

The Mahatma Gandhi and South Africa

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THE years that Gandhi spent in South Africa have been admirably described by several scholars. This article traces the development of a philosophy which became uniquely identified with Gandhi, and then looks at his legacy in South Africa, especially his influence in the social, religious, and political spheres. How is it possible that the shadow of so apparently frail a figure was cast so widely over events during most of this century?

THE EARLY YEARS

The person later to be known as Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on 2 October 1869 in Porbandar in the region of Bombay. His first seven years were spent in the typical patrilineal Hindu *kutum*, or 'joint family' with uncles and cousins. In 1876 the nuclear family moved to Rajkot, where the father, Karamchand, had been appointed *dewan* (prime minister) to the local *rana* (prince).

As happened throughout the British colonial world, the young Mohan, as he was called, had to have a first or so-called 'school name' as well as that in which to be registered. It was at this time that Mohandas incorporated his father's name while referring back to their sub-caste of grocers (*gandhis*) for his last name. His school years were uneventful: 'He has a puny boy, and was self-conscious about his frail constitution. He was forced to do gymnastics and play cricket, but he had no aptitude for either'.¹ Instead he spent much time in taking long solitary walks. When Mohandas was about 12 his father decided that he should get married, and he was united with Kasturbai Makanji to whom he had been betrothed. Their early years, characterised by passion and emotional episodes, seem to have been typical of the relationship between newly-weds.

In 1887 Mohandas, now a 17-year-old student, travelled by train to Ahmedabad to sit for his matriculation examination. He had a halting command of the English language, and did not do well in his studies.

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¹ Ved Mehta, *Mahatma Gandhi and his Apostles* (New York, 1977), p. 76.

After a few months attending a local college, an uncle pointed out that there was only one way to assure his future in India under British rule, namely to qualify as a barrister-at-law. So Gandhi decided to travel to England where, in addition to classroom assignments and formal studies, he was exposed to a wide range of friends from different philosophical and religious backgrounds. In December 1890 Gandhi took and passed his final examination, but remained in London for six months before being called to the bar. In July 1891 he returned to Bombay to practise law.

THE CALL TO SOUTH AFRICA

Late in 1892 Gandhi received a letter from Durban. A Meman merchant representing the Porbunder branch of Dada Abdullah's firm was engaged in a law suit against a Transvaal merchant. The local traders were deficient in English and inexperienced in legal matters, and needed somebody to carry on the legal correspondence and represent them in the courts. For the struggling young Indian barrister the offered round-trip fare, expenses in South Africa, and £105 was too good to refuse.

The 24-year-old Gandhi arrived in Durban in May 1893 only to find that he had walked into a hornet's nest, and, as Bridglal Pachai told the South African Institute of Race Relations, 'he received his political baptism in South Africa'.² After more than 30 years of importing labourers to the sugar-cane fields of Natal there were three categories of Indians in the country: 'indentured' who were under a five-year labour contract; 'ex-indentured' who had chosen to remain for another five years; and 'passengers', mainly traders who had paid their own fare to South Africa. Some Indians in the latter two categories qualified for the vote and shared the franchise with Natal's white settlers. In April 1894, however, the Franchise Amendment Bill was introduced to that Province's first Legislative Assembly under Responsible Government, and this stated that 'no person belonging to Asiatic races not accustomed to the exercise of franchise rights under parliamentary institutions' could in future qualify for the vote.³

The following month Gandhi met a number of Indian merchants, the most vocal and active among the new arrivals, who realised that they needed to create pressure on the local electorate to have their views and commercial interests represented. They decided to establish

² Bridglal Pachai, *Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa* (Johannesburg, n.d.), p. 1.

³ Maureen Swan, *Gandhi: the South African experience* (Johannesburg, 1985), p. 45.

the Natal Indian Congress (f. on 22 August 1894), and supported Gandhi's idea of creating their own voice in the form of a newspaper – the *Indian Opinion* – which first appeared in June 1903.⁴ In keeping with Gandhi's emerging philosophy of withdrawal from urban comforts and non-violence it was also decided to locate a communal settlement at Phoenix, north of Durban, which became associated with Gandhi and his family for more than 50 years.

In 1896 Gandhi returned to Durban from a short visit to India, accompanied by Kasturbai and their two sons. One of these, Manilal, resided in Phoenix for decades, and was directly involved in the evolution of South African politics as he continued his father's non-violent policy of confronting the white régime. But who would have thought that a century later, in June 1996, a grandson of the Mahatma, Gopalkrishna Gandhi, would arrive in South Africa as High Commissioner for India? His father, Devdas, had been born in Durban in 1900.

POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT

Efforts were made by Gandhi and the Indian merchants to block discriminatory legislation by the Natal Parliament aimed at disfranchising Indians, and the next nine years witnessed reactions to the failure of their attempts and actions to mitigate the effects of laws passed in 1897, especially the Franchise Amendment and the Immigration Restriction Acts. It is fair to state that the Indians in South Africa at that time were primarily interested in their status as traders, and many lacked not only education but also political sophistication. Gandhi activated their political consciousness by regular comments in the *Indian Opinion*, and by drafting petitions to the Governments of Natal, India, and Britain. He was also in long-term negotiation with the Attorney General of Transvaal, Jan Smuts, first on behalf of Indians in that Province and later, after the establishment of the Union in 1910, on behalf of all South African Indians.

