicitude for Afro-American correspondents and visitors, including Howard Thurman, Edward Carroll, William Stuart Nelson, Benjamin Mays, and Channing H Tobias. He encouraged them to learn about and follow his path of non-violent resistance.⁵ Gandhi was also disturbed to learn that south Asians were barred from naturalisation as American citizens along with other Asians. This was a further indicator of American racism and one that touched him even more closely. He continued his contacts over the years with a few of the south Asians who emigrated to the US or were long-term visitors including Haridas Muzumdar and Krishnalal Shridharani, and learned how Asian Indians were treated in America from them and from American friends and transitory Indian visitors.

America was, thus, a dynamic part of the west but infected with some of its distasteful diseases: materialism, racial prejudice and religious arrogance, and an imperialist drive for conquest and exploitation of less developed peoples. At the same time, it had a tradition of anti-imperialism,

equality, and non-violent resistance. Gandhi had both friends and opponents in the US, saw positive and negative elements in American civilisation and did not view it in one simple way. Though America was becoming one of the world's most powerful nations during his lifetime and its advocacy of Indian independence would be of value to his cause, Gandhi never felt that India was inferior to America or any western country. India might be able to learn some things from America if such lessons were offered without condescension, but, at the same time, India had a lot to teach if America was open enough to learn.

II

Among the Americans to whom Gandhi came closest to and trusted were missionaries or former missionaries and ministers, including Sam Higginbottom, Satyanand Stokes, John Haynes Holmes, Fred Fisher, E Stanley Jones, and Jabez T Sunderland. Richard Gregg, a lawyer and industrial relations conciliator by background, whom Gandhi invited to his ashram in the 1920s, and who became a leading exponent of non-violent resistance, and several religiously-oriented critics, should also be grouped with them. They all sympathised with the Indian struggle in their different ways and each formed a relationship – some only at a distance – to the Mahatma. Several grasped the significance of his non-violent resistance and linked it to their backgrounds in Christian or Judaic teachings.

The first of this group to make friends with Gandhi – possibly Gandhi's first good American friend – was Sam Higginbottom of Allahabad, whose speech at Benares in 1916 immediately caught the attention of Gandhi recently, who had returned from South Africa. The only missionary present at the inauguration ceremonies of the Benares Hindu University, Higginbottom argued that "...agricultural improvement through the education of the ryot was fundamental to economic progress".⁶ Gandhi's spirited and positive response to Higginbottom's argument drove the assembled maharajas to walk out of the future Mahatma's speech, but led to a life-long friendship with the missionary who had turned agricultural instructor. Gandhi continued to ask for advice on cattle-breeding and agriculture from Higginbottom and his Allahabad Agricultural Institute for the next 40 years. Gandhi was not against science or technical assistance per

se but against big and dehumanising machinery that subtracted human beings from the equation of production. The example and work of Higginbottom gave Gandhi a positive view of some of the possibilities of American technology and an approval of advice rendered without condescension.

Samuel Evans Stokes, renamed Satyanand Stokes, was also a Christian missionary by background, who made contact with Gandhi in 1920 and identified with India and its struggle for freedom and became an adopted Indian. He joined the Congress and served a term of imprisonment for his participation in the non-cooperation movement. From a Quaker family, he had come to India in 1904 and done social service work. He was known for his forceful opposition to 'begar' or forced labour in the Shimla hills, which was abolished in 1921 largely due to his efforts. He went on to become an educator and even more famous as an apple breeder in Kotgarh in what is now Himachal Pradesh. Through the years he came closer to Hinduism, and became a Hindu in 1932. Married to an Indian Christian, he worked on in India till his death in 1946, having become an Indian citizen. Though an American by birth, he lived his adult life as an Indian in India and for all intents and purposes was an Indian, but of unusual descent.⁷

At about the same time that Stokes was making contact with Gandhi in India, John Haynes Holmes was finding out about Gandhi through his research in New York. Holmes had begun his career as a Unitarian minister, but decided to break beyond denominational boundaries and renamed his church in New York, the Community Church. A lifelong pacifist, co-founder of the NAACP, and a host of other organisations, he became known around first world war as one of the foremost and engaging of speakers from the pulpit in New York. In 1918, he first learned of Gandhi and began investigating his life and work. Then in 1921, Holmes announced a sermon titled, 'Who is the Greatest Man in the World?' for a coming Sunday. The press suggested many candidates, but none guessed that Holmes' choice was an almost unknown Indian, one M K Gandhi. From this day forth for the remaining 40-plus years of his life, Holmes became a champion of Gandhi in America – Gandhi himself called Holmes "my advertising agent". Holmes saw Gandhi following in the footsteps of the Buddha and Christ and leading a great people to

freedom by non-violent resistance.⁸ Holmes wrote in 1949,

...In my extremity I turned to Gandhi, and he took me in his arms, and never let me go. Away across the globe he cared for me, and taught me, and reassured me. In London, in 1931, I met him and found him indeed my saint and seer...He gave me a peace of mind and a serenity of soul which will be with me to the last.⁹

Holmes was an even more thorough-going pacifist than Gandhi, but learned from Gandhi about the uses of non-violent resistance in political contexts. As editor of *Unity*, he published Gandhi's autobiography serially in the US starting in 1926 and joined almost every organisation supporting India's freedom struggle that was formed in America. He idealised Gandhi and did not see all the problems Gandhi had of navigating through the dilemmas of Indian society and politics. He elided Gandhi and Christ so that there was no difference between the message of Christ and the teaching of Gandhi. This was part of the Americanisation of Gandhi. When Holmes met Gandhi in 1931 in England, he was not disappointed and continued his advocacy of Gandhi and India's cause until he visited India in late 1947.

An ally of Holmes in the US in working for India's freedom was Jabez T Sunderland, also a Unitarian, who had visited India in 1895-96 and in 1913-14, but never met Gandhi. Sunderland did not become a Gandhi advocate in the way that Holmes did, for Sunderland had been brought to the cause of India in large measure by Lala Lajpat Rai. The latter, an Indian nationalist from the Punjab, came to New York in 1914 and spent the better part of five years in the US. Although Sunderland, like Holmes, remained a devoted Christian, he became an ardent exponent of the great achievements of Indian civilisation, and of the necessity of the country's independence from the British raj. In the late 1920s he wrote a powerful plea for India's freedom, *India in Bondage*, that the British found so offensive that they banned it. Sunderland argued that India was completely fit for self-rule and that British rule was a calamity for India.¹⁰ In the course of his treatise, he called Gandhi one of the greatest men in the world. Although Sunderland and Gandhi did not form the kind of relationship that Holmes and Gandhi did, Gandhi appreciated the power and passion of the argumentation in Sunderland's book and its great value in the propaganda war with

the British. Like Holmes, Sunderland too joined one organisation after another that advocated Indian freedom until he died in his nineties in 1936.

Several American missionaries also came into contact with Gandhi in his mature Indian phase, and of these, Bishop Frederick B Fisher became the firmest friend, while E Stanley Jones played an important role in depicting Gandhi as one of the greatest living human beings who embodied the spirit of Jesus Christ. Fred Fisher gradually became a maverick within the Methodist church as he sympathised ever more with the Indian freedom struggle. He met both Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore and wrote about them lovingly in his book, *That Strange Little Brown Man Gandhi*, published in 1932.

Frederick Bohn Fisher, for some time Methodist bishop of Calcutta, had come to India as a missionary in 1904 and met Gandhi in 1917 just as the latter was becoming a leader on the national scene. In his valuable book on Gandhi, Fisher noted that because of the great war, a clash mainly of Christian nations fighting each other, missionaries in India were reconsidering their views on violence and war, indeed, their missions as missionaries in these very years. Into this scene came Gandhi. Fisher described him as a fighting pacifist, as a canny idealist, as a man who was the positive embodiment of man in a new age.

Fisher noted that American and British missionaries differed: Americans did not have to defend the raj, and were more informal, and could relate more easily to Indians, and were more devoted to ideals of freedom. Then he argued that men such as Gandhi and Tagore were Christians in spirit and should be accepted as such by Christians. He wrote:

Why not accept today in the bonds of the Universal Church of Christ such men as Gandhi and Tagore and Natarajan, and myriads of others in India who are literally following the Christ although they never had a Christian put water on their heads? The very power Gandhi wields is living proof of an internal Christian experience.¹¹

As Catholic as he was in his outlook, even Fred Fisher could not see that Gandhi might not want to be labelled a Christian. However, Fisher presented – as had Jabez Sunderland – a well-argued case for Indian independence and condemnation of the continuation of the raj. He also did his best to see parallels between Hinduism and Christianity, narrowing the gap between

the religious traditions. This allowed him to feel that he shared a religious outlook with Tagore and Gandhi that went beyond specific faiths. Fisher was in the avant-garde of Christian missionaries in India and worldwide who were, as he himself pointed out, necessarily in the throes of self-analysis and reconsideration of the roles they could play in India and elsewhere. That Gandhi embodied the spirit of Christ better than most, or possibly any, living Christian speeded up the need for self-evaluation.

E Stanley Jones, another Methodist missionary, also participated in this reconsideration and as a prolific writer on missions, also came to the question of Gandhi and Christianity, in his *The Christ of the Indian Road*.¹² Like Fisher, Jones saw an identity between the teachings of Gandhi and those of Jesus Christ and saw a rising concern with Jesus in India. Jones maintained that though Gandhi called himself a Hindu and not a Christian, "...by his life and outlook and methods he has been the medium through which a great deal of this interest in Christ has come".¹³ Somewhat more concerned with labels and converts than Fisher, Jones believed the future of India was and had to be in Christ. He thought that even Indians saw Gandhi as a vehicle for Christian teaching and this was a great boon to the missionaries.

