

GANDHI'S ARMY: DEFENDING THE HOMELESS IN WESTMINSTER

Jad Adams

When Martin Luther King arrived at Palam airport, New Delhi, on 10 February 1959, he made a statement: 'To other countries I may go as a tourist, but to India I come as a pilgrim. This is because India means to me Mahatma Gandhi, a truly great man of the age.'

Jawaharlal Nehru had invited King to India specifically because he had been promoting Gandhian ideas as part of the civil rights movement. It was a recognition of King, but also a celebration that Gandhi's thought had wider applications than the Indian independence struggle alone.

King had personal reasons for coming to India as he wanted to study Gandhi's ideas more closely. King's success in the civil rights movement had meant he was a celebrity, and therefore in danger of becoming absorbed into American society as a safe rebel, a glorified after-dinner speaker. He rebelled against absorption in the system and yearned for a Gandhian renunciation of worldly goods. His wife Coretta, who accompanied him on the trip, said that under Gandhi's influence, 'If Martin had had his way, he would have taken an oath of poverty, refusing even the most basic necessities, such as a house. He felt that much of the corruption in society came from the desire to own material things.' Coretta saw things differently, and King conceded on some possessions for the family, though he refused to own anything himself, putting their house and car in Coretta's name. She hinted at tensions over the issue when she remarked, 'That brand of asceticism was more than I had expected in our marriage, and it was more than I could accept.'

Knowing Gandhi

King's familiarity with Gandhi's ideas had deep roots. From the age of 15, he attended the black liberal arts college, Morehouse, whose president was Benjamin Mays, whom King admired as a model for a socially active and intellectually progressive ministry. Mays was a spiritual father to King, and one of the influences that led him to become a preacher. He had visited India in 1939 and spent 90 minutes with Gandhi at his ashram at Sevagram in Maharashtra, talking about 'militant pacifism'. Mays saw the leadership of Gandhi as a model for the direction in which African Americans should move to secure equality. Other African Americans had also visited Gandhi and all activists could follow him in periodicals such as *The Crisis*, the magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP), which frequently covered his activities.

As he grew into a young man, King would make his own study of Gandhi after attending a talk about him from a pacifist leader. King felt the message was 'so profound and electrifying that I left the meeting and bought half a dozen books on Gandhi's life and works'. He described what he found there: 'I came to feel that this was the only morally and practically sound method open to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom.'

THE MAN AGAINST MADNESS IN NOAKHALI

Selina Hossain

Since I finished my master's at Rajshahi University in 1968, I have been reading more and more about Mahatma Gandhi to know him better. His philosophy of nonviolence, the human appeal of his struggle for India's freedom and, finally, his assassination by Nathuram Godse are now etched on my mind.

I got used to his name as a child whenever someone mentioned the Gandhi Ashram at Jayag village in Noakhali. Both my grandfathers lived in a village near the ashram. The elders told me about the ashram, and then with them, I once visited the place. I always felt that travelling led to self-discovery and that feeling was behind my quest to learn more about Gandhiji. As a little girl, I visited places without knowing their significance. Later on, I learnt to read the meaning of a place I was visiting. In my teens, I learnt that Gandhiji had come Noakhali in 1946. I kept thinking that his footsteps had blessed Noakhali, the district both my grandfathers were from. Because of him, Noakhali figured in many history books. Thus, his name was engraved on my creative consciousness at an early age. Still, at that stage, I did not think he would be a figure in the world of my writing. An important character in the literature of Bangladesh. 'You can't lead a true life without suffering' – I came across this Gandhi quote in my university days. It's a hard truth of life. Light blooming out of a dark spell of suffering is the real triumph of humanism. I still have a good collection of the Mahatma's quotes, which I use in my writings.

He fought throughout the 79 years of his life for humanity, to give people the dignity due to them. Regarding communal unity, he said, 'Unity does not mean political unity alone. It means an unbreakable heart-unity.'

Meeting Aruna Kemal

I have seen at close quarters two members of the Gandhi family – his grandchildren – Rajmohan Gandhi and Tara Gandhi Bhattacharjee. I met Rajmohan for the first time in 1986. His organization, Moral Re-Armament, had arranged a discourse for the civil society representatives from the SAARC countries. The headquarters of its Asian chapter is at Panchgani near Mumbai, the centre for Europe at Caux, Montreux in Switzerland. In the last week of December 1986, we went to Panchgani. On behalf of the organizers, Sushobha was waiting for us. She had come to Dhaka to invite me to the Panchgani conference. After lunch, she suggested I meet Aruna Kemal, the participant from Pakistan. Reacting sharply, I said without much thought, 'I would hate to talk to any Pakistani.'