Given the fervour surrounding the creation of the Indian National Congress it is not surprising that local Indians were enthusiastic in their support. Thus 9,000 signed a petition submitted to the Natal Colonial Secretary in July 1894. Nothing on this scale had occurred before, nor was it repeated during the next two decades. This initial appeal, however, produced an unexpectedly negative reaction in Natal where

⁴ This was neither the first nor the only Indian newspaper in South Africa but it gave voice to Gandhi's ideas. *Indian Opinion* was edited by Manilal Gandhi until his death in 1956, and ceased publication in 1960.

it was shown that the Indian petitioners equalled almost exactly the number of white voters. The latter were warned by their leaders that Indians would soon become serious rivals for political power in Natal.⁵

Thereafter Gandhi became increasingly active in Transvaal politics and thus widened his impact. He represented the Indian merchants who were disputing the applicability of Transvaal Law No. 3 of 1885 which restricted where they could trade and reside, and organised a petition to the Colonial Secretary that was signed by over 1,000. While visiting India in 1896 Gandhi was called back to South Africa to deal with a fresh problem: the Transvaal *Volksraad* or House of Assembly had recommended that Indians be confined to 'locations'. Over 10 years later, shortly after receiving Responsible Government, the Transvaal legislature passed the Asiatic Law Amendment Act in 1907 curtailing the status of Indians, followed by the Immigrants Restriction Act, and as further laws and amendments gradually boxed Indians into a legislative corner, a united effort under Gandhi's leadership emerged. In August 1908 some 3,000 Indians from all over Transvaal gathered at the Hamidia Mosque in Johannesburg in order to defy these new laws. As reported by the *Transvaal Leader*:

A large three-legged pot was filled with the registration certificates, about 1,000 in all, and about 500 trading licenses. Paraffin was then poured in, and the certificates set on fire amid a scene of wildest enthusiasm. The crowd hurraed and shouted themselves hoarse; hats were thrown in the air, and whistles blown. One Indian... walked on to the platform and setting alight his certificate held it aloft.⁶

Gandhi remained in South Africa, very much involved in the Indian cause for another six years. During that time the Union of the previous four colonies resulted in a country with new legal authority and powers, none of which enhanced the status of the Indian community.

GANDHI'S PHILOSOPHICAL DEVELOPMENT

For some time I have been interested in the dissemination of ideas and their translation into philosophies. We are all continuously exposed to the views, criticisms, and rewards meted out by others. The result is that our thoughts and personalities are in perpetual change and being moulded by the conditions under which we live. Essentially

⁵ Swan, *op. cit.* p. 62.

⁶ Quoted by Robert A. Huttenback, *Gandhi in South Africa* (Ithaca, 1971), p. 193.

this implies that it is extremely rare if not impossible to encounter a 'self-made man' or a completely new idea. We are all products of our social, intellectual, and political times, and our opinions and theories derive from, and consist of, recombinations of earlier stimuli. No doubt some persons make more of their conditions by reading and discourse, while others may stagnate in their private universes. Those who grow and reach beyond themselves learn from personal experiences, and also expose themselves to the ideas and contributions of others. Such intellectual cross-fertilisation may result in stimulating innovations or reinterpretations.

My contention is that Gandhi was a product of an old cultural tradition and of his time. Being intelligent and imaginative, he borrowed from his cultural history, was influenced by personal experiences, and drew much of his philosophy from others. Only Gandhi was probably able to integrate and synthesise all of these diverse influences, and then to express and live his life the way he could! It is possible that only Gandhi had the commitment and willingness to sacrifice to the degree he did!

The first signs of his eagerness to hear other views and to discuss other religions and philosophies can be discerned while Gandhi was a student in England. Biographers describe numerous encounters and discussions he had with persons who influenced his thinking. In his autobiography he tells of his search: reading *The Song Celestial*, Edwin Arnold's translation of the *Gita*, before he struggled through the original Sanskrit version; meeting theosophists and discovering their views; discussing with Christians their beliefs and reading the Bible, in which he was especially moved by the Sermon on the Mount ('That renunciation was the highest form of religion appealed to me greatly'); learning about the Prophet Mohammed (his 'greatness and bravery and austere living'); and, of course, being courted by those who denied the existence of God. But, says Gandhi, the latter 'had no effect on me, for I had already crossed the Sahara of atheism'.⁷

Shortly after arriving in South Africa, and during his first visit to Transvaal in 1893, Gandhi once again engaged in his search for a viable philosophy. His bookshelf now contained copies of the Vedas, the New Testament, the Koran, many books on Hinduism, and various commentaries. He read widely, had discussions with Quakers and a variety of other Christians, and was proselytised by some. He even

⁷ M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or the Story of my Experiments with Truth* (Washington, DC, 1948 edn.), p. 92.

accompanied an attorney friend, A. W. Baker, to a three-day Protestant convention in Wellington, Cape Province, led by the famous Christian theologian, the Rev. Dr Andrew Murray.