On numerous occasions Gandhi expressed his antipathy to religious conversions. He thought most men and women should stick to the faiths they were raised in. Since some of the missionaries were focused on the number of converts as a marker of their success, Gandhi questioned their religiosity. Were they being paid or judged and rewarded per convert? What did this have to do with service or truth? He did not call for the exit of all the Christian missionaries, but rather a devotion to service. If they would work and serve regardless of the prospect and number of conversions, then they were welcome in India. He thought India needed selfless workers for the poor, and for public health, but India did not need more religious choices. A number of his visitors, such as the famous guide of missionaries and chairman of the International Missionary Council, John R Mott, questioned him on the shortcomings of the missionaries and Gandhi, frankly, told Mott and others what he thought.¹⁴

Less concerned with the fate of Christianity than with the fate of India and Indians, Quakers from Great Britain and America

played an important role as social service workers and as connectors between the British raj and Indian nationalists. This latter activity was principally undertaken by British Quakers and pacifists, many of whom had American connections, but who were British. These included Horace Alexander, Reginald Reynolds, Marjorie Sykes, Carl Heath, Muriel Lester, Agatha Harrison, and other members of the India Conciliation Group. It was such British citizens who could often get doors opened to them that others could not, who played an important role in advancing the dialogue between rulers and ruled. Prominent American Quaker Rufus M Jones visited Gandhi in 1925, but did not play a salient role in the Indian struggle as did the British Quakers.¹⁵

However, in presenting the philosophy and methods of non-violent resistance as developed by Gandhi, several Americans played a crucial role. Of these, Richard Gregg was the most important in the pre-independence period. His arguments have a Christian background and occasionally relate to Biblical teachings, but he presents a secular and humanistic case for the efficacy and universal value of non-violent resistance. A Harvard-trained corporate lawyer, Gregg went to India in 1925, stayed about four years, part of it at Gandhi's ashram, part of it with Satyanand Stokes in Kotgarh. He spent several decades presenting the case for non-violence and also for Gandhi's economic programme.¹⁶

Gandhi came to call him 'Govind', linking him to his favourite animal, the cow, and his favourite deity, Krishna. Gandhi developed a fondness for Gregg, wrote him many lengthy and serious letters, published his comments and articles in *Young India*, and later recommended his writings to those seeking to understand his methods. In introducing a few 1927 comments of Gregg in *Young India*, Gandhi wrote:

The readers of *Young India* are familiar with Mr Gregg's name. He is studying in a very concrete manner and with a passion worthy of a patriotic son of the soil the many questions affecting this land. His studies and experiments in hand-spinning continue unabated. He is experimenting in education of the backward classes. He is interested in the welfare of these classes. And in that connection, he is studying the question of agriculture.¹⁷

After this close contact with Gandhi, in person and through the mails, over a number of years, Gregg, a highly intelligent man,

a good writer, and a believer in non-violence, completed and published his valuable work, *The Power of Non-Violence*. More than any other pre-independence writer on Gandhian methods, Gregg drew upon the social sciences, legal studies, military theory, biology, philosophy, and especially modern psychology, Freudian and non-Freudian, in making his case and explicating the values of non-violent resistance. His penetrating use of this literature helped him to make Gandhian methods more accessible to westerners and are essential in his argument that non-violent resistance is a universally useful method within and between nations.

Gregg maintained that Gandhian training involved many of the same virtues as military training, yet was part of the much more humane and psychologically healthy means of solving conflicts. He used a striking image near the opening of his work by portraying non-violent resistance as "moral jiu-jitsu":

...non-violent resistance acts as a sort of moral jiu-jitsu. The non-violence and good will of the victim act like the lack of physical opposition by the use of physical jiu-jitsu, to cause the attacker to lose his moral balance. He suddenly and unexpectedly loses the moral support which the usual violent resistance of most victims would render him. He plunges forward...into a new world of values...He loses his poise and self-confidence...The user of non-violent resistance, knowing what he is doing and having a more creative purpose and perhaps a clearer sense of ultimate values than the other, retains his moral balance. He uses the leverage of a superior wisdom to subdue the rough direct force or physical strength of his opponent.¹⁸

As he probed the value of non-violent methods of conflict resolution, Gregg argued, using a variety of psychological texts, that they dissipated fear, anger, and hatred, saved energy, and utilised the energies of positive feelings, especially love. Whereas, he thought, violent means gave a violent result and generated more hatred, non-violent means converted the opponent and helped to tame his hatred, soothed his anger, and brought former opponents closer together as the conflict was resolved. Non-violent methods, said Gregg, had the capacity to remould the world and nothing less than that eventual grandiose goal was what he and Gandhi were aiming for.

In addition to Gregg's work, the other important work on Gandhi's method – besides Gandhi's own autobiography

which is a much different kind of book – published and known in the US in the 1930s was Krishnalal Shridharani's *War without Violence*. Among the modest number of south Asians who had come to the US for a long stay or for permanent residence, two were fine writers: Dhan Gopal Mukerji and Shridharani. Born in 1915 in Gujarat, Shridharani was a precocious and successful poet in his native language and then joined Gandhi's Salt March as a teenager.

In 1934, Shridharani came to the US as a student to pursue graduate courses in journalism and sociology. He believed that an American university would serve his purposes better than a British one and he chose Columbia University. In addition to his PhD thesis on Gandhian methods published as *War without Violence*, Shridharani has left an insightful and enjoyable memoir of his American days, *My India, My America*. In his analysis of Gandhian methods, Shridharani stressed the vital relationship between, indeed, the inchangeability of means and ends. He also was an active lecturer and journalistic writer on Indian affairs in the decade and more that he was in the US. He met some of those American friends of Gandhi like Holmes, Pearl Buck and Oswald Garrison Villard, who worked with expatriate Indians to influence public opinion for Indian freedom.¹⁹

Besides those devoted to Gandhian methods, there were important American religious writers who were more critical of Gandhi even as they understood and sympathised with his struggles. These included the Christian theologian and writer Reinhold Niebuhr, and the Zionist writer Hayim Greenberg. Niebuhr had started his career inclined to pacifism and socialism and was sufficiently interested in Gandhi's work to travel to London in 1931 to try to meet him. Although Niebuhr failed to make contact with Gandhi, he did write an article leaning to Gandhi's methods in that same year.²⁰

The following year, Niebuhr published a major work, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, in which he argued that social and political conflict often necessitated the use of coercion and even violent means for good ends. Such ends were equality for the oppressed within nations and the liberation of colonies from the grip of imperialism. He said that it had to be recognised that men en masse were much less moral than individual men and more inclined to evil and exploitation.

Niebuhr went on to harshly criticise Christian pacifism – turning on former allies such as John Haynes Holmes – and to insist that even Gandhi's non-violent resistance involved coercion and often led to violence and destruction. He blurred the moral line between violent and non-violent means though still preferring the latter where possible. He also differentiated Gandhi's methods from Christian pacifism in the west by arguing that Gandhi's approach factored in political concerns: "...in him political realism qualified religious idealism..."²¹ Niebuhr tried to synthesise his Marxist, Christian, and philosophical backgrounds into what he believed was a more 'realistic' approach to conflict solution. His analysis remains one of the major American critiques of pacifism and Gandhi and one which non-violent activists from Christian and more secular stances have tried to rebutt.

Hayim Greenberg, a New York-based Zionist and admirer of Gandhi, was moved to address letters to Gandhi which he published in 1937 and 1939.²² Although Greenberg was an American and thus enters the discussion of American dialogues with Gandhi, he represents part of a much larger, international dialogue between Gandhi and spokesmen for the Jewish people in Europe, Palestine, and the US.²³ After praising Gandhi for his work for the untouchables of India, Greenberg asked Gandhi to understand the plight of other 'untouchable' groups such as Afro-Americans and the Jews in many parts of the world. He thought that Gandhi had fallen prey to Muslim propaganda in India about Zionists emigrating to Palestine. His 'An Answer to Gandhi', is directed to defending such Zionists and explaining the difficulties of Jews in Nazi Germany committing themselves to non-violent resistance. He asked Gandhi to consider the differences between the British rulers of India and the Nazis: "A Jewish Gandhi in Germany, should one arise, could 'function' for about five minutes – until the first Gestapo agent would lead him, not to a concentration camp, but directly to the gallows."²⁴

Almost a decade later when Greenberg was memorialising Gandhi after the latter's assassination, he remembered his 'loving kindness' at the same time he was a 'social crusader'. Rather than to Buddha, Greenberg compared him to emperor Asoka for he had brought compassion to political activism. Greenberg also saw parallels between Jewish traditions of non-violent activism and Indian ones, which allowed

him to feel himself closer to the fallen Mahatma.

III

One important neglected chapter of the story of Gandhi and America has been skillfully unearthed by Sudarshan Kapur: the connections between Gandhi and Afro-Americans in the decades before the civil rights movement of the late 1950s. After first world war when Gandhi came to the fore in India, Afro-American leaders Marcus Garvey and W E B DuBois began to call attention to the connection of freedom struggles in India, Africa, and in the US. Common colour of the exploited and common western white exploiters were factors which they emphasised. Thus began a feeling of solidarity between those social and politically conscious Afro-Americans struggling for equality and justice in the US and Indian nationalists led by Gandhi.

Not only was there a feeling of connection, but through numerous press reports and then visits between India and America by activists from both areas, webs of influence and mutual learning were constructed. Not only did Afro-Americans want to learn about Gandhi's methods and successes, but Gandhi was curious to understand the American race situation better. Even before Gandhi had returned to India from South Africa, Lala Lajpat Rai, another inquiring and influential Indian nationalist, had toured the US in 1914 visiting many black institutions and meeting black leaders. Lajpat Rai wrote an interesting book titled *The United States of America*, but it was not widely read. However, Lajpat Rai was based in New York between 1915 and 1919 and he befriended many liberal Americans, black and white, including DuBois.

Once Lajpat Rai had returned to India, Afro-Americans learned of Gandhi's work from the extensive coverage in the black press and from members of the south Asian community in America, particularly Haridas Muzumdar, Syed Hossain, Taraknath Das and Dhan Gopal Mukerji in the 1920s. In the late 1920s, Gandhian, nationalist emissaries Sarojini Naidu and C F Andrews visited the US. The latter spent much time at the Tuskegee Institute and had extensive contact with the black community in 1929 and 1930.

Although the black press was mostly favourable to Gandhi – indeed, idealised him as did American pacifists – one columnist in a prominent black paper, George

Schuyler in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, argued that Gandhi's methods would not work for blacks in America. He said that force had to be met with force and was dubious that a relatively small minority could overturn the racist policies of the majority by non-violent resistance.

In 1936, two visits of small groups of black American leaders to India enabled them to see Gandhi, exchange views, and then return to the US and help to spread the word about Gandhi. The first group, including Howard and Sue Thurman, and Edward and Phenola Carroll met Gandhi in early 1936.²⁵ Howard Thurman was dean of Rankin Chapel at Howard University and one of several Howard University staff and faculty keen to make contact with Gandhi. As the Americans interrogated Gandhi about South Africa and India and his non-violent resistance, Gandhi, in turn, asked them searching and serious questions about America. Gandhi tried to make clear to them that 'non-violence', even spelled out as the negation of violence in English, was a positive force. At the end of 1936, Benjamin Mays, dean of the School of Religion at Howard University, and Channing Tobias, a senior official of the YMCA, met Gandhi.²⁶ Upon their return, all of these visitors, particularly Howard Thurman and Mays, spoke extensively about Gandhi.²⁷

Through the inter-war period, a number of organisations did sprout which would contribute to a later mass movement for civil rights. These included the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), CORE (the Congress of Racial Equality), and the MOWM (the March on Washington Movement). Crucial figures in these organisations were connected to Gandhi, Gandhians, and to each other. The Fellowship of Reconciliation was an international organisation of British and shortly American members who were interested in conflict resolution and helping other groups to work for conciliation in a variety of fields. A J Muste, a leader of the FOR and one of America's leading 20th-century pacifists, was steeped in western pacifist traditions, learned of Gandhi after first world war, and added Gandhian ideas to his arsenal of conciliatory techniques. James Farmer and Bayard Rustin were both schooled in the FOR and Farmer was the most important founder of CORE, in 1942. A Philip Randolph, a trade unionist and Afro-American activist, organised the MOWM, which hoped to carry out direct non-violent action during second world

war, but it had to be de-mobilised, though the idea later took shape as the March on Washington in 1963, the greatest civil rights demonstration in the history of America. Farmer, Rustin, and Randolph, Muste, and a few others including Mordecai Johnson, again from Howard University, were links from the inter-war period ahead to the great age of the civil rights movement and Martin Luther King, Jr. Besides those who found inspiration in Gandhi's work and method, there were also those who admired him, but found his approach inappropriate for American blacks. W E B DuBois, a fabled elder by 1943, but still a strong voice in the black community, cautioned that Gandhi's method might work for a large majority opposing a foreign government, but would not work for a small minority opposing powerful majority resistance to change.²⁸ Among the Gandhian teachers, directly and through their books of this inter-war generation were Richard Gregg and Krishnalal Shridharani, whose works on non-violent resistance have already been mentioned.²⁹ Both advocates and doubters of Gandhian methods put forth their views in this period, but large-scale experiments to see what might actually bring change were not yet undertaken.