Sushobha gaped at me in shock. I, too, did not say anything more. There was definitely no question of meeting Aruna. My outburst created a stir around the conference because the motto of Moral Re-Armament was 'love for all, not hatred'. My stand, therefore, caused deep concern among the organizers. The Foreign Minister of Bhutan inaugurated the conference by lighting a lamp; he made an impressive speech. I saw Aruna Kemal from a distance. We did not talk.

GANDHI ON THE BUDDHA ISLAND

Daya Dissanayake

My Gandhian padayatra began a long time ago. I read the Mahatma's autobiography in my schooldays and, years later, had the good fortune of visiting the Sabarmati Ashram. Lionel Pereira of the Ambalal Sarabhai Group accompanied me. On a recent visit, when Dr Sanjay Garg took me to Rajghat, I walked beside the Mahatma's final footsteps, then dropped him a postcard and purchased a length of khadi.

I have been wearing khadi kurtas for many years now. My friend from Rajahmundry, BSN Kumar, used to get me all my khadi. The closest I got to a living Gandhi was when I met Rajmohan Gandhi and Tara Gandhi Bhattacharjee at the South Asian Literary Festival organized by the well-known Punjabi writer Ajeet Cour. Whenever I wear a khadi shirt, I feel strangely connected to the Daridranarayana. I prefer to call him the Mahatma of India in the same way I call Rabindranath, the man who gave this title to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the Gurudev of India.

Now, my padayatra takes me back to a time even before mine.

A Beacon of Hope

On 7 November 1927, Gandhi and his entourage boarded SS Chinkoa from the Tuticorin Port, for what was going to be his only tour of Ceylon. The backdrop to the visit was set by the newly formed Students' Congress of Jaffna, which had invited Gandhi to the island to support their freedom movement and forge greater solidarity between the anti-colonial struggles of the two countries. S.H. Perinpanayagam, a popular student leader, wrote to Gandhi, assuring him that they would raise a minimum of `30,000 for the promotion of khadi. (They subsequently collected `105,000.) For the student activists, Gandhi was a beacon of hope – the bare-bodied man in loincloth working the charkha as a defiant symbol of resistance against British imperialism. The students had been planning to bring Gandhi to the island for quite some time. In March 1925, S. Durai Raja Singam, a student activist in Jaffna, went to Madras upon learning that the Mahatma was campaigning there. With some help from the people he knew there, Singam met his idol in the mansion of Srinivasa Iyengar. The student activist's excitement was palpable. 'Gandhiji as I saw him was a ... frail tiny man with sparkling eyes and a mystic toothless smile ... a sight that awakened the sparks of the divine in man,' Singam wrote, recollecting his meeting with the Mahatma. Asked when he would be able to visit Ceylon, Gandhi told the student that he would love to be on the 'beautiful island', but *when*, he was not sure.

And then, two-and-a-half years later, the leader of the Indian freedom struggle landed with his entourage at the Melbourne Jetty, decorated with flags, potted palms, the landing steps carpeted, at 9.30 pm, 12 November 1927. About 100 Labour Union volunteers lined up on either side as part of the reception. Among those with Gandhi and Kasturba were Kaka Kalelkar, Mahadev Desai, Pyarelal, Jamnadas Gandhi, C. Rajagopalachari, and his daughter Lakshmi Rajagopalachari (later married to Gandhi's son Devdas).

THE MOUNT ROAD MAHATMA

VR Devika

Everyone has a personal prism to see Gandhi through, a special connect to him. In my case, it was my uncle, the freedom fighter and author VS Narayana Rao. This younger brother of my father, who had gone to jail many times, was my childhood hero. I looked up to him for inspiration and guidance. Seeing him, I got an idea about Gandhi – the man who had brought onto the rough road one whole generation of men like Narayana Rao.

For many of us, Gandhi had different contexts – a freedom fighter in the family, a book you had read, or even a coincidence. In my case, it was not exactly a coincidence but an accident of a date. The day the Mahatma was assassinated in Delhi's Birla House – 30 January – happens to be my birthday, though I came into the world six years later.