In his autobiography, Gandhi notes that during the Anglo-Boer War, 1899–1902, he had a great deal of personal sympathy for the plight of the Boers.⁸ But his feelings for and support of the British Crown – in spite of the fact that India was a colony – resulted in Gandhi volunteering to lead an ambulance corps of Indians to assist the British army. According to Ved Mehta:

The South African Indians probably identified more with the pastoral ways of the Boers than with the industrial capitalism of the British, but most of them had no wish to take sides in the war, for fear of reprisals. Gandhi, however, felt so much loyalty to the British Crown that he wanted the Indians to go to war alongside the British.⁹

The experience of collecting and caring for the wounded, particularly at the battle of Spioen Kop where the British suffered heavy losses, made a deep impression on Gandhi. He also saw and/or perhaps hoped for a better relationship between whites and Indians, and especially improved political conditions for the latter, as emanating from these events. He remarks on the recognition by members of the corps that although they came from different linguistic, ethnic, and religious groups, they all were ‘children of the same motherland... Everyone believed that the Indians’ grievances were now sure to be redressed’.¹⁰

The fact is that Gandhi was becoming identified with the attractions of a simple peasant life and three major philosophical positions, two of which were derived from ancient Indian thought. Were the rest really ‘his own invention’,¹¹ as Mehta suggests? We know that Gandhi had read widely since his days in London and became exposed to accounts of world-events and the thoughts of world figures. Thus he records that by 1894 he had read Washington Irving’s *Life of Mahomet and His Successors* and *The Sayings of Zarathustra*, as well as *The Gospels in Brief* and an extensive study of Tolstoy.¹² Articles he wrote in *Indian Opinion* during 1905–6 repeatedly referred to examples of passive resistance – including the Irish strategy of non-co-operation (1879–86), the Chinese boycott of American goods, the Russian revolution of 1905, and even Chief Bambata’s actions against the hut tax which led to the Zulu rebellion. According to Gene Sharp, ‘it is now clear that the Indian campaigns in South Africa, and Gandhi’s own conceptions of

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 264.

⁹ Mehta, *op. cit.* p. 112.

¹⁰ Gandhi, *op. cit.* p. 266.

¹¹ Mehta, *op. cit.* p. 118.

¹² Gandhi, *op. cit.* p. 198.

appropriate means of struggle, were inspired or influenced by other recent cases of non-violent resistance and revolution'.¹³

It would appear that a number of basic influences stimulated the development of Gandhi's beliefs and ideas, notably John Ruskin, Tolstoy, and the South African situation. Out of this interplay emerged his own very simple, yet complex philosophy.

After a brief visit to Transvaal in 1903, Gandhi prepared for the 24-hour return journey by train to Durban, and took with him a copy of Ruskin's *Unto This Last* (1860), lent to him by a new friend, Henry Polak. Gandhi would later write, 'I could not get any sleep that night. I determined to change my life in accordance with the ideals of the book'.¹⁴ After coming to the conclusion that the true basis of society was not wealth – as stated by economists – but human relationships, he summarises his reading of Ruskin in three basic propositions: (i) the good of the individual is contained in the good of the group; (ii) the labourer's work has equal value to that of the lawyer since both have the right to so earn a living; and (iii) a life of labour, i.e. tilling the soil or working as a handicraftsman, is the life worth living. Gandhi goes on to say:

The first of these I knew. The second I had dimly realized. The third had never occurred to me. *Unto This Last* made it as clear as daylight for me that the second and the third were contained in the first. I arose with the dawn, ready to reduce these principles to practice.¹⁵

Ruskin's views obviously fell on soil that had been earlier prepared and fertilised by Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You* (1894), sub-titled 'Christianity not as a Mystical Teaching but as a New Concept of Life'. Martin Green points out that this treatise starts with a discussion of 'the Quakers as his spiritual ancestors',¹⁶ while Mehta emphasises that Tolstoy 'taught that man's highest duty was to love his fellow-man and resist evil and violence'.¹⁷ In his autobiography Gandhi asserts that reading this book 'overwhelmed me. It left an abiding impression on me'.¹⁸

The Quaker model, the love for fellow-humans, and the renunciation of urban comforts were all influential concepts that found expression in the communal settlement at Phoenix. But was this undertaking the outcome of an original idea? At that time the Rev. John L. Dube had already established a communal settlement for the Amakolwa clan a

¹³ Gene Sharp, *Gandhi as a Political Strategist* (Boston, 1979), p. 27.

¹⁴ Gandhi, op. cit. p. 364.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 365.

¹⁶ Martin Green, *Tolstoy and Gandhi: men of peace* (New York, 1983), p. 86.

¹⁷ Mehta, op. cit. p. 124.