As Gandhi learned more about America and was asked to compare the plight of the untouchables with that of blacks in the US, he said slightly different things at different times. At one point, he insisted that the untouchables were better off because there no Indian legal bars against them whereas there were Jim Crow laws in the US. When Gandhi heard of lynchings and race riots, he maintained that nothing like that occurred in India by caste Hindus against untouchables.

Gandhi was frequently asked about the caste system and inter-dining and inter-marriage. C F Andrews had said that Gandhi was against both, but when Gandhi was contacted directly in the 1930s, he said that Andrews had misunderstood. However, what must also be mentioned is that Gandhi himself had changed his views. Earlier, he said in public meetings that he was against interdining and intermarriage, but by the later 1930s, he was in favour of both and explained this to American inquirers.

Many of the American visitors and writers to Gandhi wanted him to come to the US. This became a more realistic possibility in 1931, when Gandhi was in London. Arguments for and against such a visit flew back and forth, but in the end, Gandhi was

persuaded that America was not ready for his visit and he might be exploited by some and made fun of by others and that it would not be a productive enterprise. So he decided against a visit at that time and put off all suggestions about a later one.

IV

One other prominent American activist in a different line who visited Gandhi in the mid-1930s was Margaret Sanger. This was, however, not the beginning of Sanger's interest in Gandhi and India.³⁰ Serious Indian birth control organisations started in the 1920s, and Gandhi reaffirmed his views in 1925, and was answered bluntly in the editorial pages of *The Birth Control Review*, in New York, presumably by Sanger, who was the editor:

Mahatma Gandhi, the great leader of India, has recently given public utterance, in the columns of *Young India*, to his opinion concerning 'artificial' methods of birth

control. "There can be no two opinions about the necessity for birth control", writes Mahatmaji, "but the only method handed down from ages past is self-control or 'Brahmacharya.' It is an infallible sovereign remedy doing good to those who practise it. And medical men will earn the gratitude of mankind, if instead of advising artificial means of birth control they will find out the means of self-control. The union is not meant for pleasure but for bringing forth progeny. And union is a crime when the desire for progeny is absent." Self-control, austere unrelenting asceticism, is in brief, in the ethics of Mahatma Gandhi, "the only noble and straight method of birth control".³¹

What was evident from the opening salvos of this non-violent, but rather testy and even nasty set of exchanges over more than a decade is that both sides fired from strong and almost immovable entrenchments or value positions. The editorialist for the *Birth Control Review*, went on to attack Gandhi fiercely and to make more



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explicit the values for which Sanger and her supporters stood:

This thoughtless utterance – profoundly thoughtless, we are sorry to say – of India's great leader places him in the category of those traditional dogmatists and reactionary moralists for whom this world is irremediably a value of tears and whose irresponsible "idealism" has indeed made it one... We are happy that our friends in India are so vigorously combating it.

Life, we challenge these opponents, is neither an evil, a malady, nor a disease to be avoided. Life is the supreme experience, into which we must unreservedly and joyfully plunge. Sexual expression is one of the most profoundly spiritual of all the avenues of human experience, and birth-control the supreme moral instrument by which, without injury to others nor to the future destinies of mankind on this earth, each individual is enabled to progress on the road of self-development and self-realisation. Human salvation is not to be attained by a steady diet of the bitter fruit of renunciation.³²

In the positive vision of human life presented here, sexual experience is 'profoundly spiritual' and a part of human self-realisation. For Sanger and her supporters, birth control by women was a royal road to their emancipation, to their freedom as human beings. It would offer them control over their own bodies, choice about whether or not to have children, when to have these children, and the opportunity to enjoy sexual experience without the possibly unwanted consequence of pregnancy.

By 1925, Margaret Sanger was gathering allies in India, particularly since she had a formidable opponent, a "reactionary moralist", who was the acknowledged leader of nationalist Indians. Among the allies she gained was India's most famous writer, Rabindranath Tagore, a critical nationalist who did not share all of Gandhi's moral views. Tagore wrote Sanger a supportive letter published in *The Birth Control Review's* December 1925 issue. In the editor's response, she gladly shook the hand Tagore offered to her and praised his values and vision and that of her other allies in India. She wrote, in part:

The struggle is thus beginning between humanitarians and ascetics in India. It is beginning without the funds and friends of India are encouraged to aid financially through the *Birth Control Review*. With Tagore as leader and such lieutenants (R D Karve and N S Phadke – LG) as these to teach India that the real issue is not between birth control and self control, but between birth control and starvation, abor-

tion and infanticide there is no doubt about the outcome.³³

Tagore did not assume practical leadership of the birth control fight in India and for political reasons the government of India underplayed any interest in population control. The issue was debated, however, by the All-India's Women's Conference, (AIWC), among whose members there were many Sanger supporters and some opponents. In late 1935 and early 1936, Margaret Sanger, preceded by her British ally Edith How-Martyn, visited India for a few months and attended a session of the AIWC.³⁴

Margaret Sanger's main purpose in visiting India was to do publicity work and practical demonstrations for birth control. She brought supplies, demonstration models and films, and toured India in her cause. In December 1935, she travelled to Wardha, Gandhi's ashram in central India, to take a crack at gaining some support for her efforts. Arriving on his weekly silent day, she had to wait for her conversation with the Mahatma until the following day.

They began by agreeing that they both were for the emancipation of women and for birth control. Then, as they discussed the means to these goals, their differing values came into play. In presenting a one-sided version of this meeting in *Harijan*, Mahadev Desai said that Gandhi's philosophy sought "self-realisation through self-control".³⁵ Gandhi insisted that love was spiritual while sexual activity except for reproductive purposes only was pure animal lust. He said,

When both (that is, husband and wife -LG) want to satisfy animal passion without having to suffer the consequences of their act it is not love, it is lust. But if love is pure, it will transcend animal passion and will regulate itself. We have not had enough education of the passions. When a husband says, 'Let us not have children, but let us have relations', what is that but animal passion? If they do not want to have more children they should simply refuse to unite.³⁶

Gandhi said that if people were properly educated and disciplined – part of his vision of true swaraj or self-rule – then they should be satisfied to have sexual relations three or four times in their lifetime for the purpose of procreation and should otherwise abstain.

Of course, Margaret Sanger had a completely different view of the place of sexual activity in human experience and she tried to argue with Gandhi that his way could only be for the few ascetics, not for the common

man. Gandhi responded that he had learned from his wife and some other women who had been in his ashrams and believed that abstinence would work for all.

There was, of course, no meeting of minds, and the testiness on the Gandhi side crept into the final paragraph of Desai's version of the interview:

And yet as Sanger was so dreadfully in earnest Gandhiji did mention a remedy which would conceivably appeal to him. That method was the avoidance of sexual union during unsafe periods confining it to the 'safe' period of about ten days during the month. That had at least an element of self-control which had to be exercised during the unsafe period. Whether this appealed to Sanger or not I do not know. But therein spoke Gandhiji the truth-seeker. Sanger has not referred to it anywhere in her interviews or her *Illustrated Weekly* article. Perhaps if birth-controllers were to be satisfied with this simple method, the birth-control clinics and propagandists would find their trade gone...³⁷

Margaret Sanger wrote a letter responding to the article of Desai, which he printed in the February 22, 1936 issue of *Harijan*. It was followed by further nasty and condescending comments by Gandhi's spokesman in which he referred to Gandhi's somewhat positive remarks about what is now called 'the rhythm method'. Desai said that as a truth-seeker, Gandhi was trying to find common ground with Sanger. He concluded, "Whereas Sanger's method leaves one free to indulge oneself all the days of the month, this particular one seemed to have the credit of imposing on one certain measure of self-control".³⁸ Desai himself could not exercise much self-control as he went on in the following paragraph to assail "unseemly propaganda" for birth control.

The opposing views of Margaret Sanger and Gandhi embodied very different visions of human life and freedom. For Sanger, freedom meant self-fulfillment, self-realisation and a range of choice for the world's women (and indirectly for men as well) which many did not have, especially the poor. It involved the end of the subjugation of women to their husbands' desires. For Gandhi, also concerned with freedom, it also meant self-realisation but this meant discipline and strict control of all the passions whether for sex, food, or too much of any experiences of this world. It was a quest for god and truth and his god demanded control, what Sanger called warped 'idealistic asceticism'. To her, sexual experience was or certainly could be 'profoundly spiritual'; to Gandhi it

always involved lust. He had fought with his inner demon of lust for many decades and he was not about to compromise his views to conciliate Margaret Sanger, though he did offer less negative views on the rhythm method. The testiness of the exchange – on both sides – betokens that each realised that the other was a person of standing in the world’s moral community, but that each could not sway the other since they started so far apart and held so passionately to their worldviews.

V

During the period from the end of first world war – when he was the foremost political leader of India – Gandhi was interviewed numberless times and written about even more often by American journalists and writers. Some were foreign reporters, some were distinguished foreign correspondents, and some were freelance writers with a name to make. The most intense journalistic activity was concentrated in those periods of Gandhi’s most provocative and open political activity: First world war to about 1922; the late 1920s to 1932; the late 1930s to August 1942; and, the final phase from 1944 to January 1948. The first phase has been briefly mentioned in connection with the effort of John Haynes Holmes to call attention to Gandhi in his lecture in the Community Church.

The most successful of the American writers – in copies sold, in fame and infamy gained – was surely not the best writer or a distinguished correspondent. She was a freelancer with a project pleasing to officials of the raj who gave her every assistance in producing a book with which they would be happy. This was Katherine Mayo, who visited India in 1926 and published *Mother India* in the following year.³⁹ She met Gandhi when he had already achieved considerable fame, and wrote in a period when Gandhi was concentrating on his constructive programme; she did not focus on him, but rather presented a sweeping critique of Indian civilisation. As India’s most important leader and reformer of the period, Gandhi did come in for some attention and her book, because of its crucial place in the propaganda war outside India, entered into his concerns and provoked his ire.