Reading Gandhi

As a young school teacher, I decided to bring Gandhi into the classroom and in a livelier way than had been done till then. So, I began to read more about him. At one point, I went to the Gandhi Peace Foundation, Madras, to learn more about him. And I learnt to spin and work the charkha. Gandhi slowly began to infuse my life with new thoughts and ideas, filling me with a new purpose. My days, I realized, were becoming more meaningful. To know a great man fully, they say, it's important to be aware of his drawbacks as well. I, therefore, began reading both critiques of Gandhi and appreciation of his place in history. I decided to do a course in Gandhian Studies and, years later, did my master's in this subject. Around this time, I took an interest in the classical dance form of Bharatanatyam and went on to learn it as a discipline. I had no ambition to perform Bharatanatyam on stage, but I wanted to master the art of communication. The Sanskrit classical dance texts – Natya Shastra and Abhinaya Darpana – talk about four modes of communication to create Sahridayas among the audience. A Sahridaya is one who can feel the emotions being evoked by the artist through Abhinaya (expression). Abhinaya is to create a make-believe magical world and help the audience get into that world. The expressions are achieved through Angika (the body language), Vachika (dialogues, music and ideas), Aharya (costume and decor) and Sathvika (the inner feelings brought out convincingly through conviction).

I decided to use the entire gamut of expressions consciously in my teaching. In the pre-internet days, I created a PowerPoint with one-minute videos clipped from the original black-and-white film on the Mahatma as triggers for storytelling and discussing his ideas with children. I must have made over 1,500 presentations at schools, colleges and communities all over Tamil Nadu, in Delhi and during my travels abroad. When I travel, I usually send beforehand to my hosts a list of presentations I have on various topics such as classical dance, folk dance and ritual arts, but it is Gandhi that gets chosen nine out of 10 times. I end up doing some 30 presentations on Gandhi at schools, colleges and universities on every such trip.

GANDHI GARDEN IN KARACHI

Shershah Syed

Mahatma Gandhi visited Karachi in 1934 to lay the cornerstone of the newly built Karachi Chamber of Commerce. The plaque still greets the onlookers as a reminder of another era, a time when a robust nationalist vision was sweeping through India – from Karachi to Mysore, Peshawar to Chittagong. Very often, the administrator of the building now has to get the cornerstone cleaned – callous idlers scribble nasty remarks on it, sometimes about the Mahatma, and indifferently smear it with paints. As protection against such vandalism, the cornerstone has been recently covered by transparent glass.

Reputability of Freedom

Not far from the Karachi Chamber of Commerce is a structure, across Urdu Bazaar and next to the old Radio Pakistan building – the emblem of Gandhi on the cast-iron railing, evocative of the heyday of anti-colonial struggle. The ornate icon at the centre of a flowery bouquet moulded over the railing takes a pattern as it features on every balcony of the building visible from every side of the road.

A big Gandhi statue had stood on the top floor of a building on Frere Road. At some point, the statue disappeared. It is no longer there.

In the Indian Merchants Association building on Cantonment Road, where the cornerstone still draws attention, there once stood a Gandhi statue as well. The legend etched below it read: ‘Mahatma Gandhi: The reputability of Freedom, Truth and Non-Violence.’ This bronze statue was removed in 1950.

A municipal park in Karachi was known as Gandhi Garden, where small political and social gatherings used to take place. This landmark has long disappeared along with its name and location.

The present Zoological Garden in the heart of the city was called Gandhi Garden too. We have been going there for a little bit of recreation since our school days. The place is still known as Gandhi Garden, but officially, its name has changed. It’s now known as Karachi Zoological Garden.

The famed artery of the city, stretching from the port to Guru Mandir, was known as Bunder Road in its early days. Karachi Municipality named it Gandhi Road long before Partition. The grave of Pakistan’s founder, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, is situated on top of a small mountain near Guru Mandir. It has now become M.A. Jinnah Road. People still call it Bunder Road, because it is a lot easier to say that.

A few years ago, Rajmohan Gandhi, the grandson of the Mahatma, came to Karachi. In his speech at a function, he mentioned that Gandhi had visited Sindh seven times in his life. Most of the trips to Karachi. The people of Karachi – be it Hindu, Muslim, Parsi or Christian – they all loved him, and he felt welcome. His name on different buildings and city landmarks is only a testament to their affection for him.

HIS FOOTPRINTS ACROSS A CITY

Nikhita Nair

It was a comforting day at the end of January. The winter chill was gone, and still the air was indolent with the lingering touch of cold. Over the past few days, the two most important men in the life of the newly independent nation had had a strange premonition of something sinister about to happen.

