

# Mahatma Gandhi in Cinema



Narendra Kaushik

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By

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## INTRODUCTION

The book *Mahatma Gandhi in Cinema* is an attempt to explore how much of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the tallest leader of the Indian freedom struggle, lives in Hindi cinema. Arguably the only book that analyses 100 years of Bollywood history (1913–2013), it will find how much of the Indian father of the nation – in person and through his ideals – is present on celluloid.

The book is an adaptation of the study the writer did for his doctorate from the Pacific Academy of Higher Education & Research University in 2017. The research was *ex post facto*, descriptive and qualitative, and the writer has permission from the university to publish the content in the form of a book. During the study, the writer came across many research papers and books that analysed various episodes of Mahatma Gandhi's life and also films based on his select epistemologies, but no research spanned the entire 100 years of Hindi cinema. This became the writer's *raison d'être*.

The book is the outcome of a few years of rigorous and painstaking research during which the writer not only read and reread hundreds of books on Gandhi but also watched close to three dozen films in full and select scenes from dozens of others chosen from the hundred years of Hindi cinema. The films pivoted around the Gandhian principles of truth, non-violence, untouchability, *Swadeshi*, and equality of religions. The author also did appraisals of films that were either biopics on Gandhi or portrayed his character in supporting roles.

Gandhi adapted 11 vows – namely, *Satya* (Truth), *Ahimsa* (Non-Violence), *Asteya* (Non-Stealing), *Brahamcharya* (Celibacy, Self Control or Sexual Abstinence), *Aparigraha* (Non-Possession), *Sharirshrama* (Bread Labour), *Aswada* (Control of the Palate), *Sarvatra Bhayavarjana* (Fearlessness), *Sarva Dharma Samantva* (Equality of all Religions), *Swadeshi* (Use Locally Made Goods), and *Sparshbhavana* (Remove Untouchability) to nourish and nurture his moral, political and spiritual self during his pursuit of Indian freedom from the British Empire.

Since most of these vows are interwoven into or involve adherence to *Satya*, *Ahimsa*, *Swadeshi*, Equality of Religions, and Removal of Untouchability, the writer has divided the entire cinematic history of Bollywood into four phases and picked films from each phase that best represent these principles on the silver screen.

The writer juxtaposes the reel with the real drawn from *The Story of My Experiments with the Truth* or *The Autobiography*, *The Collected Works of Gandhi* (CWG) and other books and research papers to ascertain how truly cinema has represented the Gandhian principles, and whether it portrays the transformations Gandhi underwent on *chaturvarna* (the four-caste system), inter-dining, inter-marriages, and even non-violence and religion in politics. He would cite from books, research papers, journals, and newspapers in support of his contentions. The attempt is to discover whether Bombay filmmakers have reinforced the stereotypes and myths prevalent about Gandhi, simply deified him without looking into the experiments/incidents that lent an extraordinary touch to an ordinary man, or tried to decode his epistemology on the five vows.

The book is divided into six chapters, beginning with an introductory chapter and a chapter examining Mahatma Gandhi's association with or rather disassociation from cinema.

During his lifetime, the only Hindi film Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi watched was *Ram Rajya*, a film based on his favourite epic *Ramayana*. Gandhi, then 74, saw the film in a special screening at Juhu in Mumbai on June 2, 1944 during his illness. Gandhi had agreed to see only select reels of the movie for 40 minutes but ended up watching the film for an hour and a half. Filmmaker Vijay Bhatt, a fellow Gujarati, later claimed that the Mahatma looked "cheerful" at the end of the showing. The same year, before *Ram Rajya*, Gandhi had been persuaded to watch *Mission to Moscow*, a Hollywood movie by Michael Kurtiz to promote the American alliance with the then USSR.

Gandhi looked down on cinema, believing it promoted immorality and other vices and corrupted young minds, and that watching films was a sheer waste of hard-earned money. The father of the Indian nation, in a letter addressed to T Rangachariar, the then Chairman of the Cinematograph Committee, called cinema a "sinful technology" when the latter placed before him a questionnaire to find out his views on cinema in 1937. Gandhi said in an interview published in the May 3, 1942 issue of *Harijan*, "If I began to organise picketing in respect of them (the evil of cinema), I should lose my caste, my Mahatmaship".

The third chapter of the book deals with biopics or films where Mahatma Gandhi's character is the pivot. These include *Gandhi*, *Gandhi, My Father* and *Making of the Mahatma*. Since the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) was the underwriter for *Gandhi* and the film was dubbed in Hindi and premiered in New Delhi, the writer has included the film in the list.

In the fourth chapter, the book appraises films like *Lage Raho Munnabhai* (2006), *Veer Savarkar*, *Sardar: The Iron Man of India*, *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: The Forgotten Hero*, *The Legend of Bhagat Singh*, and *Dr Baba Saheb Ambedkar*, in which Mahatma Gandhi's character appears in cameos.

The study of *The Legend of Bhagat Singh* aims to find out whether Rajkumar Santoshi's film was unfair to Mahatma Gandhi, as alleged by the then CBFC Chairman Vijay Anand. Anand defended cuts in the film on the ground that "Gandhi's portrayal is very weak. He does not even hold his head high. I told the filmmakers he was the father of the nation. Don't let him look like a cow". The review also helps to ascertain whether the film is right to accuse Gandhi of not doing anything to get Singh's sentence commuted. Likewise, the juxtaposition of Jabbar Patel's *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar* with the available written content on Mahatma helps us know whether the differences between Gandhi and Ambedkar were irreconcilable.

The next chapter examines five films based on the principles of truth, non-violence, Swadeshi (use of indigenous goods), untouchability, and equality of religions in its five sub chapters. The first of these sub chapters explores *Raja Harishchandra* (1913), *Phir Subah Hogi* (1958), *Shriman Satyawadi* (1960), *Satyakam* (1969), and *Satyagraha* (2013) to test how much they abide by truths enunciated by the apostle, while the next scrutinizes *Dr Kotnis Ki Amar Kahani* (1946), *Do Aankhen Barah Haath* (1957), *Hum Dono* (1960), *Mission Kashmir* (2000), and *Maine Gandhi Ko Nahin Mara* (2005) on the parameters laid down by the father of the Indian nation for Ahimsa, or non-violence.