Mayo’s main focus was on the sexual depravity of Indians. She saw this as the roots of all the manifold evils of India. In a scene of almost unrelieved darkness, she

saw only two beacons of light for India: the British rulers and foreign missionaries. Her critique cannot be examined at length here, but as far as Gandhi was concerned, she attempted to use him to help make her bleak condemnation of India. She tried to use both Gandhi’s life and an essay on Indian marriage by Rabindranath Tagore to show that the most eminent Indians approved child marriage. She did quote Gandhi quite appropriately on the lack of sanitary habits and practices by Indians. But then she quoted his words out of context to attempt to demonstrate that he was unalterably opposed to western medicine and since he agreed to an appendectomy by a western surgeon, he was a thorough-going hypocrite.

In both *Mother India* and later writing, she condemned his use of non-violent resistance as in the following passage, which does not mention his name, but is clearly about his movement:

The doctrine of non-cooperation with the established power led nowhere, as all now see. The mystic doctrine of spiritual war, a war of ‘soul-force’, that uses the language of hate while protesting theories of love, had logically and insistently projected itself upon the material plane in the form of the slaughter of men. The inability of individuals to subordinate personal, family or clan interests and to hold together for team work, had been demonstrated. And the fact had been driven home to the hilt that neither Hindu nor Muhammadan could think in terms of the whole people.⁴⁰

Mayo was not incorrect that some campaigns of non-violent resistance led to sporadic violence, occasionally by Gandhi’s followers, but this dismissal of his method and movement was surely precipitate and premature. She was so eager to show that only the British understood the way forward for India that she had to dismiss Gandhi and satyagraha.

Mayo’s account of India sold so many copies in the west and was so positively reviewed in many quarters in the west, more in Britain than in America, that it led to the many responses that followed. Of these, one of the most acute was by Gandhi himself, titled, ‘Drain Inspector’s Report’, published in *Young India*, September 15, 1927.⁴¹ In the best-known section of Gandhi’s response, he wrote:

The book is cleverly and powerfully written. The carefully chosen quotations give it the appearance of a truth book. But the impression it leaves on my mind is that it

is the report of a drain inspector sent out the one purpose of opening and examining the drains of the country to be reported upon, or to give a graphic description of the stench exuded by the opened drains. If Mayo had confessed that she had gone to India merely to open out and examine the drains of India, there would perhaps be little to complain about her compilation. But she says in effect with a certain amount of triumph, ‘The drains are India’...The book is without doubt untruthful, be the facts stated ever so truthful.⁴²

Gandhi went on to show how she had ‘taken liberty with my writings’.⁴³ She used quotes taken out of context to demonstrate Gandhi’s antipathy to western medicine and Tagore’s so-called approval of ‘child marriage’.⁴⁴

Gandhi was hurt by what he saw as the untruthfulness of Mayo’s enterprise almost from the first words of her book. She tried to portray herself as a detached observer just reporting the facts she found in India, but Gandhi properly saw that she had gone with a mission to condemn Indian civilisation, had probably had the assistance of British officials – though he could not prove it – and had done her job. If he was hurt and offended by what he saw as the ‘untruthfulness’ of the whole, still it was a work for Indians – not foreigners – to read. Indians needed criticism and self-reformation, and even if Mayo distorted and exaggerated, she called attention to issues, for example, public sanitation and health conditions, the condition of women, that needed attention.

Along with Gandhi’s searching critique came a host of other answers to Mayo from some western missionaries in India – including Fred Fisher and E Stanley Jones – and from Jabez Sunderland. Gandhi sent his confidants Sarojini Naidu and then C F Andrews off to the US to do positive publicity work for India and to counteract the negative image created by Mayo. They both made an excellent impression on certain public audiences in America.

Many other Indians besides Gandhi and Tagore wrote their answers and many of them were powerfully stated, but the great sales of Mayo’s book and the many positive reviews in the west thereafter left a bad taste in the mouths of many Indians about western writers, especially American writers, about India. Many years later Gandhi recalled how distasteful he found Mayo’s operations in conversations with sympathetic observers of India, Louis Fischer and Margaret Bourke-White.⁴⁵

In Mayo's wake, scarcely a few years later, followed another anti-Indian, Anglophile American woman of some writing talent and ambition. Forgotten today, Patricia Kendall, an elegant New York socialite of old Virginia origins, wrote a polished account of India based on four visits over some years, titled, *Come with Me to India!* She had had some official help during her 1930 visit to India, but in the next few years demanded more aid in her enterprises that British officials begrudgingly gave her. They saw her contribution to their cause in America, but also some dangerous negative qualities. Angus Fletcher of the British Library of Information, New York – the main British propaganda unit in the US – wrote to R A Leeper of the news department of the British foreign office, on January 29, 1932:

Patricia Kendall...has consulted the Library very frequently in the last year...she consumes a great deal of our time...She apparently intends to do Gandhi's cause as much harm as possible, and she seems anxious to collect spicy gossip...She is to publish an article on 'The Economic Consequences of Gandhi'...she seems to expect us to cook the facts and figures to suit her case.

The lady's eyelashes are as false as the vermilion of her lips, but the words of her lips and the meditations of her heart are inspired with the truth according to the government of India.⁴⁶

Come with Me to India! sold thousands of copies in the midst of the Great Depression. Kendall's version of Gandhi, therefore, is of some interest here, particularly since she had a greater interest in his politics than Katherine Mayo.

Drawing on her own interview with Gandhi in March 1930, and works by British authors, mostly officials, and a few conservative Indians, Kendall asked, "Who is this man whom asceticism has induced willingly to relinquish a life of ease and whom worldliness impelled determinedly to grasp a position of power, who lives like a monk and rules like a monarch?"⁴⁷ Her answer was that he was a man of 'fanatical' ideas whose Indian campaigns "have invariably led to violence" which "he has always regretted – but never remedied".⁴⁸ He was a 'political opportunist' with the 'habit of idle promises' who had written an autobiography full of 'puerile discussions'.⁴⁹ With lengthy extracts from British memoirs such as Michael O'Dwyer's, *India as I Knew It*, Kendall made every effort to show that the Punjab violence of 1919

was incited by Gandhi and that the Mahatma, rather than O'Dwyer or General Dyer or anyone else, was responsible for the Amritsar massacre.⁵⁰

Although she wrote articles in periodicals and broadcast her views on radio, she never made the formidable impact that Katherine Mayo had. Both drew on the negative views of generations of Christian missionaries, some American, and other British students of Indian civilisation like James Mill. The India of Katherine Mayo and Patricia Kendall had few redeeming features and officials of the British raj felt that such views made a greater impact on America if they came from Americans than if they had been put forth by their own nationals.

VI

In addition to these freelance writers of no great stature, but considerable sales, there was a galaxy of some of the stars of American foreign journalism and serious, but popular writing who visited India in the Gandhian period. These included Webb Miller, William Shirer, John Gunther, Louis Fischer, Edgar Snow, Margaret Bourke-White, and Vincent Sheean. All of these writers paid some attention to Gandhi and three of them – Shirer, Fischer, Sheean – were so moved by Gandhi that they devoted whole books to him.

Webb Miller and William Shirer, experienced foreign correspondents by 1930, met Gandhi during the second great period of his renown, at the time of the Salt March of that year and the visit to London in 1931. Miller was based in London, but sent off to India, for which he had no preparation, to cover the Salt March. Flying for seven continuous days, he reached India and reported on events related to the Salt March, but never met Gandhi in his few months in India. The government of India censored his cables and did their best to keep him from Gandhi. He was the only foreign correspondent who covered the Gandhian demonstration at the Dharasana salt works about 150 miles north of Bombay.

More than 2,000 khadi-clad demonstrators advanced toward the salt deposits. Miller recounted what happened:

Suddenly...scores of native police rushed upon the advancing marchers and rained blows on their heads with their steel-shod 'lathis'. Not one of the marchers even raised an arm to fend off the blows. They went down like tenpins. From where I stood I heard the sickening whacks of the

clubs on unprotected skulls...Those struck down fell sprawling, unconscious or writhing in pain with fractured skulls or broken shoulders. In two or three minutes the ground was quilted with bodies.⁵¹

The government of India tried to stop his despatches, but some got through for Miller had "discovered a hole in the censorship."⁵² He continued, "My story of the beatings at Dharasana caused a sensation when it appeared in the 1,350 newspapers served by the United Press throughout the world."⁵³ Then it was read into the Congressional Record in Washington and printed as a pamphlet by Gandhi backers in the US. This story of brutality by officers of the raj against unarmed and fearless demonstrators struck a counterblow to the negative views of such as Katherine Mayo about India and called into question her portrayal of a benevolent raj.

Miller sympathised with Gandhi and other anti-imperialist movements. His accurate and moving reporting in India gained him interviews with Gandhi in London during the Mahatma's 1931 visit. Miller was a devoted fan of Henry David Thoreau and happened to ask Gandhi if he had heard of the American writer. Gandhi's "eyes brightened and he chuckled."⁵⁴ Then Gandhi recounted how he had read Thoreau in South Africa and how it had been a formative influence for him. Miller gave his overview:

From long reading of Thoreau I am convinced that his philosophical conceptions emanated largely from Indian literature. In Walden he repeatedly mentions the Vedas and other Hindu literature and once says: "I...who loved so well the philosophy of India..." It would seem that Gandhi received back from America what was fundamentally the philosophy of India after it had been distilled and crystallised in the mind of Thoreau. This perhaps explains why the Hindu mentality so readily accepted his ideas.⁵⁵

Miller had met all the leaders of Europe and America, but found Gandhi "the most fascinating and inscrutable" of all the notable figures he had met.⁵⁶ He wrote a tender and acute description of Gandhi as part of his UP despatches. But it was the news from Dharasana that made the words of Miller and the path of non-violent resistance world famous. Thus Gandhi, almost unknown outside India a decade before, became *Time* magazine's Man of the Year for 1931.

William Shirer, famous for his works on the Third Reich and the fall of the Third

Republic, was a 27-year-old correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune* when he was assigned to India in 1930 and met Gandhi on February 22, 1931. Shirer reported from India and then from England on Gandhi, but waited nearly half a century to write a full account of his interaction with Gandhi and the importance of the Mahatma in his own life.⁵⁷ Shirer met Gandhi often and became one of the foreign reporters whom Gandhi trusted and valued because, as has been already noted, Gandhi placed considerable importance upon the positive value that American public opinion could play in the Indian freedom struggle.