‘While the present is full of uncertainty, the future is more shrouded and difficult to pierce,’ Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said, addressing the students of Aligarh Muslim University on 24 January. Exactly four days later, Mahatma Gandhi disquietingly remarked, ‘If I’m to die by the bullet of a mad man, I must do so smiling. God must be in my heart and on my lips. And if anything happens, you are not to shed a single tear.’

This Friday morning, when the mellow sun lazed around the wooded bungalows of New Delhi, Gandhi had a strange sense of foreboding. The lines from the Bhagavad Gita that were recited by him and his followers were:

‘For certain is death for the born
And certain is birth for the dead;
Therefore over the inevitable
Thou shouldst not grieve.’

He was running late for his evening prayer; his talk with Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel had assumed grim proportions. He had tried to convince Patel not to resign from Nehru’s cabinet. His doctor, Sushila Nayyar, was not around – she had not yet returned from Pakistan. Nor was the police officer present to accompany Gandhi to the prayer grounds as he had gone to attend an urgent meeting somewhere.

These apparently minor lapses and misses put together have the making of a Shakespearean tragedy – the villain’s plot visible to the audience but not to the protagonist.

To save time, Gandhi cut across the lawn to the prayer grounds at Birla House. Abha and Manu, his constant companions, escorted him. While Gandhi began to greet the crowd of visitors, three shadowy figures – Nathuram Godse, Karkare and Madanlal – ominously lurked around as agents of death. Godse moved close to Gandhi, bowed and greeted him, and as the 78-year-old raised his hand in benediction, the semi-automatic pistol in the hand of the 36-year-old member of a fanatic Hindu-nationalist fringe pumped three bullets into his frail body, ending the long journey of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Driven by his blind rage over what he saw as Gandhi’s leaning towards the Muslims, Godse instantly rose up the ranks of history’s worst villains by assassinating the tallest figure of India’s freedom struggle. Gandhi’s chest bled, but he still made a failed attempt to go towards the prayer platform. His last words – *Hé Ram*. His feeble frame wrapped in blood-soaked white khadi collapsed on the ground. At 17 minutes past five, he bid farewell to the world, his arms still folded to greet his assassin.

THE HOUSE OF HOPE

Apurba Saha

I ask a man at the bus stop for directions to Hyderi Manzil. He gives me a puzzled look. Then I turn to a few others; they nod indifferently. I look around on either side of the road for a clue. To my surprise, the sign over the arch appears a little distance away: Gandhi Bhavan.

Standing outside the closed gate, I look for a guard, wait for someone to appear. In no time comes out a man sporting a headband. Dilip De, I learn a while later, is the keeper of the place. Once inside, a strange feeling grips me: This is the house where Mahatma Gandhi spent the first day of free India to make sure riots did not convulse Calcutta once again.

That morning, when the top leaders of the Nationalist Movement gathered at the Red Fort in Delhi to savour the first taste of freedom, Gandhi-Mountbatten's one-man army for the east – staked everything to make sure the capital of Bengal did not erupt again in an orgy of violence. Barely a year ago, on 16 August 1946, Jinnah's Direct-Action Day, about 4,000 people had died in a vicious outburst of violence – both Hindus and Muslims. In history books, the incident is referred to as the 'Great Calcutta Killing'. Anticipating violence in Punjab, Lord Mountbatten deployed there most of the troops – depleted after a part of the Indian Army joined the new state of Pakistan. Killings had already begun in Punjab. And in Bengal, his hope was the frail figure of a 77-year-old man. He wrote to Gandhi:

'In Punjab we have 55,000 soldiers, and large-scale rioting on our hands. In Bengal our forces consist of one man, and there is no rioting. As a serving officer as well as an administrator, I should be allowed to pay my tribute to the one-man boundary force.'

Further east, the district of Noakhali had been smeared with blood a year ago. In retaliatory violence in Bihar, more people were killed. Gandhi had rushed from one trouble spot to another to stress the futility of violence, douse the fire of hatred. He had been camping in Hyderi Manzil since 13 August, determined to ensure that Calcutta did not lapse into madness at the dawn of Independence. Of all the challenges in his long struggle, this was perhaps the toughest.

The congested Mianbagan area of Belegkata where this house is located was a veritable tinderbox in 1946-47. The working-class population of Hindus and Muslims had been living on a razor's edge for months before Independence. The division of the province with the prosperous East Bengal going to Pakistan had created tension and uncertainty. Completely indifferent to the celebrations of the freedom hour, Gandhi, with a handful of associates, stayed put in this nondescript building close to a slum. For 25 days – between 13 August and 7 September 1947. How did he decide on Hyderi Manzil as his address for this critical period in history?