The scrutiny of *Lage Raho Munnabhai*, for instance, ascertains whether Raju Hirani trivialized the message of the Mahatma by emphasizing his ideals through tragic-comic situations. Similarly, it is interesting to see whether the films on non-violence reflect Gandhi's evolution on non-violence. In his lifetime, non-violence was not always the victor. The Mahatma himself became an admirer of Subhas Chandra Bose's efforts to liberate the country from foreign rule through the use of force and supported Indian military action against Pakistani mercenaries in Jammu & Kashmir in 1947. In his book *India Wins Freedom: The Complete Version*, Maulana Abul Kalam writes that

in discussion with him (Gandhi), I felt that he was becoming more and more doubtful about an allied victory. I also saw that Subhas Bose's escape to Germany had made a great impression on Gandhiji. He had not formerly approved many of his (Bose's) actions, but now I found a change in his outlook. Many of his remarks convinced me that he admired the courage and resourcefulness Subhas Bose had displayed in making his escape from India.

His admiration for Bose unconsciously coloured his view about the whole (2nd World) war situation.

This is followed by a sub chapter in which the writer scans films like *Dharti Ke Lal* (1946), *Naya Daur* (1957), *Manthan* (1976), *Swades: We the People* (2004), *Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India* (2001), *Achhut Kanya* (1936), *Sujata* (1959), *Ankur- The Seedling* (1973), *Jaag Utha Insan* (1984), and *Shudra* (2012) to test whether cinema conformed to Gandhian principles on *Swadeshi* and untouchability. This helps the writer ascertain whether filmmakers have taken into consideration the evolution of the Mahatma on these principles.

Gandhi, for example, was against inter-dining, inter-caste and inter-religious marriages before 1930, so much so that he prevented his second son Manilal from marrying Fatima, a Muslim girl, in South Africa in 1926, and made his other son, Devdas, wait for five years before he could marry Lakshmi, the daughter of C Rajgopalachari, a Brahmin, in June 1933. By then, Gandhi had changed his views on inter-dining and inter-caste marriages, saying, "Restriction on inter-dining and inter-caste marriage is no part of the Hindu religion... Today, these two prohibitions are weakening Hindu society." This statement is in contrast to what he had said in 1920: "Prohibition against intermarriage and inter-dining is essential for rapid development of the soul."

In the last sub chapter, based on scrutiny of films, the writer analyses *Padosi* (1941), *Hum Ek Hain* (1946), *Train to Pakistan* (1998), *Road to Sangam* (2009), and *Hey Ram* (2000) to check whether they promote Gandhi's epistemology on the equality of religions.

This is followed by a final chapter or denouement where the writer has placed his findings and conclusions, buttressing them with references from books and research papers.

# CHAPTER I

## CINEMA, A ‘SINFUL TECHNOLOGY’

During his lifetime, the only Hindi film Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi watched was *Ram Rajya*, a film based on his favourite epic *Ramayana*. Gandhi, then 74, saw the film in a special screening at Juhu in Mumbai on June 2, 1944, during his illness.

Gandhi had agreed to see only select reels of the movie for 40 minutes but ended up watching the film for an hour and a half. Filmmaker Vijay Bhatt, a fellow Gujarati of Gandhi, later claimed that the Mahatma looked “cheerful” at the end of the show.

That same year, before *Ram Rajya*, Gandhi was persuaded to watch *Mission to Moscow*, a Hollywood movie by Michael Kurtiz filmed to promote the American alliance with the then USSR (Rajmohan, 2007).<sup>1</sup>

Like many of his contemporaries in the Indian freedom movement, Gandhi did not think very highly of cinema. He believed Hindi as well as foreign films promoted immorality and corrupted young minds.

When T Rangachariar, the then chairman of the Cinematograph Committee placed a questionnaire before him to know his views on cinema in 1937, the father of the Indian nation described cinema a “sinful technology” (Jain, 2009).<sup>2</sup> Gandhi considered cinema a waste of resources and time.

In a prayer meeting in a village on December 27, 1947, Gandhi asked,

Why do you need a cinema here? Instead of this, you can perform the various plays and stage dramas known to us. The cinema will only make you spend money. Then you will also learn to gamble and fall into other evil habits. Those addicted to alcohol, ganja and bhang should give up these addictions. (CWMG, 1947–1948)<sup>3</sup>

Gandhi said in an interview published in the May 3, 1942 issue of *Harijan*, “If I began to organise picketing in respect of them (the evil of cinema), I should lose my caste, my Mahatmaship” (Tripathi, 2015).<sup>4</sup>

The Mahatma even refused to invoke cinema for education.

I have never once been to a cinema and refuse to be enthused about it and waste God-given time in spite of pressure sometimes used by kind friends. They tell me it has an educational value. It is possible it has. But its corrupting influence obdurates itself upon me every day. Education, therefore, I seek elsewhere. (YI, 1926)<sup>5</sup>

Gandhi found it suffocating to sit in a theatre and threatened to shut cinemas given the chance. In answer to “Why do you oppose the growth of industries in our country through machinery?” on May 27, 1947, he said

With so much leisure on hand, the people get busy in mischief, for, as the saying is, an idle mind is the devil’s workshop. Or they waste their time in cinemas and theatres. Many people argue with me and try to convince me that the cinema has an educative value. But the argument doesn’t appeal to me at all. For one thing, sitting in a closed theatre one feels suffocated. I had been in such a theatre only once, when I was a small child. If I had my way, I would see to it that all the cinemas and theatres in India were converted into spinning halls and factories for handicrafts of all kinds.<sup>6</sup>

He further said in the same breath

And what obscene photographs of actors and actresses are displayed in the newspapers by way of advertisement! Moreover, who are these actors and actresses if not our own brothers and sisters. We waste our money and ruin our culture at the same time. If I was made Prime Minister of the country, these would be the first things I would do: I would close all the cinemas and theatres, though I might, as an exception, permit exhibition of pictures of educational value or showing scenes of natural beauty. But I would stop the sale of gramophone records. That is, I would suggest to the Government that it should impose heavy taxes on all such life-killing activities. Similarly, harmful drinks and drugs like liquor, tobacco and tea should be heavily taxed so that their consumption would automatically decrease. (CWMG, 1947)<sup>7</sup>

A great proponent of celibacy, the Mahatma believed that cinema could break a person’s vow for self-control. “You will avoid theatres and cinemas. Recreation is where you may not dissipate yourself but recreate yourself”, he said in the preface to his book *Self-Restraint vs. Self-Indulgence* (CWMG, 1927).

Gandhi felt bad about being accused, wrongly, of promoting a film production house.

Today my withers are unwrung even though a German friend tells me that a German paper accuses me of having promoted a film company. The innocent writer does not know that I have never once been to a cinema and refuse to be enthused about it. (CWMG, 1926–1927)<sup>8</sup>

When labourers organized a theatrical performance and wanted to give him the proceeds in Rangoon on March 10, 1929, he remonstrated with them.