Shirer, like Miller, was more sympathetic to the nationalists led by Gandhi than to the raj. Of the British, he wrote, "Ruling India brought out the worst in them."⁵⁸ He began to know Gandhi and India, but missed Europe where he felt more comfortable and was able to have himself recalled. But he was told that he was to pick up the Gandhi story when the Mahatma arrived in Europe, in 1931. This Shirer did, covering his every move from Marseilles to London and back. Gandhi was pleased to see him because Shirer had, said Gandhi, reported his words "truthfully" even when he did not understand them.⁵⁹

Shirer recounts in his memoir how Gandhi both courted the British public and spoke bluntly, but charmingly to them.⁶⁰ He thought Gandhi's opening speech to the Round Table Conference one of the greatest he had heard and noted that not all great men rise to the occasion, but Gandhi had done so. In the earlier part of his British visit, Gandhi was optimistic, even as Shirer realised that the rulers of India would never grant what Gandhi wanted, certainly not in 1931. Then, as Gandhi felt the stark opposition of the British to any serious concessions and also the opposition of Muslims and untouchables from India, he began to grow weary and discouraged. Shirer noted that Gandhi had a little of what the journalist described as the 'banian' spirit in him as he talked, argued, listened. Though Gandhi was to Shirer the most remarkable man whom he had met, he was still disturbed by the fusion of religion and politics that Gandhi had made.⁶¹

Some of the American writers who covered Gandhi became more powerfully involved than simply reporting the news. Shirer wrote:

Gandhi was my greatest teacher, not only by what he said and wrote and did, but by

the example he set...what did he teach me? I suppose the greatest single thing was to seek the Truth, to shun hypocrisy and falseness and glibness, to try to be truthful to oneself as well as to others, to be sceptical of the value of most of life's prizes, especially the material ones, to cultivate an inner strength, to be tolerant of others, of their acts and beliefs, however much they jarred you, but not tolerant of your own faults.⁶²

Shirer detailed other things he learned from Gandhi about life and religion, and concluded, "I count the days with Gandhi the most fruitful of my life. No other experience was as inspiring and as meaningful and as lasting... What I had got from Gandhi helped me to survive."⁶³

Like Miller, Shirer had to fight through British censorship – open or covert – to report what he saw as the truth about Gandhi and the British. Both helped to give Americans first-hand, vividly written pictures of what was transpiring in India and Britain in the pre-television era. What they reported was widely circulated.

In 1931, deciding that he would not visit America, Gandhi agreed, nonetheless, to make a radio broadcast to the US. This was arranged by the Columbia Broadcasting System and took place on September 13, 1931. It was Gandhi's very first radio address and he spoke without great preparation, but with lucidity, keeping his foreign audience in mind. He said in part:

If India is to revive the glory of her ancient past, she can only do so when she attains her freedom. The reason for the struggle having drawn the attention of the world...[lies] in the fact that the means adopted by us...are unique...they are purely and simply truth and non-violence....We feel that the law that governs brute creation is not the law that should guide the human race...the world is sick unto death of blood-spilling. The world is seeking a way out, and I flatter myself with the belief that perhaps it will be the privilege of the ancient land of India to show the way out to the starving world.⁶⁴

Gandhi went on to talk of self-suffering and the blemishes on India's record which she must correct: untouchability and Hindu-Muslim antipathy. He closed with a plea for assistance for the poor peasants of India. "May I not, then, on behalf of these semi-starved millions, appeal to the conscience of the world to come to the rescue of a people dying to regain its liberty?"⁶⁵ The talk was heard by many and then printed in newspapers across

the US. In the years that followed, Gandhi said that he received more communications from America than from any place outside of India. The flow of visitors and journalists continued until the end of his life.

For a few years following the early 1930s, especially after his fast against separate electorates for untouchables, Gandhi was out of the limelight. Then Indian politics was alive once more in the late 1930s. Among the American writers who came to see Gandhi and India was John Gunther, formerly a correspondent for the *Chicago Daily News*, who had found a new career as the author of series of "inside" books. He devoted nearly a quarter of *Inside Asia*, published in 1939, to India, the raj, the Congress, and Gandhi.

Inside Asia roughly alternates portraits of important leaders with chapters giving general information on the geography, social groups, and recent politics of the different areas of Asia from Japan to Iran. Each chapter is filled with precise information gathered from background works, current reports, interviews, and observations. The author tried hard to achieve detachment particularly in such a case as India, where vital American interests were not involved. Gunther's aim was to have Americans understand, grasp the issues of contemporary Asia as he understood them and in their appropriate contexts. The writing is crisp and functional, but has some pungency. There is also a firm intelligence and astute judgment at work. For example, this is how Gunther begins his portrait of Gandhi:

Mr Gandhi, who is an incredible combination of Jesus Christ, Tammany Hall, and your father, is the greatest Indian since Buddha. Like Buddha, he will be worshipped as a god when he dies...

No more difficult or enigmatic character can easily be conceived. He is a slippery fellow. I mean no disrespect. But consider some of the contradictions, some of the puzzling points of contrast in his career and character. This man who is at once a saint and a politician, a prophet and a superb opportunist, defies ordinary categories.⁶⁶

Gunther followed this introduction with a careful exploration of some of the contradictions, for example, Gandhi's attitude towards the untouchables. "Mr Gandhi devotes the largest share of his energy nowadays to uplifting the Untouchables, but he resisted with his life an attempt to remove Untouchability from Hinduism..."

He adores the Untouchables, and would do anything for them – except remove them from Hinduism, which makes them what they are.”⁶⁷

Drawing mostly on Gandhi’s autobiography, Gunther sympathetically recounted Gandhi’s life history, his years in South Africa, his growing political interest and influence, and his return to India. He underscored the ‘sexual motif’ in Gandhi’s life and called him a “supreme egotist” which Gunther related to Gandhi’s attitude to god.⁶⁸ Gandhi’s use of khadi and his “invention of satyagraha he cited as examples of his “astute political sense.”⁶⁹ After describing the Salt March as one of the remarkable events in modern history, Gunther went on to explain why at present (1937-38) Gandhi and the Congress were largely cooperating with the government of India. A description of Gandhi’s daily round of life in his ashram probably drew upon a visit and was followed by a more personal and political description of Gandhi’s world. He called the Gandhi of early 1939 a “force for moderation in Indian politics”⁷⁰ unlike the extremist and instigator of violence that British officials and American Anglophiles found him. It is a sound, fair, accurate, and friendly word picture. Gunther, unlike Mayo and Kendall, had no axe to grind, and unlike Miller and Shirer, he had no striking event – witnessed at first-hand – to describe. However, this balanced account of Gandhi and India was a significant part of Gunther’s best-selling book and was probably read by many Americans.⁷¹

Before the year of *Inside Asia’s* publication, 1939, was over most of Europe and India were involved in the second world war. This changed all the equations of British and Indian politics and placed the relationships of Gandhi and Americans in a new and different context. From 1939 to 1941, though the draft and Lend Lease were in place, America was not at war and it was still, hopefully for most, a distant conflagration in which Americans would not be called upon to fight and die. But once Britain and Germany were at war, the viceroy declared war on behalf of India and the Congress ministries resigned. Gandhi and his Congress colleagues moved slowly towards confrontation with the raj because they abhorred fascism, for the most part, and knew that London was being bombed by 1940. Gandhi did not like to take advantage of an opponent under stress. So Congress members undertook individual satyagraha in 1940 and a

few were arrested, but this was not a great challenge to the raj.

Then came the Japanese attacks at Pearl Harbour and in south-east Asia on December 7 and 8, 1941 and the following events of 1942. These not only brought the US into the war, but brought tens of thousands of American troops to India, which served as a base camp for the India-China-Burma and south-east Asia theatres of war. An American technical mission was also sent to India and the government of India set up an American relations department. It also brought renewed concern by some Americans about nationalist India’s and Gandhi’s stance on the war. President Franklin D Roosevelt was one of these concerned Americans and he tried to influence Churchill to make concessions to nationalist India which would bring whole-hearted backing by the Congress of the war effort.⁷²

With the coming and going of American troops, officers, and officials, there also followed, of course, journalists. Among these only two will be considered here: Louis Fischer and Edgar Snow, chosen because they were fine journalists, but also because of their contrasting views of Gandhi. Louis Fischer had spent many years in Europe, including 14 years in the Soviet Union, as a correspondent. For some time enamoured, then gradually disillusioned with the Soviet Union, Fischer came to Gandhi well recommended by Jawaharlal Nehru, whom he had met some years before in Europe. Fischer spent a week, June 3-10, 1942, at Gandhi’s ashram and wrote a detailed account of that visit, *A Week with Gandhi*. He visited Gandhi again in 1946 and after Gandhi’s death did intensive research in India and elsewhere, which he used in his excellent biography of Gandhi, published in 1950, and a short popular version of the biography, published in 1954.

Fischer visited Gandhi in June 1942 at a crucial moment: it was just after the failure of the Cripps Mission and just before the August uprising. Following in the footsteps of Gandhi’s Boswell, Mahadev Desai, Fischer tried to record the entire dialogue of every conversation he had with Gandhi, even their bantering at mealtime. At the end of his week’s diary, Fischer gave an overall impression of Gandhi:

Part of the pleasure of intimate intellectual contact with Gandhi is that he really opens his mind and allows the interviewer to see how the machine inside works...He gives immediate expression to each step in his thinking...He did not talk at me; he talked

to me...when I asked Gandhi something I felt that I had started a creative process...If you strike right with Gandhi you open a new pocket of thought. An interview with him is a voyage of discovery, and he himself is sometime surprised at the things he says...That is why I learned so much from Gandhi and so much about Gandhi... Gandhi sometimes takes delight in expounding ideas which are impractical anachronisms...He is aware that he cannot turn back the clock. He cannot abolish the automobile. But he can make fun of it.⁷³

Overcoming the physical discomforts of Gandhi’s central India ashram, Fischer here and elsewhere expressed the pleasure and liveliness he found in and with Gandhi. He delighted in conversation with Gandhi, who treated him as an equal and asked for his opinions of Hitler, Stalin, Eleanor Roosevelt, and America.

The most important matter to Gandhi at the time of Fischer’s visit was the immediate exit of the British. Fischer, like Shirer, Gunther, and Edgar Snow, was concerned about Allied victory in the war against the Axis powers. Shirer and Snow both wrote – as did others – that Gandhi had no accurate idea of the evils of fascism. The exchanges with Fischer showed that though Gandhi hated war, he certainly wanted the Allies to win. But like most Americans of the second world war period, Fischer’s dialogue with Gandhi was both an effort to understand the Mahatma and an exercise in persuasion. These Americans wanted Gandhi, the Congress, and nationalist India to stand with the Allies against what the latter thought was the threat of worldwide barbarity and darkness if the Axis won. Nehru, who joined Fischer at Gandhi’s ashram during that June 1942 week, felt this Allied concern more strongly than did Gandhi.

But Nehru, like Gandhi, wanted India’s freedom as part of any war-time participation in the struggle against fascism. For many Indians, British rule was as bad as any fascism they learned about only from the press. Few Indians knew of Nazi or Japanese cruelties first-hand. They did know of Jallianwallah Bagh and British sins by direct experience. Gandhi said to Fischer, “I do not wish to humiliate the British. But the British must go. I do not say that the British are worse than the Japanese...But I do not wish to exchange one master for another.”⁷⁴ Fischer pushed Gandhi to explain what he meant by his statement that the British should depart and leave India to god. Did Gandhi want the Japanese to walk in and take over

India? Gandhi said, "No, Britain and America, and other countries too, can keep their armies here and use Indian territory as a base for military operations. I do not wish Japan to win the war. I do not want the Axis to win. But I am sure that Britain cannot win unless the Indian people become free."⁷⁵

Fischer was not done. He wanted an even more clear-cut statement of support for the Allied cause. 'I think', said Fischer, "the war has to be fought and won. I see complete darkness for the world if the Axis wins. I think we have a chance for a better world if we win."⁷⁶ But Gandhi did not come around. Indian freedom was his priority. He could not put another world-shaking cause first. Fischer talked to Gandhi and Nehru about an impending civil disobedience movement and wondered how it would affect the war effort of the Allies. They made it clear to him that Britain had to make some serious concessions to Indian nationalism or, war or no war, they would foment trouble.