A Rundown Manzil

News had reached him about the explosive situation in Calcutta. On 6 August, he was in Lahore meeting Congress workers. According to a newspaper report, Gandhi told them about his unhappiness over the Ashok Chakra replacing the charkha in the national flag to be ceremonially hoisted a few days later.

IF DEVELOPMENT MEANS DEVASTATION, IT IS NOT FOR US

Sunderlal Bahuguna

Sunderlal Bahuguna's Chipko Movement in the 1970s is among the most reassuring instances of Gandhian nonviolence being successfully put to practice to win a major environmental war. In the face of a systematic threat to the forests in the Garhwal region of the Himalayas by the timber mafia – with support from the local bureaucracy and petty politicians – villagers 'stuck' (chipko in Hindi) to trees to save them from being felled. Soon, the movement spread to newer areas and different parts of the country. Bahuguna, an environmental activist and distinguished Gandhian, later led the protests against the Tehri Dam project and waged a campaign against the liquor culture in the hills.

The 91-year-old Bahuguna, mostly confined to bed in his Dehradun home, now lives almost like a recluse. When approached for a conversation with *The Equator Line*, he first declined. He agreed after much persuasion. **Nikhita Nair** conducted this interview over several sessions in association with journalist **Pradeep Bahuguna**, who is **Sunderlal's** son.

In his lifetime, Mahatma Gandhi influenced a large number of people all over the world. Your generation of Indians, who grew up during the freedom struggle, was particularly impressed by him. How old were you when you first felt the influence of the Mahatma in your life? Which aspect of his ideology made the strongest appeal to you? Do you recall a particular incident that drew you closer to Gandhi? Maybe you found a certain aspect of Gandhian philosophy attracting you.

I was 13 years old when I first met Gandhiji's disciple Sri Dev Suman. While I was playing with the other boys in Tehri, Suman came to us. I vividly remember he was in khadi-kurta and dhoti, a topi on his head. He was carrying a chest. Intrigued about what was inside that chest, the other children asked him. Like a serene monk, he sat under a tree, and before the curious eyes, he opened the chest. A charkha was kept inside. He started working it. While spinning yarn, he told us about Gandhiji's ideal of swadeshi. Suman motivated the boys to adopt khadi, wear clothes made by our own hands and thus drive the British away from our motherland. Suman asked us what we wanted to be when we grew up. The answer was typical – everybody wanted to serve the government. The man in khadi looked distressed. 'Then who is going to serve the people? Are you going to sell your souls for some pieces of silver?' This question bothered me a lot and I felt an awakening within. Instead of buying milk with the money that my mother had given me, I bought some books from Suman. They were *Hind Swaraj* by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Prince Kropotkin's *An Appeal to the Young*. After reading these works, I became Suman's disciple.

It's hard to pick which aspect of Gandhian philosophy appealed to me more. Gandhiji's method of nonviolence to liberate India from colonial clutches captured my imagination. In 1955, I met my would-be wife, Vimla Nautiyal, who agreed to marry me only if I left politics and embraced Gandhian living. That is, to start life afresh in a remote village. I met that condition by moving to Silyara village, about 22 km from Tehri. On 19 June 1956, I married Vimla and our new home turned into a centre for discourse about the Gandhian method of nonviolence. My humble hut was a symbol of my conviction that using nonviolence as a method can solve any problem.

SMALL GRASSROOTS INITIATIVES

Tara Gandhi Bhattacharjee

It is both fascinating and admirable to meet someone who is part of a legacy as venerable as that of Mahatma Gandhi. While many heroes of world history have slid into the topsy-turvy of reassessment, Gandhian thought has seen a renewal over recent decades, inspiring Lech Walesa's campaign against Poland's communist regime and the nonviolent protests of the Arab Spring beginning in Tunisia in 2010. A day after Gandhi's granddaughter **Tara Gandhi Bhattacharjee** came out of hospital, **Nikhita Nair** met her at her New Delhi residence to know how it feels to have *Gandhi* not just etched beside her name but to live it every day.

Though monsoon was largely over, the air that late September evening was still sultry, and the traffic on the road outside was chaotic. But the house was peaceful – 84-year-old Tara Gandhi Bhattacharjee still recovering, smiles welcoming the conversation. Frail and laid low by illness, this daughter of Devdas Gandhi, the Mahatma's youngest son, beams that resilient energy long known as an unmistakable trait of the family.