You grown-up people may regard yourself as immune from the insidious effects of the theatre on yourselves, but you ought to have regard for your little children whose innocence you expose to an unconscionable strain by asking them to questionable performances. Look around you. We are situated in the midst of a raging fire. The cinema, the stage, the race-course, the drink-booth and the opium den – all these enemies of society that have sprung up under the fostering influence of the present system us on all sides. Is it any wonder, then, that I have not hesitated to call the present system Satanic? My advice to you therefore is, beware of pitfalls. (CWMG, 1929)<sup>9</sup>

On the Silver Jubilee of the Indian cinema in 1938, when Gandhi was requested to send a message for an official souvenir, his secretary's response was

As a rule Gandhi gives messages only on rare occasion and this is only for cause whose virtue is never doubtful. As for the cinema industry, he has the least interest in it and one may not expect a word of appreciation from him. (Kaul, 1998)<sup>10</sup>

In 1939 Khwaja Ahmad Abbas wrote an open letter to Gandhi, pleading with him to accept the positive contribution of cinema to entertainment and its utility as a tool to further the cause of Indian freedom movement. But it had no impact on Gandhi. Similarly, the request of Baburao Patel, editor of *Filmindia*, failed to move him from his stated position. Patel wrote once

Let this champion of *Daridra Narayan* come down and meet us and we shall try to convince him, or be convinced. Surely as workers in the film field, we are not worse than the poor untouchables for whom the old Mahatma's heart so often bleeds. And if he thinks we are, the more reason why he should come to our rescue.

On another occasion, Patel argued, "Gandhi, the apostle of truth believes cinema to be an evil but has yet to see our films. He can't know the truth unless he experiences it himself. Will he begin with *Achhut?*" (Patel, 1940).

It appears that Indians, particularly the ones born before the country gained independence from the British, and even two decades later, were not that fond of the cinema. In fact, they considered the dancing and singing depicted in motion pictures a source of corrupting youth.

This was even more applicable to the idealistic leaders the Indian Independence movement produced.



There was always a puritanical streak in the Indian freedom movement, which was repelled by the colourful costumes, the love stories and the song-and-dance routines of popular films. After Independence, some puritans assumed high office from where they spoke out against an industry they did not like. (Guha, 2007)<sup>11</sup>

But there were also freedom fighters, like Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai, who not only encouraged Indian filmmakers to make films but also fought against censorship. Even Congress' national leader and independence activist from Madras, S Satyamurthy, was aware of the power of the mass medium. Before the civic elections in Madras in 1934, he filmed an appeal and had it screened in a number of cinema houses (Baskaran, 1981).<sup>12</sup>

Sarojini Naidu and Jawaharlal Nehru were also not averse to promoting a good film. The latter watched *Achhut Kanya* at the bidding of Naidu and even sent his good wishes to the Indian Motion Pictures Congress held in 1939 in Bombay. His message read

Motion pictures have become an essential part of modern life and they can be used with great advantage for educational purposes...I hope that the industry will consider now in terms of meeting the standards and of aiming at producing high class films which have educational and social values. (FI, 1939).<sup>13</sup>

Sardar Patel did not shy away from taking advantage of the medium to create awareness against prohibition and about the freedom movement of the Congress party either. In 1939, at the request of Vinayak Damodar Karnataki, the maker of *Brandy Ki Botal* (1939), he recorded a message against prohibition. The message was incorporated in the film as its opening scene.

The first Indian home minister secured a smuggled copy of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's *Azad Hind Fauj* at the Bombay port. The print was first played by Congress leaders at the Regal Theatre and later, after footage of Congress leaders was added, was screened all over the country (Kaul, 1998).<sup>14</sup>

Subsequently, Patel, with the aid of the Indian Motion Pictures Producers' Association (IMPPA), prepared a documentary on *Netaji Subhash*, which included the smuggled footage. The first deputy prime minister of India also inaugurated *Achhut*, a movie directed by Chandulal Shah, in 1940 and in his speech on the occasion stressed the vital role cinema played in the life of a nation.

Though Gandhi understood and made use of news media, he disregarded the film medium to promote his cause. Gandhi distributed ten thousand

green pamphlets to newspapers and leaders of political parties during his visit to India on colour prejudice in South Africa after his return from there. He also published *Indian Opinion* (IO) and refused to shut it down, even when its publication hurt the publishers financially. "The aim of journalism is service, not commerce", he emphasized while announcing the cuts he'd made in his lifestyle expenses to keep the newspaper afloat.

Tripathi finds it puzzling and weird that Gandhi, despite being aware of the role of media in reaching the masses and the government, was against the cinema.

To me, it seems inexplicable and bizarre to a certain extent that a man who understood and created symbols out of everyday life and made them into potent totems, like the charkha (spinning wheel) or his simple dressing, never attempted to use such a powerful medium to spread his message. One could assume that this stemmed from his opposing standpoint on things modern and on technology as a whole, despite being born in an era of progressive evolution of communication technology. (Tripathi, 2015)<sup>15</sup>

Like the majority of cultivated Indians, Mahatma Gandhi and his followers looked down on films as an inferior form of entertainment. Unlike other freedom movements – for example, in Russia – the National Congress had no use for the cinema. (Nochimson, 2010)<sup>16</sup>

Rachel Dwyer, professor of Indian Studies and Cinema at the School of Oriental and African Studies, who has written extensively on Hindi cinema, claims Gandhiji expressed his contempt for cinema when he told the Indian Cinematograph Committee in 1927–1928

Even if I was so minded, I would be unfit to answer your questionnaire, as I have never been to a cinema. But even to an outsider, the evil that it has done and is doing is patent. The good, if it has done any at all, remains to be proved. (Dwyer, 2010)

Gandhi considered cinema a vice, like betting, gambling and horse racing (Ganti, 2013).<sup>17</sup>

Gandhi was not even interested in meeting Charlie Chaplin, whom he called "a buffoon", and was only persuaded to see him after Kingsley Hall Community Centre manager Muriel Lester described the Hollywood actor as somebody whose art was "rooted in the life of working people" (Lester, 1932).<sup>18</sup> The two met on September 22, 1931 during Gandhi's visit to England for the Round Table Conference.

Donn Byrne writes in his book about the “the Mickey Mouse of India” (Gandhi was given the nickname during his stay in England because his ears stuck out like those of Mickey Mouse) that he

never went to cinema and had not even heard of Charlie Chaplin. He only agreed to meet him when he heard that Chaplin has come from a poor family in the East End, where Gandhi himself had stayed for a time when he first came to England as a student and where he was now staying once again. (Byrne, 1984)<sup>19</sup>

Interestingly, such was Gandhi’s power that within that one meeting, he left Chaplin tremendously impressed and converted him to his cause against machinery. Chaplin’s movie *Modern Times* (1936)

echoes the sentiment that machinery should benefit humanity and not throw it out of work, a point much removed from his earlier stance where he believed that machinery could release man from the bondage of slavery. (Tripathi, 2015)<sup>20</sup>

Hindi cinema was at a nascent stage during Gandhi’s lifetime. It was not the Bollywood of now, the largest industry producing films in the world, over two times more than China and almost four times more than Hollywood.