¹⁸ Gandhi, op. cit. p. 172.

few miles further north at Ohlange,¹⁹ as well as the Zulu Christian Industrial School in 1901,²⁰ and within a few years was publishing *Ilanga lase Natal*, a Zulu newspaper. Maureen Swan suggests that 'If Gandhi had no prior knowledge of Dube's work, then the establishment of his commune, in the same area, is a most striking coincidence'.²¹ There can be little doubt that by 1903 Gandhi was being influenced by a combination of Tolstoy, religious readings, and Dube's innovations.²²

As Gandhi's political style took shape, so did his *persona*. Title reflected rank and possibly also social distance, and he was glad to remain close to the people. As explained in his autobiography, Gandhi was at this time still called 'Bhai' (brother): 'I had fortunately not yet become "Mahatma", nor even "Bapu" (father)'.²³

In 1906 Gandhi was again involved in the Indian Ambulance Corps, although his patients this time were mostly Zulu, whose wounds would not have been dressed by the British. According to Gandhi, the 'Zulu "rebellion" was full of new experiences and gave me much food for thought. The Boer War had not brought home to me the horrors of war with anything like the vividness that the "rebellion" did'.²⁴ Having already begun to renounce worldly life owing to his reading of Ruskin, Gandhi arrived at the decision 'that I should have more and more occasions for service of the kind I was rendering, and that I should find myself unequal to my task if I were engaged in the pleasures of family life and in the propagation and rearing of children'.²⁵ In 1906 he took the ancient Hindu vow of *brahmacharya* (celibacy), the ancient Jain commandment of *ahimsa* or non-violence to all things, and *satyagraha*, the force of truth and love for which he had coined his own term.

The first of these, *brahmacharya*, was arrived at as Gandhi realised that he 'could not live both after the flesh and the spirit... What formerly appeared to me to be extravagant praise of *brahmacharya* in our religious books seems now, with increasing clearness every day, to be absolutely proper and founded on experience'.²⁶ *Ahimsa* was adapted to Gandhi's activity in the political realm, where he stated that one must 'hate the

¹⁹ In 1912 Dube became the first president of the South African Native Congress, later known as the African National Congress.

²⁰ This school was based on the model of Tuskegee Institute, developed by Booker T. Washington in Alabama in the United States in 1881. ²¹ Swan, op. cit. p. 60.

²² With the assistance of a friend, Hermann Kallenbach, Gandhi established a second communal settlement in 1910 in Transvaal, calling it Tolstoy Farm. There were, in Gandhi's words, op. cit. p. 407, 'Hindu, Musalman, Parsi and Christian boys and some Hindu girls... a family, in which I occupied the place of the father'. It was closed in January 1913 in anticipation of Gandhi's departure from South Africa. ²³ Ibid. p. 327. ²⁴ Ibid. p. 386.

²⁵ Quoted by Bridglal Pachai, *The South African Indian Question, 1860-1971* (Cape Town, 1971), p. 32. ²⁶ Gandhi, op. cit. p. 387.

sin and not the sinner'. Thus he could oppose acts and policies but not necessarily their perpetrators. 'It is quite proper to resist and attack a system, but to resist and attack its author is tantamount to resisting and attacking oneself. For we are all tarred with the same brush, and are children of one and the same Creator...'.²⁷

As regards *satyagraha*, there was at first the act without the philosophy, as later clarified and confirmed by Gandhi:

It was the New Testament which really awakened me to the rightness and value of Passive Resistance. When I read in the 'Sermon on the Mount' such passages as 'resist not him that is evil, but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek turn to him the other also', and 'Love your enemies and pray for them that persecute you, that ye may be sons of your Father which is in heaven', I was simply overjoyed, and found my own opinion confirmed where I least expected it. The *Bhagavad Gita* deepened the impression, and Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You* gave it permanent form.²⁸

While Gandhi had arrived at the concept of passive resistance and non-violence through diverse influences and experiences, he still searched for a Gujarati term to express this philosophy:

But I could not for the life of me find out a new name, and therefore offered a nominal prize through *Indian Opinion* to the reader who made the best suggestion on the subject. As a result Maganlal Gandhi coined the word 'Sadagraha' (Sat = truth, Agraha = firmness) and won the prize. But in order to make it clearer I changed the word to 'Satyagraha' which has since become current in Gujarati as a designation for the struggle.²⁹

GANDHI'S FINAL YEARS IN SOUTH AFRICA

While the four colonies were engaged in constitutional talks preparing for Union, Gandhi went to London in 1909 hoping to gain citizen status for Indians, or at least better conditions. As Mehta points out, his mission proved 'thankless and fruitless'.³⁰ But negotiations in South Africa which had been carried on previously with the Transvaal Colonial Secretary, Jan Smuts, had to be continued with Smuts as Minister of the Interior, and Gandhi's strategy also changed. What had been a mixture of discretion and threat by the Indians now turned more towards diplomacy. In fact, Huttenback sub-titles a chapter on this phase, 'Gandhi versus Smuts 1910-1914'.

By 1912 there remained a number of well defined problems. Indentured immigration of Indians had been prohibited the previous

²⁷ Ibid. p. 337.

²⁸ Quoted by B. R. Nanda, *Mahatma Gandhi* (London, 1958), p. 96.