Excerpts:

How does it feel to be born as part of such a great lineage? Have you ever felt the weight of the Gandhian legacy – that this history is not easy to bear, expectations difficult to live up to?

It never felt heavy as I considered it natural since I was born in this family. I am realizing the responsibility in my search for Gandhi. My search for Gandhi is my own truth. One can realize Gandhi by being on the path of seeking the truth. What is heavy is my being in the search of my truth. This is how I look at Gandhi, whose whole life was a journey in search of his own truth. I even cherished the fact that I was part of this family. I was never interested in the political arena. Though khadi fascinated me, it came naturally. To be in touch with your own self is a challenge. Self-realization is indeed a daunting feat.

Which path did you choose to search for Gandhi?

My search for Gandhi still goes on. The path that I chose can be mirrored in my love for khadi. Khadi is not just clothing. Khadi comes to me as a cosmic fabric. Writing also made me come closer to Gandhi. I like to listen to music. I have been a daughter, a wife and a mother. Approaching the autumn of my life like every other human being, I have experienced the whole life. I tried to find Gandhi in whatever I did. Now, I introspect. When you are connected by blood, you naturally do things you see in your family. The search for truth is in every sphere of life.

Growing up in the turbulent time of World War II, the Indian Freedom Movement and Partition, do you feel that India has not yet become a very cohesive society? Not the land the freedom fighters laid down their lives for?

India has always been a multicultural society. Even if the population is growing, the uniqueness of Indian society is its multiculturalism and diversity. Though America says it is a melting pot of many peoples and cultures, the contradictions in that society are visible. If we see divisiveness in Indian society and consider it as truth, then we should also see the other dimensions of truth – that India is also a cohesive society. India as a cohesive society is also a reality.

AN EPIC SEARCH AND A FILM ABOUT TRUTH

Amit Ranjan

After the shamefaced rioters surrender their weapons to him and go back promising not to maraud again, a lone rugged man strides onto the verandah of the ramshackle house, where the 77-year-old man sits fasting – firm in his decision not to touch food until the killing spree in the city ends. The man – clearly either a daily-wage earner or a factory worker – is both defiant and remorseful, a victim and perpetrator of violence at the same time. He throws a coarse roti onto the wilting old man’s chest and shouts, ‘Here. Eat, eat. I’m going to hell, but not with your death on my soul.’

Those around the old man look on uneasily for the intruder’s next move. Having unleashed his anger, now he makes a terrible confession, ‘I’m going to hell! I killed a child! I smashed his head against a wall.’

‘Why?’ the old man asks.

‘Because they killed my son! The Muslims killed my son!’

‘I know a way out of hell. Find a child, a child whose mother and father have been killed, and raise him as your own.’

‘Only be sure that he is a Muslim and that you raise him as one.’

This is perhaps the most intense and emotionally draining moment in Richard Attenborough’s *Gandhi*, a 1982 epic, which went on to win eight Academies apart from being a blockbuster. The concept of hell and repentance unfolded in this brief scene takes on biblical proportions. Here’s a sinner sliding down the dark tunnel to burn in hellfire, meets a saintly figure who tells him about redemption, that his deadly sin is not the end of the road. To infuse the Gandhi biopic with such startling connotations required the genius of Attenborough and his deep engagement with the ‘seditious ... half-naked fakir’. *Half-naked fakir*, Churchill’s contemptuous sobriquet for the Mahatma spat out in 1931, unravels the ugly face of the Empire. And half a century down the line, the filmmaker, a product of English liberalism, gave us a reason for hope and the hint of an effort to expiate the guilt of colonialism by getting at the heart of the enigma called Gandhi.

Attenborough’s affair with *Gandhi* began in 1962, when early one morning, Motilal Kothari, a man from Gujarat living in London, called him. Perhaps it was a coincidence that the previous night he had come home with a bronze bust of Nehru by Jacob Epstein, purchased at Christie’s. Days later, when he met Kothari over lunch in a restaurant, he persuaded him to make a film about Gandhi. Later, when he met Prime Minister Nehru, they shared their disgust at Mark Robson’s *Nine Hours to Rama*, recently released to indifferent response. ‘I had seen it and could not voice my own anger at its evident distortion of truth,’ Attenborough later wrote in *In Search of Gandhi*, recalling his meeting with Nehru.