Before he left the ashram, Fischer was made into an envoy to the viceroy and to president Roosevelt. A few weeks later the latter enterprise was formalised and Gandhi sent Fischer a letter to deliver to the American president. Dated July 1, 1942, and addressed 'Dear Friend', Gandhi told Roosevelt of his ties to America and what he had learned from Thoreau. Then he wrote:

Of Great Britain I need say nothing beyond mentioning that in spite of my intense dislike of British rule, I have numerous friends in England whom I love as dearly as I love my own people...I have nothing but good wishes for your country and Great Britain. You will therefore accept my word that my present proposal, that the British should unreservedly and without reference to the wishes of the people of India immediately withdraw their rule, is prompted by the friendliest intention. I would like to turn into good will the ill will...and thus enable the millions of India to play their part in the present war....I venture to think that the Allied declaration that the Allies are fighting to make the world safe for the freedom of the individual and for democracy sounds hollow, so long as India, for that matter Africa are exploited by Great Britain, and America has the Negro problem in her own home.⁷⁷

By his end-run around the British Indian postal service and for his sympathies with nationalist India as well as for anti-imperialist speeches he made upon his return to the US, Fischer earned the ire of the raj,

of the British government in London and its embassy in Washington. But he had come close to Gandhi and rewarded Gandhi's confidence in him and hospitality by writing one of the finest biographies ever written of Gandhi.

Edgar Snow, another of America's finest foreign correspondents, visited India several times and met Gandhi in 1930 and 1942. He was in India in January 1948 and wrote one of the most moving accounts of Gandhi's assassination. But Snow was a China man: he liked and respected the Chinese, he served to bring the Chinese communist movement to the attention of the world with his famous book, *Red Star over China*. Then he became a regular correspondent for the *Saturday Evening Post*, with a large readership. India and Indians, however, did not inspire the same respect in him and he found Gandhi a cranky and boring old man. The fluidity of mind that Fischer admired, Snow found ridiculous. Only in Jawaharlal Nehru and a few other cosmopolitan leaders of the Congress did Snow find admirable qualities.

As Fischer had come to India in the critical period just before the August Resolution and then revolt, so Snow, too, was there and even closer to the culminating moment. As Fischer lived with Gandhi and came close to him, Snow lived near the other top Congress leaders at the time of an important working committee meeting in July 1942, and spent long evenings chatting and arguing with Nehru, Azad, Sarojini Naidu, and Mr and Mrs Asaf Ali.⁷⁸

Snow interviewed many Indians and was able to describe even the rigid and reactionary viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, with some compassion. However, Gandhi was his bete noire. Although he knew that many people including many Americans thought Gandhi a great man, he had difficulty finding positive things to say about Gandhi and wrote in *People on Our Side*, published in 1944:

No political party carrying such enormous national responsibility was ever afflicted with a spokesman given to utterances so likely to bewilder and antagonise the world as was Congress under Gandhi the Mahatma...Gandhi exhibited the vagaries his own efforts to make up his mind as candidly as a housewife hangs out her weekly wash....yet...Gandhi still personified and articulated...the leadership of India to the masses. His contradictions did not bother them. A lot of the incomprehensible things he said were addressed to the mystical Indian soul which intuitively understood

him. And when he spoke 'logically' he was talking for the Indian bourgeoisie, which supported him both morally and financially. Nobody else in India could play this dual role of saint for the masses and champion of big business, which was the secret of Gandhi's power. With all his vacillation he never deviated from his fundamental objective, which was to keep Indian attention focused on the British as their main enemy. He did not want the movement to be side-tracked by the red herring of fascism versus democracy.⁷⁹

Snow was more a man of the international left, at least in his sympathies, than most of the American correspondents, and a simple Marxist analysis was part of his repertoire. Gandhi was linked to his big business patrons and 'disciples' more directly in Snow's views than those of Miller, Shirer, or Fischer. And Gandhi's contradictory statements from day to day bothered him as they had not Fischer. Indeed, Fischer found Gandhi's fluidity of mind, his openness to show himself in the process of making up his mind wholly admirable. To Snow, Gandhi's thought processes on display were a disaster and his account is intercut with some ridicule of 'the old man' whose day, he thought, had passed.

As an American completely devoted to the anti-fascist crusade, he also thought Gandhi naive about fascism and destructive of the Allied struggle with the Japanese and Germans. This led him to walk out on Gandhi in 1942, when the Mahatma had asked him to stay for a few moments of private conversation after a joint interview with several correspondents.⁸⁰ Snow did respect Nehru and learned of the intra-Congress arguments about the proposed civil disobedience movement in the summer of 1942. Snow believed that Nehru was stalling, hoping for American intervention and British concessions which would allow the Congress to rejoin the government and to support the Allies in the war. When such developments did not materialise, Nehru agreed to the August compromise resolution that led to the prompt imprisonment of all top Congress leaders including Gandhi and himself. Calling Gandhi 'the little Generalissimo', Snow wrote an account of Congress failures and the raj's repression for his American readers.⁸¹

Visiting India while the Congress was out of commission, Snow saw the Communist Party of India gathering strength and thought that Indian communists would

play a major role in India's near future. His antipathy to Gandhi led him to underestimate the power and tenaciousness of the Mahatma, but Snow did correctly surmise that the British had to go and soon. Hatred of the British for their racism and exploitation of India was widespread up and down Indian society.⁸²

As the war ended, elections were held in Britain bringing the Labour Party to power and the Congress leaders were released. Viceroy Wavell tried to move the constitutional process forward and elections were held in the winter of 1945-46. The Congress and the Muslim League gained most of the seats and communal relations deteriorated in Calcutta, in eastern Bengal, and throughout northern India. Gandhi was a crucial player in the negotiations that were carried on by Wavell and then in 1947 by the last British viceroy, Lord Mountbatten.

Americans were interested in the great drama being played out in India and many correspondents were on hand. One who spent a good deal of time in India from 1946 to 1948 was photographer-writer Margaret Bourke-White, whom Gandhi liked and jokingly called 'my torturer'.⁸³ In her book, *Interview with India*, Bourke-White wanted to show that the great man whom she admired was also a human being. She thought that the west knew only a distant, saintly Mahatma. She was an incomparable photographer, searching interviewer, and sensitive writer. Where Snow had ridiculed Gandhi and at one point compared him to the rear end of a horse, Bourke-White was always gentle and respectful, and at the same time she carefully delineated what she saw as Gandhi's talents and his major failings.

Her most vivid chapters on Gandhi were about his final fast in January 1948 and then an interview the day of his assassination. She learned that like herself Gandhi was a multi-talented communicator. Gandhi, she wrote, "...in spite of his prejudices against the machine age, was as quick as any other political leader to take advantage of modern methods of communication. Shortly after Independence Day he began the practice of having his nightly prayer speech broadcast to the nation...over All-India Radio."⁸⁴ She had cultivated numerous contacts and friendships during her nearly two years in India, and Nehru and several of those closest to Gandhi were in her circle. So she had their perspectives on Gandhi's fast as well as making her own observations. She broadcast and wrote them

for Americans and took her photographs for *Life* and for her forthcoming book. She wrote, "...I saw the power and courage with which he led the way in the midst of chaos...Gandhi risked his life to stem the destructive fury of religious hatreds..."⁸⁵

In addition to exercising her journalistic skills to show the greatness of Gandhi near the end of his life, she also explored some of his shortcomings relentlessly. Two topics especially gnawed at her: Gandhi's idea of trusteeship, particularly with reference with some of India's wealthiest men like Gandhi's New Delhi host, G D Birla, and the plight of the untouchables. She felt that Gandhi preached the idea of trusteeship, but did not check up how it worked in practice. And Gandhi talked of his love of the untouchables, but did not really see how they lived and how some of these rich trustees treated them. She questioned both Gandhi and Birla about their 32-year-long friendship and about trusteeship. She toured factories, workplaces, and living quarters where many untouchables were to be found. Then she wrote:

It would have been easy at some time during those 32 years for Gandhi to walk a short way, just a few miles, and see for himself whether the fulfilment of the trust measured up to his faith in the trustee – or, what was more important, to his faith in the trusteeship principle. That he did not look, or if he looked that he did not correlate what he saw with the principle, was an attitude which one of my Indian friends referred to as 'the blind eye'. This outlook was not peculiar to Gandhi..It is only that it was more startling to meet it in Gandhi because of the down-to-earth quality of his leadership and because of his love of truth...The 'blind eye' failed to flash that image of conditions in the bustees, where his beloved harijans and other working-men lived in squalor...because of a deeply rooted and instinctive attitude. It was not merely to protect his friend Birla...and owners of wealth. It was to protect the old order: a simple, pre-machine age order whose passing he would not admit.

Gandhi had no ambition to reshape the structure of society. He wanted to reshape the individual human heart. He cared very deeply about bringing out the best in every man.⁸⁶

As she pressed Gandhi about trusteeship and how well Birla had fulfilled this ideal, she found that at a certain point Gandhi shut the curtain. He did not want to talk about it any longer.

Bourke-White went on to another subject that bothered her and about which she wanted Gandhi's views: the atomic bomb.

He said that of course he believed that America should stop making the bomb. She went on:

I began speaking of the weight with our new and terrible atomic knowledge hangs over us...Holding in our uncertain hands the key to the ultimate in violence, we might draw some guidance, I hoped, from the apostle of non-violence...I became aware of a change in my attitude toward Gandhi...I felt in the presence of a new and greater Gandhi.

It took me the greater part of two years to respond to the undeniable greatness of this man whom millions of devoted Indians accepted as *bapu* – father. Perhaps it was harder for me, an American, to hurdle his antiquated ideas on the machine age... because to me the machine has always been a glorious thing... On our own side of the globe, our world seemed in danger of dissolving, and I felt this steady voice might have something to say to us.⁸⁷

She asked how Gandhi would meet the atomic bomb. "...by prayerful action", he answered.⁸⁸ A few more words were exchanged and they said their goodbyes. Scarcely was Bourke-White down the street a few blocks from Birla House, when she learned that Gandhi had been shot. She hurriedly returned and witnessed the aftermath of the assassination and Gandhi's funeral. She probably conducted the last interview with Mahatma Gandhi before the light went out.

Edgar Snow was also there and he had begun to reconsider his harsh view of Gandhi. In the *Saturday Evening Post*, Snow wrote, in part:

...Gandhi...could be seen lying with a face serene and peaceful. But each man mourned for something in himself left without a friend, a personal sorrow, as if fate had seized an intimate treasure that one had always assumed would be there...