²⁹ Gandhi, op. cit. p. 389. ³⁰ Mehta, op. cit. p. 122.

year, and Gandhi had to tackle four specific issues: (i) removal of the £3 per capita tax; (ii) freedom of mobility between the four Provinces; (iii) reversal of a rule that Indians would lose their domiciliary rights if absent for more than three years; and (iv) recognition of marriages contracted by Hindu, Muslim, or Parsi rituals, although these were frequently not according to monogamous laws. Once again Gandhi called for a strike, and specifically in the coal mines around Newcastle. Men stayed away from work; women went to prison. 'Soon there were 60,000 men on strike besides the *satyagrahis* in jail'.³¹

Smuts, who had been engaged in verbal duels and negotiations with Gandhi for years, refused to have the strikers arrested, not least since the Indian leader 'appeared to be in a position of much difficulty. Like Frankenstein he found his monster an uncomfortable creation and he would be glad to be relieved of further responsibility for its support'.³² Indeed, as strikers moved into the Transvaal there was little to sustain their physical needs. But the two leaders were more evenly matched as bargaining power had been won. In the end there was Gandhi stating minimum issues to be solved and Smuts acceding to the demands.

Following the recommendations of the Indian Enquiry Commission the Union Government enacted legislation that included (i) repeal of Section 6 of Natal Act No. 17 of 1895, the £3 tax; (ii) registration of monogamous marriages and the recognition of a man's rights to marry 'one or more other wives'; (iii) appointment of marriage officers from among Indian priests in accordance with the religion of the marrying parties; and (iv) power given to magistrates to issue temporary permits to Indians wishing to travel to other Provinces.³³ According to Pachai, 'The Indian Relief Act conceded half the number of points... on which the Indians desired a settlement', while administrative matters were finalised in an exchange of correspondence that became known as the Smuts–Gandhi Agreement of 30 June 1914, in confirmation of earlier interviews between the two men.³⁴

The following month Gandhi, accompanied by Kasturbai, visited England just as the Great War started, and then returned to India to confront British rule there, to reform the caste system, and to restore village culture and industry, until his assassination in 1948. Fatima Meer suggests in her portrait of Indian South Africans that 'If Gandhi left the country with mixed feelings about his contribution to it, he did

³¹ Green, *op. cit.* p. 136.

³² Swan, *op. cit.* p. 250.

³³ In spite of this concession Indians were never permitted during the next 83 years of white control to settle in the Orange Free State, in contrast to Transvaal.

³⁴ Pachai, *The International Aspects of the South African Indian Question*, p. 66.

not show them in his farewell speeches'.³⁵ Smuts, heaving a sigh of relief, exclaimed that 'The saint has left our shores, I sincerely hope for ever'. But he admired Gandhi and 30 years later wrote:

It was my fate to be the antagonist of a man for whom even then I had the greatest respect... I must frankly admit that his activities at that time were very trying to me. Together with other South African leaders I was busily engaged in the task of welding the old Colonies into a unified State... Suddenly in the midst of all those engrossing preoccupations, Gandhi raised a troublesome issue.³⁶

GANDHI AND BLACK POLITICS

Brought to Natal to help a small group of businessmen, Gandhi became involved in the Indian cause in South Africa at the same time as he served his clients. But as Kogila Moodley notes, 'His gradually widening circles of concern never quite succeeded in including the plight of the African'.³⁷ Swan also suggests that the politics of the Natal Indian Congress, like that of the Indian Committee, reflected in essence an exclusive and self-serving ideology.³⁸ This was true because 'Gandhi had advised Indians to keep their issues distinct from those of other non-White groups'.³⁹

In their study of class and colour in South Africa, H. J. and R. E. Simons aver that 'Gandhi and his fellow Indians saw in the African only an innocent tribal peasant... [they] fought their battles in isolation and won only moral victories'.⁴⁰ This is clearly illustrated by events in 1904, when the Johannesburg municipality, which had not maintained proper sanitation in the locations occupied by Indians, decided that Africans could also reside there. Huttenback points out that Gandhi then acted more like an orthodox Gujerati Vaishya rather than the ecumenical egalitarian for which he is remembered, by writing as follows to the authorities: 'About this mixing of the Kaffirs with the Indians I must confess I feel strongly. I think it is very unfair to the Indian population, and it is an undue tax even on the proverbial patience of my countrymen'.⁴¹ In 1908 Gandhi once again complained to Lord Elgin, Secretary of State for the Colonies, this time being even

³⁵ Fatima Meer, *Portrait of Indian South Africans* (Durban, 1969), p. 32.

³⁶ W. K. Hancock, *Smuts: the sanguine years, 1870-1919* (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 346-7.

³⁷ Kogila A. Moodley, 'South African Indians: the wavering minority', in Leonard Thompson and Jeffrey Butler (eds.), *Change in Contemporary South Africa* (Berkeley, 1975), p. 259.

³⁸ Swan, *op. cit.* p. 51.

³⁹ Meer, *op. cit.* p. 28.

⁴⁰ H. J. and R. E. Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950* (Harmondsworth and Baltimore, 1969), p. 72.

⁴¹ Huttenback, *op. cit.* p. 138.

more selective by claiming that the Indians of the Transvaal should not be included with 'the general body of Asians'.⁴²

It was only after World War II that Indians started to show an interest in the minority status they shared with Africans. Gail Gerhart refers in her study of black power in South Africa to Dr Yusuf Dadoo, who as president of the Transvaal Indian Congress, as well as a central committee member of the South African Communist Party (f. in 1921), became a leader of the Indian Passive Resistance Campaign of the early 1940s and would again act during the Defiance Campaign. 'Under the leadership of Dadoo and Dr G. M. Naicker in Natal, Indians began to show greater concern with the plight of Africans and to consider the possibility that Indians might best be served by making common cause with other nonwhites'.⁴³ In fact, in 1950 Indian workers supported a call by the African National Congress for a 'stay away from work' protest.