For a second meeting with Nehru, the filmmaker flew down to Delhi and had a lively conversation in the prime minister’s office. For him, Nehru was a ‘revelation’, and he remembered the session for a wealth of anecdotes about Gandhi that the prime minister shared. Coming to the purpose of Attenborough’s visit, Nehru cleared the film in principle. It took another 20 years for Attenborough to make \$22 million film.

LANGOT BABA

Taha Kehar

Warris Shah suddenly woke up to a sharp smell of cigarette smoke. It was not yet morning. A cold fear gripped him. Hope the house has not caught fire! He leapt up from his bed and saw Danish resting on the charpoy on the balcony outside the bedroom – his large body sprawled and the feet dangling out of the string cot. Plumes of grey smoke wafted into the room from the balcony, forming a thin cloud below the ceiling. He kept looking at his servant.

Danish rose awkwardly, dropping the stubbed cigarette under the cot.

‘Sorry, Saeen,’ the flunkey said shamefacedly. ‘I didn’t mean to smoke your cigarette. I just saw the lovely packet and couldn’t resist. Too tempting. *Maaf kar dein*, Saeen.’

‘Are you out of your mind?’ Warris Shah roared, outraged. ‘Why are you on the balcony? What business do you have here? Did you want to steal something? I will ask Abba to send you back to that godforsaken village of yours. I don’t get why he bothered to bring you boys from Makli to work in Karachi when all of you are good-for-nothing *chors*.’

‘Please, Saeen,’ Danish fell at Warris Shah’s feet, his heart pounding wildly. ‘I’m not a thief. I came in to clean your room. It was only a mistake. I got carried away. The gleaming fag packet ... Don’t send me back to Makli. Please, I beg of you, Saeen. I’ll do anything for you.’

Warris Shah rubbed his eyes and stifled a yawn. He had recently graduated from the Lahore art college and was planning a group exhibition with two other artists in Karachi. He pulled out a cigarette from his pack of Marlboro Lights, placed it between his lips and touched the gold-dusted lighter against its tip.

‘Can you tell me a story?’ Warris whispered, as if embarrassed by what he had said.

‘What do you mean, Saeen?’ Danish asked, perplexed by this strange request.

Warris Shah took a long drag, pulled the cigarette out of his mouth, tipped the ash into the tray and let out a sigh.

‘I mean it,’ he raised his voice. ‘Tell me a story, and I’ll never tell anyone about this incident.’ He looked at the manservant to make sure he had been sufficiently scared.

‘Saeen...’ Danish hesitated, still confused by the young man’s strange demand. How could this man – this scion of a notorious zamindar family in Sindh – forgive Danish without lashing him for at least five minutes? His father, Shaukat Shah, was a sadist. The old zamindar would torture the peasants if they failed to deposit to his barn a part of the crop as tax. He would get off on whipping and caning the hungry men – an actual erection, his detractors would say. Danish’s uncle, who was Shaukat Shah’s munshi for over a decade, had to spend four months in Shaukat’s private prison – a bricked-up dungeon – for stealing a little money from the zamindar’s iron chest. Although Shaukat Shah had relented and had his uncle released, Danish – who was much too young at the time to understand the cruelties of an unjust world – grew up in fear of what would happen if he incurred the zamindar’s wrath.

Is this young man really Shaukat Shah’s blood? Danish wondered. How could a story be the price for a misdemeanour as grave as lighting up on the balcony of the boss’s bedroom?

‘Hello?’ Warris Shah snapped his fingers and reclined on the sofa. ‘I don’t have all day. Tell me a story right now.’

‘What would you like to hear, Saeen?’ Danish squatted on the floor and lowered his head.

THE NIGHT GUEST

Manojit Mitra

It was past midnight. The incessant noise of cricket and the occasional hooting of an owl only deepened the silence all around. The knock at the door came like a disruption. Satyasundar Chatterjee woke up but remained inert, undecided whether to answer the door or not. He kept lying – quiet. These were troubled times, and it might not be wise to open the door at this unearthly hour. He kept lying, uneasy about the knock. A while later, he heard it again – thuk, thuk! Not loud, not impatient – but persistent. Satyasundar finally got up from his bare bed on the floor and went to the door.

‘Who’s this?’

‘Sorry for troubling you. Will you please open the door? Please.’ The voice of a young man – hesitant, apologetic.

Satyasundar dithered. In the godforsaken Kumaria village, who could it be at this hour of night? In this back of the beyond corner of Birbhum district, who was the stranger at his door? Maybe someone seeking shelter for the night? But there could also be a gang of dacoits on the other side of the door waiting to barge in? He finally shook off his hesitation. Why not open the door and see? He had seen enough in life to fear such things. He unfastened the bolt and opened the door.