Bollywood has been the top producer of films for several years. In 2002, in comparison to the 739 films produced in Hollywood, it produced 1013 films and enjoyed a growth rate of 12.6 percent compared to Hollywood's 5.6 percent (NFPE, 2002).<sup>21</sup> In 2011, Bollywood was estimated to have grossed 93 billion, a growth of 11.5 percent from 2010 (Shukla, 2014).<sup>22</sup> In 2012, it produced 1,602 films compared to the 745 and 476 films made in China and America in the same year, respectively. Bollywood sold 2.6 billion tickets against the 1.36 billion sold by Hollywood in 2012 (McCarthy, 2014).<sup>23</sup>

Hindi cinema used Gandhi’s name to sell its wares, even during the Mahatma's lifetime and not just after his death. Such was Gandhi’s popularity in the 1930s and 1940s that many film hoardings would put life-size pictures of him over the photographs of heroes and heroines.

Several films boasted that they were a “helper to the cause of Mahatma Gandhi” and inspired by “the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi”. Even the Hollywood film *Mission to Moscow*, which Gandhi watched in 1944 in Mumbai, tried to exploit his name by sponsoring an advertisement which claimed, “Mahatma Gandhi sees the first talking picture *Mission to Moscow*” (Chowdhry, 2000).<sup>24</sup>

In India, Ajanta Cinetone's *Mill (Mazdoor)* (1934), written by Munshi Prem Chand, was promoted as "the banned film" (its theme portraying the labour-capital conflict and exploitation of workers was rejected by the censors) and one which vindicated Gandhi's principles (Rangoonwala, 1975).<sup>25</sup>

It was first banned then released under a new title, *Seth Ki Ladki*, and then prohibited again in March 1935 because

There is running throughout the film the idea of the conflict of capital and labour, that much of the film depicts the squandering by members of the capitalist class of money earned by labour, in contrast with the squalid conditions under which labour lives; and that it is a direct incitement to discontent in labour circles. (Vasudev, 1978)<sup>26</sup>

A year later, it was released as *Daya Ki Devi* after all references to the nationalist movement had been deleted.

*Wrath* (1931), a film produced by the Imperial Film Company and directed by R S Chaudhary, had a character modelled after Mahatma Gandhi called Garibdas, who fought against untouchability. The Bombay censors cut out many of its scenes and renamed it *Khuda Ki Shaan*. Vinayak Damodar Karnataki's *Brandy Ki Botal* (1939) portrays demonstrations against liquor through the exhibition of the Congress flag, *charkha*, slogans emphasizing independence, and references to Gandhi and Patel. It refers to Gandhi as *Azadi ka Devta* (Angel of Freedom).

*Diamond Queen*, a film directed by Homi Wadia and produced under the banner of Wadia Movietone, which was canned when elections for the formation of an interim government in India were scheduled, had a poster proclaiming, "Fighting for democracy wiping out illiteracy."<sup>27</sup>

During the Second World War, Indian filmmakers, inspired by the nationalistic fervour sweeping through the country, started portraying the symbols of the Congress and Mahatma Gandhi. Though more often than not these symbols had no direct relation to the story, they still evoked enthusiasm in the filmgoers.

Film producers now took to the casual introduction of Congress symbols into films. On the wall, in the background, one would see the Gandhian motif, the spinning wheel, signifying defiance of the economic pattern of the empire. In a store, there would be a calendar with Gandhi's portrait; in a home, a photograph of Nehru, on the sound track, the effect of a passing parade, with a few bars of a favourite Congress song. Often such symbols had no plot reference; but in theatres they elicited cheers. As war began, British censors ordered the scissoring of such shots. After 1942, when Gandhi was again imprisoned—along with a number of Congress leaders—

no photograph of Gandhi was allowed on screen, no matter how incidentally. (Kasbekar, 2006)<sup>28</sup>

After his assassination, a good number of songs were composed to emphasize on the ideals of truth and non-violence and celebrate Gandhi's contribution to India's freedom struggle.

Mohammad Rafi gave voice to a private song, *Suno-suno ae duniya waalon Babu ki ye amar kahani* (O people of the world, lend an ear to Babu's immortal story), which told the story of Gandhi – '*De di hamme azadi bina khadag bina dhal, Sabarmati ke sant tune kar diya kamal*' (You gave us freedom without sword and shield. Sabarmati's saint you did magic). More recently, *Lage Raho Munnabhai's Bande mein tha dum...Vandematram* (The man had power...hail the motherland) was on peoples' lips for a long time.

During Gandhi's lifetime, Indian cinema did not quite have the kind of potential to shape minds it acquired a few decades later, after independence. It appears to the researcher that Mahatma Gandhi was so deified in his lifetime that no Hindi filmmaker or literary figure had the gumption to question his ideals, evaluate his life, principles and beliefs objectively, or put his relationships with his father, wife, brothers, sons, and other political contemporaries under the scanner.

This is something India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, cautioned Richard Attenborough against when the latter visited him to get approval for a biopic on Gandhi. In 1963, when Attenborough turned up in New Delhi to seek Nehru's approval for his project, the Indian prime minister's advice to him was, "Whatever you do, do not deify him – that is what we have done in India – and he was too great a man to be deified" (Attenborough, 1982).<sup>29</sup>

Nehru even told Attenborough that Gandhi "had all the frailties, all the shortcomings. Give us that. That's the measure, the greatness of a man" (Crossette, 1981).<sup>30</sup>