It was actually only with the emergence of Black Consciousness, which came to a head after the death of Steve Biko in October 1977, that all non-whites – Blacks, Coloureds, and Indians – decided that they were Black and presented a united opposition. In reaction, and in an attempt to break this new coalition, the South African Government in 1983 proposed a change which resulted in a tri-cameral constitution supported by two-thirds of the white voters. Whites, Indians, and Coloureds, according to this new system, had three separate Houses in Parliament, but Blacks were excluded from this form of representation. In the polls which followed, 'more than four-fifths of the "coloured" and Indian people – ostensibly the beneficiaries – rejected it in a massive election boycott'.⁴⁴ The United Democratic Front, which included 650 affiliate movements representing more than 2.5 million members, spearheaded this opposition. During these years, though, Gandhian methods were relied on for political expression:

In line with Gandhi's non-violence, the Defiance Campaign against pass-laws in the 1950's, the bus and school boycotts, and workers' stay-aways in the 1960's and 1970's, the strategy aims at political mobilization as well as paralysis of the enemy.⁴⁵

⁴² Ibid. Perhaps because of this self-interest and exclusivity by the Indians, or because the Zulu thought they were being exploited, there was a riot in Durban in January 1949. Indian-owned stores were burned, looting was widespread, and 136 people were killed. For a number of years there remained a residue of fear and distrust at the personal level.

⁴³ Gail M. Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa* (Berkeley, 1979), p. 102.

⁴⁴ Allister Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa* (London, 1990), p. 330.

⁴⁵ A. J. Arkin, K. P. Magyar, and G. J. Pillay, *The Indian South Africans* (Pinetown, 1989), p. 100.

GANDHI'S MORAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL SHADOW

We may never know whether the structure or name of the Natal Indian Congress, established in 1894, had any influence on the creation in 1912 of the South African Native National Congress, which a few years later emerged as the African National Congress. Allister Sparks contends that the ANC was 'founded under the strong influence of Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence', albeit also inspired by Booker T. Washington.⁴⁶ In the same political climate, it should be recalled, as pointed out by Leo Kuper, 'Passive resistance in the form of civil disobedience, had been effectively established in South Africa by Gandhi under conditions of repression which rendered it a seemingly appropriate mode of political action'.⁴⁷

Gandhi had planted a philosophy which held that non-violent resistance sometimes bore fruit. Although South Africa's first winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, Albert Luthuli, does not mention Gandhi by name, he must have been influenced by the man and his philosophy. Luthuli had received part of his education at Ohlange Institute under John Dube, and in 1938 visited Madras as a delegate to an International Missionary Conference. He mentions some of the early Gandhi-like (or inspired?) actions:

In the Free State in 1913 there were widespread anti-pass demonstrations and numerous arrests. In 1919 Congress organized an anti-pass campaign – in Johannesburg alone there were 700 arrests. In Cape Town 400 dockers staged a strike. In 1920, 40,000 African miners came out on strike on the Reef.⁴⁸

Better documentation exists for the *modus operandi* of organised resistance by South Africa's political minorities. In her autobiography, Helen Joseph explains how the Transvaal leaders of the ANC, allied with the South African Indian Congress in 1950–2, were joined by the Cape Coloured Franchise Action Committee.⁴⁹ Together they 'began to lay plans for a resistance campaign based on Gandhian-style civil disobedience'.⁵⁰ Leo Kuper claimed in 1957 that the central theme of the campaign – namely, defiance directed against unjust laws, not against any racial group – was derived from Gandhi's philosophy that 'man and his deeds are two distinct things... Hate the sin and not the sinner'.⁵¹ There is, of course, a question regarding motivation: did

⁴⁶ Sparks, *op. cit.* p. 236.

⁴⁷ Leo Kuper, 'African Nationalism in South Africa, 1910–1964', in Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson (eds.), *The Oxford History of South Africa*, Vol. II, *South Africa, 1879–1966* (Oxford, 1971), p. 445.

⁴⁸ Albert Luthuli, *Let My People Go* (London, 1962), p. 92.

⁴⁹ Helen Joseph, *Side by Side* (New York, 1986).

⁵⁰ Gerhart, *op. cit.* p. 134.

⁵¹ Leo Kuper, *Passive Resistance in South Africa* (New Haven, 1957), p. 44.

those who practised this philosophy do so for realistic reasons, since they had no weapons to confront a heavily armed police? It would seem that in the early years at least, the moral force of Gandhi's *satyagraha* may have been an overriding consideration.