This small man, so full of a large love of men, extended beyond India and beyond time...There was a mirror in the Mahatma in which everyone could see the best in himself, and when the mirror broke, it seemed that the thing in oneself might be fled forever.⁸⁹

In the last months of Gandhi's life another famed American correspondent, Vincent Sheean, had a premonition of Gandhi's death. Sheean said to his friend William Shirer, "I've got to go out to India and see him before he is gone. There is something he alone can teach me about the meaning, purpose and significance of life." Shirer had been telling Sheean of how important Gandhi was in his own life for many years,

but Sheean resisted. The latter said, "I wasn't ready. Now I think I am. But I have to get it from Gandhi himself."⁹⁰ Sheean took his time, but came to India and had two meetings with Gandhi.⁹¹ The third was scheduled for the hour after Gandhi's prayer meeting on January 30, 1948.

Drawing on his two meetings with Gandhi, his extraordinary experiences at the funeral ceremony in Delhi and the immersion of ashes at Allahabad, Sheean began to dig more deeply into Indian culture and Gandhi's life. In 1949, he published, *Lead, Kindly Light*, the fruit of his investigations of and experiences in India. It is beautifully written and a searching inquiry into Gandhi's life and religious understanding, Sheean's interviews with Gandhi, and his effort to come to terms with and use Gandhi's truth for himself. Like Sheean's earlier and widely read, *Personal History*, it combines observation, introspection, and reflection upon texts and personal experience. It is more sympathetic to Indian cultural traditions and more adulatory towards Gandhi than other American journalistic books about India.

Sheean recounted his conversations with Gandhi and the impact upon him, but also tried to present an overview of the central teachings of Hinduism and Indian culture, of Gandhi's life, and of the modern precursors of Gandhi, religious and political. Whereas Louis Fischer wrote a fine biography of Gandhi and Shirer a moving memoir, Sheean wanted more from Indian culture for himself than either of these two. He was a spiritual seeker and a student. Although he was a first-rate journalist, at that time on assignment for *Holiday* magazine, what he wanted was a truth or truths to live by. Western materialism, industrialism, violence (even in a good cause), and positivism had become almost meaningless to him. At his Vermont retreat in 1947, he consulted those he called his "three Jewish doctors" – Marx, Freud, and Einstein – but was dissatisfied and believed only Gandhi could help him.⁹²

In India he combined the reporter, the serious student, and the truth-seeker. He found correspondences between ancient Greek and Indian thought which provided some meaningful guidance. However, Gandhi was the guru he had sought and they communicated with few words, Sheean believed. Gandhi, through the few brief moments he had spent with Sheean, brought him to a realisation of

God that Sheean had fought off all his life. Further:

The principal things he communicated to me was the necessity of the renunciation of the world. He was at great pains to show that the fruits of action are not forbidden and that the world could be enjoyed, providing it is first renounced. This means, of course, that a man must at all times be ready to give his life for the truth. It involves a great decision, which, once made, can never be retracted....what he had communicated to me – *renounce the world and receive it back again as the gift of god* – was not Christian, but Hindu...the litany of Gandhi's truth, as it had occurred to me innumerable times beside his cremation platform, came back with the force of prayer:

"Kuruksheetra is in the heart of man."
*And there let it remain. And there let it remain.*⁹³

Anticipating Gandhi's death for months beforehand and then standing nearby as it happened – soon after his intense and powerful spiritual meetings with Gandhi – sent Sheean into shock. He became dizzy and developed blisters and wandered around the garden of Birla House for hours after the event. Days later he was unsure of his bearings. Then he began to attend daily prayer meetings at the riverside with some of those close to Gandhi. He obtained a ticket on the special train carrying a part of Gandhi's ashes to Allahabad and was present at the immersion with, he thought, about four million others on the shore and in the river at the sacred confluence. He had what he called 'darshan' and then made a visit to Benares. After that he went to stay with friends, Gertrude Emerson and Boshi Sen, in Almora.

Recovering from the shock, he tried to understand what he had learned and where he was to go. Besides those spiritual truths just mentioned, he reviewed Gandhi's life as that of a 'karmayogin' – as prescribed in the *Bhagavad Gita* – and came to the conclusion that Gandhi's main contribution to the world was the idea and example of satyagraha. He wondered whether it was a universally applicable concept as Richard Gregg and others argued. Sheean had his doubts and thought individuals in the west might follow it, but not as a concerted movement.⁹⁴ Sheean published his book on Gandhi and his experiences in 1949. In the year of Gandhi's death, Gandhi's own autobiography, *My Experiments with Truth*, was published in book form in the US for the first time and was a best-seller. In 1950, Fischer's fine and full biography

of Gandhi was published along with Margaret Bourke-White's superb portrait of India and Gandhi. No one could know or expect that vital experiments in satyagraha in America – helped if not guided by Gandhi's teachings – were soon to follow.

VII

Americans' dialogues with Gandhi did not cease with his death. Although direct contact was no longer available, the teachings of Gandhi, living Gandhians in India, and blendings of Gandhian and western concepts and methods of non-violent resistance were there to experiment with. The activist and non-violent tradition in America entered a period of efflorescence from the mid-1950s to the late 1960s. Those who had been discussing non-violent methods for years now put it into action, primarily for the equality of America's black minority, but also to ban the bomb, bring women and other oppressed groups up to the rights and privileges of white, male America. A J Muste, James Farmer, Rosa Parks, Bayard Rustin, Dorothy Day, Dave Dellinger were among those leading some of these struggles, and many less famous but brave souls participated, and even organised them. But a young black minister, Martin Luther King, Jr, who had begun to read Gandhi as a graduate student, became the most important American non-violent activist. Like his Christian predecessors, John Haynes Holmes, Fred Fisher, and others who had known Gandhi, King blended Christ and Gandhi in his thinking and teaching. In *Stride toward Freedom*, an account of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, King wrote:

As the days unfolded...the inspiration of Mahatma Gandhi began to exert its influence. I had come to see early that the Christian doctrine of love operating through the Gandhian method of non-violence was one of the most potent weapons available to the Negro in his struggle for freedom...in the summer of 1957 the name of Mahatma Gandhi was well known in Montgomery. People who had never heard of the little brown saint of India were now saying his name with an air of familiarity. Non-violent resistance had emerged as the technique of the movement...⁹⁵

Old texts were refound; for example, King wrote the introduction to a 1959 revised edition of Richard Gregg's 1934 work, *The Power of Non-Violence*. And

new ones were written; for example, Joan V Bondurant published *The Conquest of Violence* in 1958. Both were excellent guides to those who wished for an introduction to Gandhian concepts and methods. As this activist period of American history unfolded, Gandhi's teachings penetrated further and deeper into American consciousness.⁹⁶

Gandhi himself had utilised both Indian and Christian ideas of non-violence, but fashioned his own arsenal of concepts and practical techniques of action. Many westerners who encountered Gandhi drew in different proportions upon western and Indian traditions, ideas, and arguments. Gandhi helped to invigorate the idea of non-violent resistance in the west and to politicise it as he had done in India. Though he did not go to America, he met and corresponded with many Americans. He persuaded or failed to persuade on a variety of issues of mutual concern. Although he made some converts to his ideas for non-violent action, he did not succeed in others. Some of the arguments, for example, over birth control with Margaret Sanger, and over Indian participation in second world war with American journalists, turned into stalemates.

But what Gandhi had done for America was to show that satyagraha or 'soul-force' had a great potentiality, even in a society addicted to violence. He helped to awaken some of the best in American traditions and by his explicit connection to Christ and Thoreau, he made some Americans feel that these teachings were not so foreign. His connection to America called forth many selfless and courageous non-violent activists and some powerful and sensitive American writing along the way. **END**

Notes

1 See, for example, the valuable works of C Seshachari, *Gandhi and the American Scene*. Bombay: Nachiketa, 1969; Sudharsan Kapur, *Raising Up a Prophet; The Afro-American Encounter with Gandhi*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992; Lloyd I Rudolph, 'Gandhi in the Mind of America' in Sulochana Raghavan and Nathan Glazer (eds), *Conflicting Images: India and the US*, Glen Dale, Maryland: Riverdale, 1990, 143-78; Charles Chatfield, *The Americanisation of Gandhi: Images of the Mahatma*. NY, Garland, 1976; Harold R Isaacs, *Scratches on Our Minds: American Views of China and India*. White Plains: M E Sharpe, 1980. I have also made use of a collection on 'Gandhi and

America' made by Enuga Reddy which draws upon a variety of published sources, and Blanche Watson, compiler, *Gandhi and Non-Violent Resistance: Gleanings from the American Press*. Chennai: Ganesh and C, 1923. The work and comments of Dennis Dalton have also helped me through this enterprise. See his fine essays on Gandhi, some of which connect him to America in *Mahatma Gandhi: Non-violent Power in Action*. NY: Columbia U Press, 1993. I am trying to draw upon all of these and go into territories not fully charted by any of them, but still consider this essay a work in progress.

2 On Gandhi's own awareness of himself as propagandist and its importance, see M K Gandhi, *Collected Works*, Government of India, Publications Division, New Delhi, Vol 46, 63-66, interview published in *The Hindu*, May 5, 1931. Gandhi's *Collected Works* were published in 100 volumes including various indices, 1958-1992. Hereafter they will be cited simply as Gandhi, *Works*, with the volume and page numbers. Also see on the various propaganda wars taking place: Milton Israel, *Communications and Power: Propaganda and the Press in the Indian Nationalist Struggle, 1920-1947*, Cambridge U Press, Cambridge, 1994; Manoranjan Jha, *Civil Disobedience and After: The American Reactions to Political Developments in India during 1930-35*, Meenakshi Prakashan, Meerut, 1973; M S Venkataramani and B K Shrivastava, *Roosevelt Gandhi and Churchill: America and the Last Phase of India's Freedom Struggle*, Radiant, New Delhi, 1983. There are, in addition, numerous government files which touch on these matters, especially the government of India, Information Department, India Office Library, London, and Government of India, Home Department, and also Foreign and Political Department, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

3 On Andrews' visit, see Hugh Tinker, *The Ordeal of Love*, CF Andrews and India, Oxford U Press, Delhi, 1979, 233-34.

4 For example, Gandhi, *Works*, V 48, 7.

5 See Sudharsan Kapur, *Raising Up a Prophet*, 72ff.

6 Gary R Hess, *Sam Higginbottom of Allahabad*, University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville, 1967, 39. Gandhi had met some Americans in South Africa, but it is not clear that any became a good friend. See Mohandas K Gandhi, *My Experiments with Truth*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1957, 118. Gandhi's autobiography was first published in the US serially in *Unity* in the late 1920s and in book form in 1948.

7 See Satyanand Stokes, *National Self-Realisation*, Rubicon, New Delhi, 1977. Also see Tinker, *Ordeal of Love*, 172; and Richard B Gregg, *The Power of Non-Violence*, JB Lippincott, Philadelphia, 1934, 28-30.