## Endnotes

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- <sup>2</sup> *Narratives of Indian Cinema*, Manju Jain, Primus Books, 2009, p. 24
- <sup>3</sup> *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 90, p. 307
- <sup>4</sup> Gandhi on and in cinema, Akul Tripathi, *One India One People*, Vol. 19/3, October 2015
- <sup>5</sup> *Young India*, Vol. 37: November 11, 1926–January 1, 1927; p. 65
- <sup>6</sup> *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 88, p. 17
- <sup>7</sup> *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 33, p. 85
- <sup>8</sup> *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 32, p. 84
- <sup>9</sup> *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 40, pp. 125–126
- <sup>10</sup> Gautam Kaul, *Cinema and the Indian Freedom Struggle*, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1998, p. 44
- <sup>11</sup> *India after Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy*, Ramchandra Guha, published in July 2007 by Harper Collins, p. XXXVII
- <sup>12</sup> The Message Bearers, Sundararaj Theodore Baskaran, Cre-A, 1981, p. 140 Film India, July 1939
- <sup>13</sup> *Filmindia*, Jan 1940, p. 18
- <sup>14</sup> Gautam Kaul, *Cinema and the Indian Freedom Struggle*, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1998, p. 136
- <sup>15</sup> Gandhi on and in cinema, Akul Tripathi, *One India One People*, Vol. 19/3, October 2015
- <sup>16</sup> *World on Film: An Introduction* by Martha P Nochimson, John Wiley & Sons, 22 Feb, 2010 <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/why-is-gandhiji-missing-from-hindi-cinema/article936550.ece>
- <sup>17</sup> Das Sharma, 1993:136, as cited in Tejaswini Ganti, *A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema*, 2013:23
- <sup>18</sup> *Entertaining Gandhi*, Muriel Lester, Nicholson & Watson, 1932
- <sup>19</sup> *Mahatma Gandhi: The Man and His Message*, Donn Byrne, University of Nevada Press, 1984, pp. 91-92
- <sup>20</sup> Gandhi on and in cinema, Akul Tripathi, *One India One People*, Vol. 19/3, October 2015
- <sup>21</sup> National Film Production Estimates 2002 Data, Motion Picture Association of America PWC, FICCI, BW estimates, available at <http://www.indiamarks.com/you-know-youre-watching-a-bollywood-movie-when/>
- <sup>22</sup> *Recipe for Hindi Cinema Blockbuster: Research for Marketing Decisions*, Vishal Shukla, January 19, 2014
- <sup>23</sup> Niall McCarthy, 2014, Bollywood Indian film industry by the numbers, *Forbes.com*
- <sup>24</sup> *Colonial India and the Making of Empire Cinema: Image, Ideology and Identity*, Prem Chowdhry, Manchester University Press, 2000, pp. 155–156
- <sup>25</sup> *75 years of Indian Cinema*, Firoze Rangoonwala, Indian Book Company, Delhi, 1975, p. 78

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<sup>26</sup> *Liberty and Licence in the Indian Cinema*, Aruna Vasudev, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1978, p. 46–47

<sup>27</sup> *Flashback: Cinema in 'The Times of India'*, Bombay: Times of India, 1990, Dilip Padgaonkar

<sup>28</sup> Asha Kasbekar cites from Eric Barnouw and Subrahmanyam Krishnaswamy's *India Film* (1980) in her book *Pop Culture India: Media, Arts and Lifestyle*, published by APC-CLIO in 2006

<sup>29</sup> *In Search of Gandhi*, Richard Attenborough, Bodley Head, December 2, 1982

<sup>30</sup> Filming Gandhi's life stirs passion in India, *New York Times*, Barbara Crossette, January 25, 1981

## CHAPTER II

# MISSING MAHATMA IN MOVIES AND HIS RESURRECTION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

By 1969, there were around a dozen Hindi films that greatly celebrated and reinforced the Gandhian principles of truth, non-violence, *Swadeshi*, the equality of religions, and untouchability (*Do Aankhen Barah Haath*, *Naya Daur* (1957), *Phir Subah Hogi* (1958), *Sujata* (1959), *Shriman Satyawadi*, *Hum Dono* (1960), *Satyakam and Sachchai* (1969)), but there had been no attempt to make an honest appraisal of Mahatma Gandhi's principles and experiments through a biopic.

The first major attempt to decipher his life through a biopic was made in 1968 when the Gandhi National Memorial Fund, in cooperation with the Films Division, produced a five-hour documentary called *Mahatma: Life of Gandhi* on the great man. The film contained animation, live photography and old prints to provide an integrated image of his life. The story itself is mostly narrated using Gandhi's own words.

There was a lull for close to a decade and a half after this. From 1960 to 1980, Hindi cinema seemed to have forgotten about the proponent of peace. Rachel Dwyer, a professor of Indian Cultures and Cinema at School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in University of London, was intrigued by "the case of the missing Gandhi in Indian Cinema" (Dwyer, 2011).<sup>1</sup>

Dwyer, who has written extensively on Hindi cinema, claims in a book *Filming the Gods: Religion and Indian Cinema* that Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi* remains the only introduction for many young Indians to the "father of the nation". Apart from the documentary *Mahatma: Life of Gandhi*, she may not be factually incorrect.

It is a fact that there are only a few films about Gandhi and his role in the freedom struggle made in Indian languages. Yet, Gandhi's moral ethos served as a guide, spiritual light, source of self-identification and a strong sense of patriotism in many of the films between the 1950s and the 1980s, like *Nashtik* (1983), *Do Aankhen Barah Haath* (1957), *Naya Daur* (1957),



*Mother India* (1957) .... all set in pre-independence or post-partition period, but none of the films directly represented him (Raj, Sreekumar, 2013).<sup>2</sup>

There could be two reasons why Hindi filmmakers have kept away from Mahatma Gandhi and, to a greater extent, other icons of the First Indian War of Independence in 1857 and the country's subsequent freedom struggle.

Firstly, there is no guarantee that such films would succeed. In fact, many of the ones filmed between 1940 and 1955, including *Veeangana* (1946), *Maharani Jhansi* (1952), *Jhansi Ki Rani* (1953), and *Shaheed-e-Azam Bhagat Singh*, failed to score at the box office. The first three, directed by Nandlal Jaswantlal, Jagdish Gautam and Sohrab Modi, respectively, told the story of Jhansi queen Laxmibai while the fourth was Gautam's first attempt to put the young revolutionary Bhagat Singh on the big screen. Modi's wife Mehtab played Rani Jhansi in the film. *Jhansi Ki Rani* was released in English as *The Tiger and the Flame* after dubbing and partial editing in English.

Secondly, historical films more often than not are very expensive to produce and create controversy, something Hindi filmmakers wanted to avoid after the failure of the four above-mentioned movies and the controversy over *Jhansi Ki Rani*. Sanjit Narwekar, writer and filmmaker, says

The box-office failure of Modi's magnum opus seems to have put an end to other films on the freedom struggle. Also, Hindi filmmakers began to shy away from such films because of the inevitable controversy it (*Jhansi Ki Rani*) raised. (HCFS, Narwekar)<sup>3</sup>

Modi spared no money or effort filming his magnum opus. It was the first film shot in Technicolour in India, and Modi hired Hollywood colour consultant George Jenkins and Oscar-winning American cinematographer Ernest Haller (of *Gone with the Wind* and *The Flame of the Arrow* fame) to shoot it.