Hilda Kuper points to a gradual change in philosophy which was formalised in 1945, when intellectuals and trade unionists ousted the conservative merchant leaders of the South African Indian Congress, sometimes contemptuously described as 'the Old Guard'.⁵² Dadoo explains that the old 'cap-in-hand compromise' had been replaced by militants who were willing to confront the Government and act on behalf of their people.⁵³ 'Almost immediately on coming into power the new "protest" leaders of Congress launched the 1946 (Second) Passive Resistance Campaign against the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act of 1946 (the so-called "Ghetto Act")'.⁵⁴ Writing about African nationalism, Leo Kuper remarks that while these Indian actions achieved some concessions, the results of passive resistance by Blacks were 'almost entirely negative'.⁵⁵ Nelson Mandela recalls that Manilal Gandhi, whose 'gentle demeanour seemed the personification of nonviolence', called for passive resistance along the lines of his father's campaign, while others argued for different tactics: 'The joint planning council agreed upon an open-ended program of non-cooperation and nonviolence'.⁵⁶ Thus emerged the Defiance Campaign in 1952. Mary Benson explains that Walter Sisulu and Mandela, representing the Youth League, argued that the younger people would not support passive resistance, and yet agreed that 'non-violence was the only viable method against a heavily armed, violent state'.⁵⁷ When Dr J. S. Moroka, the president of the ANC, called for 10,000 volunteers to defy the law, as many as 8,577 responded.⁵⁸

In the years between World War II and the mid-1960s a growing number of whites recognised the plight of minorities in South Africa. Some joined the South African Communist Party, as did Bram Fischer, a top barrister, while many garment workers and miners supported non-white labourers. Still others, sympathetic to the cause and/or with religious convictions, spoke out against the undemocratic policies and

⁵² Hilda Kuper, *Indian People in Natal* (Durban, 1960), p. 49.

⁵³ Quoted in Gerhart, op. cit. p. 61.

⁵⁴ Hilda Kuper, op. cit. p. 49.

⁵⁵ Leo Kuper, loc. cit. p. 446.

⁵⁶ Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (Boston, 1994), p. 111.

⁵⁷ Mary Benson, *Nelson Mandela: the man and the movement* (New York, 1986), pp. 42–3.

⁵⁸ This campaign resulted in massive arrests and convictions under the Suppression of Communism and Riotous Assembly Acts, as well as new powers hastily authorised in terms of the Public Safety and the Criminal Law Amendments Acts.

hard-handed methods of the Government. From the mid-1950s onwards, rows of white women, each with a black sash draped over a shoulder, lined the path outside the gates to Parliament in Cape Town or the Union Buildings in Pretoria. They bore the brunt of threats, assaults by hooligans, and a variety of indignities, and yet they silently stood their ground. 'The Black Sash hauntings', wrote Patrick Duncan, 'are a perfect example of *satyagraha*'.⁵⁹

In March 1960 Robert Sobukwe, as president of the Pan-Africanist Congress,⁶⁰ organised an anti-pass law campaign supported by the ANC that was to begin on 21 March in Sharpeville township. 'Word was going around that the Congress leaders wanted everyone to go there and present themselves for arrest for not carrying their passes', and the ensuing massacre of 69 people provoked an international outcry. Sparks points out that 'passive resistance can work only if there is a certain level of sensitivity within the ruling community that will recoil from the use of naked force against peaceful protestors'.⁶¹ By this time, unfortunately, violence was being practised by the oppressors as well as the oppressed.

GANDHI'S MEMORY

As passive resistance made way for confrontation and violence it may well be asked if Gandhi's memory had also faded. Do those living in South Africa today remember the tenets which set this deceptively simple man apart from his fellows? People of prominence in the country know of Gandhi and his rôle in South Africa, and almost every leader has retained, as if in the form of a philosophical sediment, some trace elements of Gandhism. In his autobiography, Mandela frequently mentions the influence of the Mahatma on the Defiance Campaign during the 1950s and 1960s:

I saw nonviolence in the Gandhian model not as an inviolable principle but as a tactic to be used as the situation demanded. The principle was not so important that the strategy should be used even when it was self-defeating, as Gandhi himself believed. I called for nonviolent protest for as long as it was effective.⁶²

⁵⁹ Patrick Duncan, 'Passive Resistance', in *Africa South* (Cape Town), October–December 1956, p. 82.

⁶⁰ In 1958 a group of dissidents advocating the use of violence left the ANC in order to form the Pan-Africanist Congress, which was soon associated with a terrorist group called *Pogo* and banned. In 1961 the ANC secretly established a military wing known as *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (Spear of the Nation).

⁶¹ Sparks, *op. cit.* pp. 234 and 269.

⁶² Mandela, *op. cit.* p. 111.

We should recall that at this stage of the struggle many were calling for violence, notably supporters of the Pan-Africanist Movement, while most members of the South African Communist Part welcomed confrontation. Throughout all of this, however, 'Mandela was intensely anti-communist',⁶³ yet able to draw together all these diverse groups and maintain a relative uniformity of directed non-violence.