8 See John Haynes Holmes, *My Gandhi*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1954 and his autobiography, *I Speak for Myself*, Harper, NY, 1959. I have also consulted Holmes' papers which are in the Library of Congress, Washington, DC, but here I can only briefly touch on Holmes and will deal with him much more fully at a later time.

9 Holmes, *My Gandhi*, 9.

10 Jabez T Sunderland, *India in Bondage: Her Right to Freedom*, R Chatterjee, Calcutta, 1929, 2nd ed.

11 Frederick B Fisher, *That Strange Little Brown Man Gandhi*, Ray Long and Richard Smith, NY, 1932, 109. On the relationship of Fisher and Gandhi, also see Welthy Honsinger Fisher, *Frederick Bohn Fisher: World Citizen*, Macmillan, NY, 1944, 65-68, 125-34.

12 See E Stanley Jones, *The Christ of the Indian Road*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1925.

13 Jones, *Christ of the Indian Road*, 86.

14 See Gandhi's exchanges with John R Mott, March 21, 1929 in *Works*, Vol 40, 57-61 and December 19 and 26, 1936 in *Works*, Vol 64, 33-41.

15 See Kapur, *Raising Up a Prophet*, 134; Hugh Tinker, 'The India Conciliation Group, 1931-1950: Dilemmas of the Mediator', *The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, London, Vol XIV, No 3, November, 1976, 224-241; Suhash Chakravarty, *The Raj Syndrome*, Penguin, New Delhi, 1991, (rev ed), 165ff; Marjorie Sykes, *Quakers in India*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1980; Reginald Reynolds, *A Quest for Gandhi*, Garden City, Doubleday, NY, 1952. Many of the papers of the India Conciliation Group are to found in Friends House, London. Comments of Rufus M Jones are to be found in his brief article, 'Mahatma Gandhi and Soul Force' in Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (ed), *Mahatma Gandhi*, Jaico, Bombay, 1956, 124-29.

16 Richard B Gregg published *Economics of Khaddar*, 1928; *Gandhiji's Satyagraha*, 1930; 'Gandhi versus Socialism', 1932; and his most famous work, *The Power of Non-Violence*, JB Lippincott, Philadelphia, 1934. A revised and shorter version of the last of these was published in 1959 and was an essential work for American non-violent activists in the Civil Rights movement.

17 Gandhi, *Works*, XXXIII, 461-62, from *Young India*, June 9, 1927.

18 Gregg, *The Power of Non-Violence*, 43.

19 See Krishnalal Shridharani, *War without Violence*, Harcourt, Brace, NY, 1939; Krishnalal Shridharani, *My India, My America*, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, NY, 1943; Kapur, *Raising Up a Prophet*, 121-22, on how *War without Violence*, became a text for James Farmer and other members of CORE.

20 For comments and bibliography on Niebuhr, see Seshachari, *Gandhi*, 125ff, and Rudolph, 'Gandhi', 154-58.

21 Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral*

- Society*, Charles Scriber's, NY, 1960 [1932], 244.
- 22 Hayim Greenberg, 'A Letter to Gandhi', 1937, and 'An Answer to Gandhi', 1939 and 'Gandhi', 1948 in *The Inner Eye*, Jewish Frontier Association, NY, 1953, Vol I, 157-61, 219-38.
- 23 See Gideon Shimoni, *Gandhi, Satyagraha and the Jews: A Formative Factor in India's Policy towards Israel*, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1977; Leonard A Gordon, 'Indian Nationalist Ideas about Palestine and Israel', *Jewish Social Studies*, XXXVII, Nos. 3-4, Summer-Fall 1975, 221-34.
- 24 Greenberg, 'Answer to Gandhi' in *Inner Eye*, I, 233.
- 25 See Gandhi, *Works*, Vol 62, 198-202.
- 26 Gandhi, *Works*, Vol 64, 221-25, 397-402.
- 27 For a thorough account of these visits and their aftermath, see Kapur, *Raising Up a Prophet*, 81ff.
- 28 See W E B DuBois, 'Doubts Gandhi Plan', *Amsterdam News*, March 13, 1943, reprinted in David Levering Lewis (ed), *WEB DuBois: A Reader*, Henry Holt, NY, 1995, 409-10.
- 29 See Kapur, *Raising Up a Prophet*, 101ff; Nat Hentoff, *Peace Agitator: The Story of A J Muste*, AJ Muste Institute, NY, 1982, 97ff; David Cortright, 'Gandhi's Influence on the US Peace Movement', *International Studies*, New Delhi (forthcoming).
- 30 On Margaret Sanger and India, see Ellen Chesler, *Woman of Valour: Margaret Sanger and the Birth Control Movement in America*, Anchor Doubleday, NY, 1993; and the excellent article by Barbara N Ramusack, 'Embattled Advocates: The Debate over Birth Control in India, 1920-40', *Journal of Women's History*, Vo 1, No 2, Fall 1989, 34-64; issues of *The Birth Control Review*, Margaret Sanger's journal; and comments by Gandhi and Mahadev Desai which will be cited below.
- 31 *The Birth Control Review*, September 1925, Vol IX, No 9.
- 32 *The Birth Control Review*, editorial, September 1925, Vol IX, No 9.
- 33 *The Birth Control Review*, December 1925, Vol IX, No 12.
- 34 For details, see Ramusack, 'Embattled Advocates', 47ff.
- 35 Mahadev Desai, 'Mrs Sanger and Birth Control', *Harijan*, January 25, 1936 in Gandhi, *Works*, Vol 62, 156.
- 36 Gandhi, *Works*, Vol 62, 157-58.
- 37 Desai, 'Mrs Sanger' in Gandhi, *Works*, Vol 62, 160.
- 38 Desai, 'Mrs Sanger's Letter', *Harijan*, February 22, 1936.
- 39 See Manoranjan Jha, *Katherine Mayo and India*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1971, for the contexts and story of her Indian adventures. The book, Katherine Mayo, *Mother India*, Harcourt, Brace, NY, 1927, provoked a cascade of responses, a few of which will be cited here. Mrinalini Sinha is preparing a study of the numerous responses and impact of the book.
- 40 Mayo, *Mother India*, 353-54.
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- 43 Gandhi, *Works*, Vol 34, 541ff.
- 44 Tagore, also angered, responded with a letter to *The Nation*, published January 4, 1928, reprinted in Dhan Gopal Mukerji, *A Son of Mother India Answers*, EP Dutton, NY, 1928, 105-08.
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- 46 Government of India, Information Department, L/I/1/1424, India Office Library, British Library, London.
- 47 Patricia Kendall, *Come with Me to India!* Charles Scribner's, NY, 1931, 330.
- 48 Kendall, *Come with Me*, 342.
- 49 Kendall, *Come with Me*, 338, 351, 352, 366.
- 50 Kendall, *Come with Me*, 369ff.
- 51 Webb Miller, *I Found No Peace*, Simon and Schuster, NY, 1936, 193.
- 52 Miller, *I Found No Peace*, 199.
- 53 Miller, *I Found No Peace*, 198.
- 54 Miller, *I Found No Peace*, 238.
- 55 Miller, *I Found No Peace*, 239-40.
- 56 Miller, *I Found No Peace*, 240.
- 57 William L Shirer, *Gandhi: A Memoir*, Simon and Schuster, NY, 1979.
- 58 Shirer, *Gandhi*, 151.
- 59 Shirer, *Gandhi*, 158.
- 60 All the details about Gandhi's visit to Britain are drawn from Shirer, *Gandhi*, 157ff.
- 61 Shirer, *Gandhi*, 242-44.
- 62 Shirer, *Gandhi*, 239.
- 63 Shirer, *Gandhi*, 244.
- 64 The text of Gandhi's talk is in Haridas T Muzumdar, *Gandhi vs the Empire*, Universal, NY, 1932, 166-70.
- 65 In Muzumdar, *Gandhi*, 170.
- 66 John Gunther, *Inside Asia*, Harper, NY, 1939, 344.
- 67 Gunther, *Inside Asia*, 345.
- 68 Gunther, *Inside Asia*, 348, 351.
- 69 Gunther, *Inside Asia*, 354.
- 70 Gunther, *Inside Asia*, 369.
- 71 On American best-sellers about Asia, see the excellent article by Daniel B Ramsdell, 'Asia Askew: US Best-Sellers on Asia, 1931-1980', *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Boulder, Colorado, Vol 15, No 4, 1983, 2-25.
- 72 On wartime politics, see Kenton J Clymer, *Quest for Freedom: The United States and India's Independence*, Columbia U Press, NY, 1995; and Venkataramani and Shrivastava, *Roosevelt, Gandhi and Churchill*, are among the best of many fine works on this subject.
- 73 Fischer, *A Week*, 116-18.
- 74 Fischer, *A Week*, 25.
- 75 Fischer, *A Week*, 32.
- 76 Fischer, *A Week*, 33.
- 77 Gandhi's letter to President Roosevelt is reprinted in Louis Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, Collier Books, NY, 1962 [1950], 526-27.
- 78 Edgar Snow, *People on Our Side*, Random House, NY, 1944, 46.
- 79 Snow, *People on Our Side*, 44-45.
- 80 See John Maxwell Hamilton, *Edgar Snow: A Biography*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1988, 137.
- 81 Snow, *People on Our Side*, 47-54.
- 82 Snow, *People on Our Side*, 50ff.
- 83 See Bourke-White, *Interview*. From earlier in his life, Gandhi became antipathetic to posed photographs and then to flashbulbs. Bourke-White, 'the torturer', often had to plead for permission to take the pictures she wanted. Some of her stunning photographs are to be found in this book and also in *Life* magazine in those years. Also see Margaret Bourke-White, *Portrait of Myself*, Simon and Schuster, NY, 1963, 272ff.
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- 89 Quoted in Shirer, *Gandhi*, 227, from *The Saturday Evening Post*, March 27, 1948.
- 90 Shirer, *Gandhi*, 226.
- 91 See Shirer, *Gandhi*, 226; and Vincent Sheean, *Lead, Kindly Light*, Random House, NY, 1949.
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- 93 Sheean, *Lead, Kindly Light*, 232-35.
- 94 Sheean, *Lead, Kindly Light*, 212ff.
- 95 In James M Washington (ed), *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr*, Harper, San Francisco, 1991, 447. On this period, also see the excellent studies by Maurice Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer...* Basic Books, NY, 1987, and Lawrence S Wittner, *Rebels against War*, Columbia U Press, NY, 1969.
- 96 See Joan V Bondurant, *The Conquest of Violence*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1965, (rev ed) [1958]. There were also excellent anthologies about non-violent resistance published during the Civil Rights era. These include: Staughton Lynd (ed), *Non-violence in America: A Documentary History*, Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis, 1966; Mulford Q Sibley (ed), *The Quiet Battle: Writings on the Theory and Practice of Non-violent Resistance*, Garden City, Anchor, NY, 1963; Arthur and Lila Weinberg (eds), *Instead of Violence*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1963. On King and the movement there are numerous excellent works. Among them are: David J Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*, Vintage, NY, 1988; Robert Weisbrot, *Freedom Bound: A History of America's Civil Rights Movement*, Plume, NY, 1991.