A young man, as he had guessed, barely 25, faced him. A bag in hand, dishevelled and tense, he was completely fagged out. Putting the bag down, he folded his hands. ‘I apologize for waking you up,’ he said. ‘Can I spend the night in your house? I’ll leave early in the morning.’

Satyasundar looked him over, then asked, ‘Who are you? Where are you from?’

The young man said he was from Kolkata. Kanchan Roy – his name. He had been here on some family business and lost his way. ‘Err ... I’m sorry, really sorry. But if you turn me away, I will have to spend the night out in the paddy field.’

Satyasundar sensed the stranger was not telling the truth about himself. Perhaps Kanchan was not his real name. But he let him in. He had no bed to offer. An old-school Gandhian – an endangered species – he slept in a bedroll spread on the floor, a cotton pillow his only indulgence. Before he could say something, Kanchan guessed his dilemma and said he didn’t need a bed. Dumping his bag in a corner, he slumped down on the floor, thanking his host again and again. Satyasundar put out the lantern.

But sleep didn’t return soon. There was something about this boy that kept nagging him. In all these years he had been living in the little home, he had never received such an unusual visitor. If his clothes and manners were anything to go by, he was a well-bred city boy from an upper-middle class home. He should not have been here at this hour. What business could he have in this ghostly place, all alone inside the heart of darkness? There were gaps in the narrative. He noticed Kanchan was not sleeping either, that he kept tossing and turning. Finally, Satyasundar said, ‘Not used to sleeping on the bare floor, are you?’

‘It’s okay,’ Kanchan said. ‘You too aren’t sleeping.’

In no time, a conversation started, haltingly before it got into the flow. That they could not see each other, did not know how expressions on the other’s face changed, mattered very little. The boy, Satyasundar noticed, was not willing to open up, talk about his family.

Very often *The Equator Line* numbers evoke a deep response from the readers. This clearly is a measure of the magazine's success. Moved by the essays and interviews assessing many facets of Mahatma Gandhi's personality and his anti-colonial struggle in *The Equator Line 25: The Burden of his Truth*, well-known writer Bhaskar Roy Barman has written an insightful essay. We are delighted to carry excerpts from the write-up on our website.

GANDHIAN INFLUENCE ON INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION

Bhaskar Roy Barman

To deal with the Gandhian influence on Indian English literature with which to conclude this paper necessitates a discussion of the concept and category of Indian English fiction, they are often considered inter-related. We can't think of concept in isolation from category: concept determines category and category gives birth to concept. Concept and category are two different terms connoted differently and they call forth an elaborate discussion from different perspectives. Let's set aside 'concept' for the time being and steer our attention on to 'category'. Now we shall concern ourselves with how to categorize Indian Literature, I mean, Indian English fiction concretized under the Gandhian influence. Categorizing Indian English literature will help us to a great extent in understanding about the concept.

At the beginning of my discussion it deserves to be noted that Indian English literature is part of Third World Literature. Thus is necessitated a brief expatiation on 'Third World Literature' as a theory. Indian literature should be categorized in the light of this theory.

The idea of assembling and professionalizing this new area of literature is mooted in the metropolitan university in England and North America in response to some kinds of pressures being put to bear upon them to formulate a new set of categories within the larger conceptual category. It seems worthwhile to summarize some of the pressures, literary, cultural and political, and, at the same time, the general conjuncture impelling them and us through them first to speak of a unitary category of Third World Literature and then to regurgitate that very ideology, on an escalated scale, in all we think and say about that category. The pressures and paradoxes that accompany them take institutional and pedagogical forms through which can be traced the lineages of particular intelligentsias and then connected the practices of these intelligentsias with their largely unrecognized global determination with a view to preparing a theoretical ground for examining the fairly widespread proposition that nationalism of one kind or another is a determinate ideological imperative in the cultural productions of the 'Third World' in the era of colonialism and imperialism.

It should be borne in mind, to understand about the nature of Third World Literature, that it is connected with the context of the metropolitan university and its teaching is linked to that situation. The Indian university's relation with, nay, dependence upon, its British and American counterparts is so fundamental, intrinsic and even generic that knowledge produced there becomes immediately effective in a relation of imperial dominance, shaping, as it does, the way we think of ourselves and our literature now considered part of Third World Literature.