Mandela always recognised the contribution of Gandhi whether as regards his own call for non-violence, his hunger strikes on Robben Island,⁶⁴ or his appreciation in 1980 upon being awarded the Nehru Award for International Understanding. In a statement smuggled out of prison and read by Oliver Tambo, Mandela declared that 'Mahatma Gandhi "had exerted an incalculable influence" in the history of the people of...South Africa'.⁶⁵ During Mandela's brief trip to India in 1996, *Hinduism Today* reported that at Gandhi's Ashram in Ahmedabad, the South African President had declared: 'My visit to India would have been incomplete if I had left without visiting this place... I am like a battery that has been recharged'.⁶⁶

Two brief examples illustrate Gandhi's wider legacy. The first concerns the Nazareth Baptist Church, which was established by Isaiah Shembe in about 1903, a few miles north of Phoenix. In time this Zulu became associated with Ekuphakameni ('the High Place') where the cult was located, and John Dube of Ohlange, close by, was his friend and consultant. According to Harold Turner, an Indian woman was a member of Shembe's cult,⁶⁷ and if he did not know about Gandhi and his style it would have been unique. Hans-Jürgen Becken tells us that the cult leader welcomed all people – 'I am of all colours (i.e. spiritually of all races)' – and explains that 'Shembe was a man of prayer and fasting; for days he did not take any food besides some unleavened bread and water once a day, especially when he retreated for meditation'.⁶⁸ Although there is no evidence of personal contact between Gandhi and Sheme, it is likely that in the absence of direct contact they at least knew about each other.

The second case that deserves to be mentioned concerns a separatist

⁶³ Benson, *op. cit.* p. 31.

⁶⁴ Mandela explains in *op. cit.* p. 369 that a hunger strike is useless unless publicised: 'Otherwise, prisoners will simply starve themselves to death and no one will know'.

⁶⁵ Benson, *op. cit.* p. 216.

⁶⁶ 'News in Brief', in *Hinduism Today* (Hanamaulu, HL), 17, 4, April 1995.

⁶⁷ Harold W. Turner, 'The Place of Independent Religious Movements in the Modernization of Africa', in *Journal of Religion in Africa* (Leiden), 2, 1, 1969, p. 47.

⁶⁸ Hans-Jürgen Becken, 'The Nazareth Baptist Church of Shembe', in Missiological Institute, Lutheran Theological College, *Our Approach to the Independent Church Movement in South Africa* (Mapumulo, Natal, 1966), pp. 104–5.

church in the Durban area, called Emakhehleri, whose founder, Maphithini Thusi, born near Durban in 1880, had grown up in and around the city. As an adult he started to hallucinate and visited a diviner for treatment. In 1937 Thusi had a dream in which Shaka, Shembe, and Mahatma Gandhi appeared and instructed him to give his time and efforts to helping his people. As I explained in 1971, Shaka was the King who represented the tradition of Zulu culture and the tribal ancestors; Shembe represented a model of independentism and many of the values later expressed in this cult; while Gandhi 'was included to underscore the absence of ethnocentrism in the movement', and also the harmonious relations between members.⁶⁹ It is significant that this independent church would give Gandhi a place in its historiography.

CONCLUSION

Yusuf Dadoo states that the first passive resistance campaign in South Africa was under the leadership of the Mahatma Gandhi, and ended after eight years in victory for the Indian community.⁷⁰ A few organised protests lasted longer, included members of other political minority groups, and involved strategies that included violence. Almost 90 years after Gandhi started his struggle, a democratic South Africa emerged.

It is possible to trace Gandhi's influences at different levels and in divergent contexts, notably the political realm. Starting with his own involvement in petitioning for the rights of Natal Indians, Gandhi's opposition to issues rather than persons continued. Is it possible that this soul force marked by truth and love has somehow been retained in Nelson Mandela's policy? It is not hard to see a residue of Gandhism when a man who was prosecuted, banned, insulted, and jailed on Robben Island for 27 years emerges and asks South Africa to look to the future and not the past, to work together for the country, to forgive the oppressors. As for religion, Gandhi's influence is always present in Hinduism and its varied expressions, and has had some impact on at least two Zulu separatist churches – one by association and the other directly. I think that as Gandhi borrowed ideas from different philosophical and religious expressions during a period of innovation, the reverse may also have been true. In many cases Gandhi has been mentioned for his forgiving nature, his idea of hate the sin not the

⁶⁹ Brian M. du Toit, 'Religious Revivalism Among Urban Zulu', in E. J. de Jager (ed.), *Man: anthropological essays* (Cape Town, 1971), pp. 89 and 97.

⁷⁰ Gerhart, op. cit. p. 21.

sinner, his denunciation of violence, and his renunciation of material trappings.

Both the political and religious contexts find expression in the social world of everyday living. My research project in South Africa during 1989 included a survey question as to who were considered to be the most admired people, and the Mahatma Gandhi was mentioned frequently. A Tamil lady, for instance, recounted that when Gandhi came to Johannesburg he had given her mother a photo of himself standing next to his mother, and that the family still treasures the picture. Another woman related that her parents had gone to jail with Gandhi during the Defiance Campaign, and claimed: 'We don't carry passes because of him!'⁷¹

Mohandras Karamchand Gandhi arrived in South Africa as an inexperienced young barrister-at-law. During the next 21 years he developed his philosophy and the operational mode which accompanied it. South Africa was to have a lasting influence on this extraordinary man who, in turn, changed the country for ever. His legacy is writ large in the political, religious, and social realms of South Africa's past, present, and future. What better memories does anybody need than to have served his fellow humans in this way?

⁷¹ Brian M. du Toit, *Aging and Menopause Among Indian South African Women* (Albany, 1990), p. 48.