"In those days, it cost something like a crore. Even if everybody in India had seen the film, it would not have made its money back," says Mehelli Modi, the director's son, who runs the Second Run DVD label for arthouse films in London (Ramnath, 2019).<sup>4</sup> The film's failure proved to be a major financial disaster for Sohrab Modi and his Minerva Movietone. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru obliquely pointed towards this in his statement in Rajya Sabha in December 1963.

The production of a film on the life of Gandhiji was too difficult a proposition for a Government department to take up. The Government was

not fit to do this and they had not got competent people to do it. (Tripathi, 2015)<sup>5</sup>

This was also the year when *Nine Hours to Rama*, a British film based on Stanley Wolpert's book by the same name, a fictional account of the nine hours before Gandhi's assassination, was released. The narrative spans nine hours in the life of Mahatma's killer, Nathuram Godse.

In 1982, Richard Attenborough finally completed his dream project, a film on Gandhi. The biographical film won eight Oscars, including best director for Attenborough and best actor for Ben Kingsley, alias Krishna Bhanji, a man born to an Indian doctor and an English model, who portrayed the character of Gandhi. Kingsley's ancestors reportedly lived in the same village where Gandhi was born.

It was only in the 1990s that Indian filmmakers really started exploring the legacy Mahatma Gandhi left behind. A half decade (2000–2005) produced over half a dozen commercial movies, beginning with Kamal Hasan's *Hey Ram!* in 2000.

It was after the 1990s that a strong appearance of Gandhi and his ideologies began to excel in commercial movies like *Lagaan: Once upon a time in India* (2001), *Jodhaa Akbar* (2008), *Swades: We the People* (2004), *Maine Gandhi Ko Nahi Mara* (2005) and the most popular of all, *Lage Raho Munnabhai* (2006). These were the daring attempts of film-makers to capture the philosophies rather than the biased biographies of martyrs. (Raj, Sreekumar, 2013)<sup>6</sup>

It would not be wrong to say that that the last two decades and a half have been the most prolific when it comes to Hindi cinema referring to Gandhian ideals directly or indirectly, including *Lord Mountbatten* (1986), *Sardar: The Iron Man of India* (1993), *Jinnah* (1998), *Babasaheb Ambedkar* (2000), *Maine Gandhi Ko Nahin Mara* (2005).

*Lage Raho Munnabhai* (2006), in particular, re-established the morals Mahatma Gandhi practiced and prescribed during his lifetime. The sequel of *Munnabhai MBBS*, which ironically had nothing in common with the original except for Sanjay Dutt and Arshad Warshi and Mumbai's tapori language, set the trend for "gandhigiri", a new style of Gandhian protests across the country. According to newspaper reports, the film caused an increase in the sale of books on Gandhi, and several schools organized group screenings (Zeeshan, 2006 in Paranjape, 2105).<sup>7</sup>

The resounding success of the film forced many other filmmakers from the world of fantasy to commence making movies on the Mahatma. Film critics took note of this and called Gandhi the flavour of the season in

Bollywood after the release of the LRM and other films on the father of the Indian nation.

Guess who's the flavour of the season in Bollywood right now? No, it's not the scrumptious King Khan, nor is it AB's beautiful Baby. The man who's got several film makers firmly in his thrall is none other than a thin, *dhoti*-clad, a freedom fighter who was shot dead more than 50 years ago. Yes, it's Mahatma Gandhi we're talking about, a national icon who is often regarded as someone who's been largely forgotten by the young today... Suddenly, a clutch of films is being made on Gandhi, films that look at the man and his ideals from different standpoints. One was released last year and at least four more are in the works... That makes for a veritable outpouring of films on the father of the nation. (Ramachandran, 2006)<sup>8</sup>

Another film critic wrote over a year later on the release of *Gandhi, My Father*,

When Richard Attenborough made Gandhi many years ago, no one would have thought of Gandhi as a good bet for success in Bollywood. But times have changed and so have the average Indian filmmaker's perceptions about Indian history. Gandhi seems to be omnipresent in many Indian films in terms of ideology, metaphor, and essence if not in terms of physical presence. (Chatterji, 2007)<sup>9</sup>

About two months after the release of LRM, when Union Health Minister A Ramadoss paid a visit to AIIMS in New Delhi to inquire about dengue patients, resident doctors welcomed him with flower bouquets and Get Well Soon cards. The doctors alleged that the health minister ignored the premier institute and was too busy settling a personal score with AIIMS director, P Venugopal (Ruhani, October 26).<sup>10</sup>

About a fortnight before this, over a thousand farmers in Patanbori (Yavatmal district in Vidarbha) resorted to Gandhigiri by garlanding and washing the feet of a State Bank of India branch manager who refused to extend fresh loans to them to buy seed and fertilizers in the sowing season (Maitra, 2006).<sup>11</sup>

The film spawned at least a couple of websites on Gandhigiri – [www.gandhigiri.org](http://www.gandhigiri.org) and [www.gandhigiri.co.in](http://www.gandhigiri.co.in) – and inspired many Indian and foreign writers to analyse the term.

*The Political Aesthetics of Global Protest: The Arab Spring and Beyond*, a book by Martin Webb and Kathryn Spellman-Poots in 2014, states that the first website sanctified the interchangeability of the term dadagiri with Gandhigiri in 2013 after the Supreme Court sentenced Sanjay Dutt to jail for receiving illegal weapons from an underworld don.

The website [www.gandhigiri.org](http://www.gandhigiri.org) subsequently sanctified the interchangeability of dadagiri and Gandhigiri, noting that Sanjay Dutt, the film star, following his conviction for the possession of semi-automatic weapons, would be housed in the very same jail (Yerwada in Pune) that Gandhi had formerly occupied. (p. 87)<sup>12</sup>

The book argues that LRM “brilliantly demolishes the empty ‘statist’ Gandhi” when Munna advises the removal of Gandhi’s statues and his name plates from roads and buildings and instead the internalization of his teachings in response to a question from an inmate of the Second Innings home.

Even around 13 years after its release, the runaway success of the LRM continues to spawn Gandhigiri protests across India.

In December 2015, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal asked his party volunteers to give roses to violators of phase I of his “odd-even” scheme for the Delhi roads (Angre, 2015). Subsequently, in April this year, the Bharatiya Janata Party, the main opposition party in the national capital, decided to replicate Kejriwal’s idea to protest against the second phase of the odd-even scheme. The district administration in Mathura recently used the idea to name and shame people who defecate in open in the holy city (HT, 2016).<sup>13</sup>

Suddenly, every move by Mahatma Gandhi – his life, ideals, practices, principles and beliefs, espousal of truth, sexual oddities, and celibacy – is being dissected, debated and decoded in the worlds of politics, spirituality and literature. His legacy of non-violence and civil disobedience is being celebrated all around the world. His birthday – October 2nd – is commemorated as *Gandhi Jayanti* in India while worldwide it is observed as the International Day of Non-Violence.

Rai was surprised by the omnipresence of Gandhi in Hindi cinema at the beginning of the 21st century.

It does not explicate why has there been an intensified reception to Gandhi in the realm of popular Hindi cinema. In other words, despite Gandhi’s disdain, popular Hindi cinema has become a significant assimilatory space. (Rai, 2011)<sup>14</sup>

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> The Case of the Missing Mahatma: Gandhi and the Hindi Cinema, Rachel Dwyer; *Public Culture* May 2011; 23 (2): 349–376.

<http://publicculture.dukejournals.org/content/23/2/349.abstract>

<sup>2</sup> The Case of the Missing Mahatma: Gandhi and the Hindi Cinema, Rachel Dwyer; *Public Culture* May 2011; 23 (2): 349–376.

<http://publicculture.dukejournals.org/content/23/2/349.abstract>

<sup>3</sup> *Hindi Cinema and the Freedom Struggle*, Sanjit Narwekar, available at [https://www.academia.edu/819268/Hindi\\_Cinema\\_and\\_the\\_Freedom\\_Struggle](https://www.academia.edu/819268/Hindi_Cinema_and_the_Freedom_Struggle)

<sup>4</sup> The warrior queen: The story behind Sohrab Modi's classic *Rani of Jhansi*, Nandini Ramnath, *The Scroll*, January 19, 2019

<sup>5</sup> Gandhi on and in cinema, Akul Tripathi, *One India One People*, Vol. 19/3, October 2015

<sup>6</sup> Sony Jalarajan Raj and Rohini Sreekumar, *Journal of Creative Communications*, 2013

<sup>7</sup> *The Death and Afterlife of Mahatma Gandhi*, Makarand R Paranjape, Random House India, January 30, 2015

<sup>8</sup> Hey Ram! So many films on Gandhi! S Ramachandran, *The Telegraph*, April 02, 2006

<sup>9</sup> In the name of the father, Shoma A. Chatterji, *The Tribune* (Spectrum on Sunday), July 22, 2007

<sup>10</sup> Gandhigiri at AIIMS, Faheem Ruhani, October 26, 2006, *DNA*

<sup>11</sup> Vidarbha farmers resort to Gandhigiri, Pradip Kumar Maitra, October 13, 2006, Nagpur, *Hindustan Times*

<sup>12</sup> Flowers and Gandhigiri: Kejriwal's tips for 'odd-even' Volunteers, Ketki Angre, NDTV, December 30, 2015

<sup>13</sup> Name and Shame: UP to photograph people defecating in the open, *Hindustan Times*, April 10, 2016

<sup>14</sup> Popular Hindi Cinema as Gandhi's Alter Ego: An Exploration in Respect of Gandhi, My Father, Dhananjay Rai, *Social Change*, 41(1) 63-78, CSD 2011, SAGE Publications

# CHAPTER III

## COMPARATIVE STUDY: GANDHI, THE PROTAGONIST

*Gandhi* opens with the assassination scene and then travels back to Pietermaritzburg railway station in the capital of KwaZulu-Natal where Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi came face to face with the colour prejudice legalized and promoted by the British empire in its colonies for first time.

The voiceover by Edward R Murrow, an American broadcaster, makes it apparent that the film is dealing with a man “who made humility and simple truth more powerful than empires”, about whom scientist Albert Einstein said

Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.

The over three-hour-long movie makes it clear in its very first scene that it is going to tell the story of the extraordinary man who led India’s struggle for independence from English rule. It is the story of a man who refused to budge from his principles of truth, non-violence, equality of religion, untouchability, and *Swadeshi*. Its opening statement

No man’s life can be encompassed in one telling. There is no way to give each year its allotted weight, to include each event, each person who helped to shape a lifetime. What can be done is to be faithful in spirit to the record and try to find one’s way to the heart of the man<sup>1</sup>

conveys director Richard Attenborough’s profound respect for the father of the Indian nation.

In its first few minutes it puts Mahatma Gandhi on a pedestal, and then goes on to reinforce his position through his dialogues with English priest Charlie Andrews and other Europeans who came in contact with him during different stages of his life. The scene where Judge Broomfield, in whose court in Ahmedabad Gandhi is tried for sedition, rises from his chair respectfully when the Mahatma enters the courtroom and then expresses hope that his sentence will be curtailed bolsters that image.

Gandhi stresses non-violence when he restrains Father Charlie from reacting to abuse heaped on them by white boys in a street by asking him, “Doesn’t the New Testament say if your enemy strikes you on the right cheek, offer him the left?” It is further underlined when Gandhi tells Tyebe Mohammed, an Indian in South Africa, that “I too am prepared to die ... But, my friend, there is no cause for which I am prepared to kill”. Gandhi’s statement “An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind” ends the debate.

Mahatma Gandhi’s belief in truth was unshakeable. This is fortified in the film when the “little brown man” tells American journalist Walker, “If you are a minority of one, the truth is the truth” after the latter reminds him that he is a very small minority to take on the Government – and the empire. Gandhi also confesses to Mirabehn (Madeline Slade, daughter of an English admiral) in the second half that “when I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love has always won”.

The film has numerous scenes where Gandhi is heard emphasizing Hindu-Muslim unity. The protagonist even tells Walker how a priest in his town would read from the Hindu Gita and the Muslim Quran, moving from one to the other as though it mattered not at all which book was read as long as God was worshipped. He tries to convince Mohammad Ali Jinnah against seeking the partition of India by reminding him that the Muslim and Hindu are the right and left eyes of India. “No one will be slave, no one master”, he declares.

The film makes a statement against untouchability as well when Gandhi insists Kasturba, his wife, must rake and cover the latrine, saying, “In this place there are no untouchables – and no work is beneath any of us!” In another speech, Gandhi exhorts, “There must be Hindu-Muslim unity – always. Secondly, no Indian must be treated as the English treat us so we must remove untouchability from our lives, and from our hearts”.

Kasturba also partakes in her husband’s fight against foreign clothes.

When Gandhiji and I were growing up, women wove their own cloth. But now there are millions who have no work because those who can buy all they need from England. I say with Gandhiji, there is no beauty in the finest cloth if it makes hunger and unhappiness,

she says, which followed by her husband’s assertion, “English factories make the cloth – that makes our poverty”.

The best thing about Attenborough’s film is that it expresses Gandhi’s ideals without beating around the bush, in a style which is direct and plain. Gandhi did not bother much about reactions as long as he spoke the truth.

For instance, in one scene, he takes pride in his immaculately dressed sons. “Perfect little English gentlemen!” he exclaims to Kasturba, his wife, after they had just moved in South Africa and he was yet to change into wearing a loincloth.

The messaging is perfect when it comes to how the film emphasizes the non-violent form of Gandhi’s *Satyagraha* against injustice but the biggest flaw of *Gandhi* is that it makes no effort at all to convert the ethical giant into a man of the world by throwing light on his sexual oddities and eccentricities. It gives no space to ideals like Aparigraha (non-possession) or Brahmacharya (sexual abstinence or celibacy), which may have contributed to Gandhi’s evolution into an ascetic.

Moreover, the film accepts whatever Gandhi did or said in his lifetime as gospel truths without ever questioning them. Patrick French, the writer of *India, a Portrait*, questions the veracity of the first scene in Attenborough’s film where Gandhi is ejected from a first-class train coach on the way to Pretoria.

Take the episode when the newly arrived Gandhi is ejected from a first-class railway carriage at Pietermaritzburg after a white passenger objects to sharing space with a “coolie” (an Indian indentured labourer). In fact, Gandhi’s demand to be allowed to travel first-class was accepted by the railway company. Rather than marking the start of a campaign against racial oppression, as legend has it, this episode was the start of a campaign to extend racial segregation in South Africa. Gandhi was adamant that “respectable Indians” should not be obliged to use the same facilities as “raw Kaffirs”. He petitioned the authorities in the port city of Durban, where he practised law, to end the indignity of making Indians use the same entrance to the post office as blacks, and counted it a victory when three doors were introduced: one for Europeans, one for Asiatics and one for Natives,

French wrote in 2013.

All said and done, Attenborough’s *Gandhi* will always remain an outsider’s view, made for the consumption and understanding of Europeans rather than Indians. Probably for this reason, American journalist Johan Gunther calls the biopic “an incredible combination of Jesus Christ, Tammany Hall and your father” (French, 2013)<sup>2</sup>.

Prof Rachel Dwyer, who has studied Indian cinema comprehensively, believes that for all its cinematic brilliance, *Gandhi* remains an “outsider’s view” of India and its most famous leader to date. “What is remarkable is that even after 30 years and the great social changes and reappraisal of history in India, this one version remains unchallenged,” she said (2011)<sup>3</sup>, a statement the author finds difficult to disagree with.



Even the story of India's freedom struggle is told primarily through Gandhi and his dialogues with European characters and adversaries.

It is curious that Attenborough has chosen to reveal Gandhi almost entirely through his interactions with foreigners: first it is Charlie, then Walker from New York Times, then Madeline Slade and then Margaret Bourke-White, not to mention his foreign adversaries, Gupta notes One gets a very mistaken impression that Gandhi had few close Indian friends. (Dwyer, 2011)<sup>4</sup>

Even Shyam Benegal's *Making of the Mahatma* (called *Gandhi Se Mahatma Tak* in the Hindi version), released 14 years after *Gandhi*, which does not give the feel of an epic and depicts Gandhi with all his faults and foibles, only deals with the period Mahatma Gandhi spent in South Africa and thus can't be called a biopic.

Unlike the Gandhi of *Gandhi*, who looks super confident, superhuman and infallible, the Gandhi of Shyam Benegal's *Making of the Mahatma* comes across as reticent, real and grounded. Unlike the Gandhi of the first who appears to be a man of convictions, the Benegal's Gandhi is still formulating his ideas and is a saint in the making. The former gives the feel of an epic on screen while the latter a documentary.

Based on Fatima Meer's book *The Apprenticeship of a Mahatma*, *Making of the Mahatma (TMTM)* was a collaboration between India's National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) and South Africa's South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC).

Mahatma Gandhi asserts his epistemology on truth, non-violence, self-respect, untouchability, education, social service, renunciation, forgiveness, manual labour, journalism, and abstinence in TMTM. The film traverses the over two decades Gandhi spent in South Africa experimenting with his epistemology.

It captures the process of transformation Gandhi went through, from being a man who took pride in wearing European dress to somebody who shaves off his head in the memory of those killed during the *Satyagraha* and does not accept the railway strike because it was violent.

Unlike in *Gandhi, My Father*, where the conflict between Mahatma Gandhi (Darshan Jariwalla), his eldest son Harilal (Akshay Khanna) and wife Kasturba (Shefali Chhaya) simmers for two hours and is underplayed, despite the movie being based on Gandhi's relationship with Harilal, in Benegal's film, the conflict between Gandhi (Rajit Kapoor) and the other two (Pallavi Joshi plays Kasturba) erupts and finds expression in several scenes.

In *Gandhi*, it is mentioned only twice in interactions between Kasturba and the Mahatma. The conflict plays out during the Mahatma's interaction

with his wife about their children's formal education, gifts the family receives from South African-Indians before their departure for India, Harilal's marriage to Chanchal, a Gujarati girl, and Gandhi's refusal to send Harilal for higher education to England. Gandhi makes it clear to Kasturba she will have to clean the latrines after the latter resists cleaning the chamber pot of anybody and everybody.

Kasturba calls him a hard and uncaring man after Gandhi does not let her keep the jewellery they receive as gifts. When Harilal decides to marry Chanchal without his approval, the Mahatma does not flinch from confessing that he was conceived in a moment of lust. He sees a reflection of the waywardness he experienced in his adolescence in Harilal.

I have always felt that the undesirable traits I see today in my eldest son are an echo of my own undisciplined and unformulated early life. I regard that time as a period of half-baked knowledge and indulgence. It coincided with the most impressionable years of my eldest son, and naturally he has refused to regard it as my time of indulgence and inexperience. He has on the contrary believed that that was the brightest period of my life, and the changes, effected later, have been due to delusion miscalled enlightenment. (Gandhi, 2012)<sup>5</sup>

The Mahatma had major differences with his sons, in particular with the eldest, Harilal. Some of these differences arose due to the kind of education he insisted on imparting to them. Instead of sending them to English medium public schools, he hired a home tutor for them in South Africa and insisted on them learning Gujarati, their mother tongue.

My inability to give them enough attention and other unavoidable causes prevented me from providing them with the literary education I had desired, and all my sons have had complaints to make against me in this matter. Whenever they come across an M.A. or a B.A., or even a matriculate, they seem to feel the handicap of a want of school education. (Gandhi, 2012)<sup>6</sup>

Yet Gandhi always believed that by allowing his sons to learn from his experiences at home, he was ensuring that they learnt lessons in liberty and self-respect.

Had I been without a sense of self-respect and satisfied of myself with having for my children the education that other children could not get, I should have deprived them of the object lesson in liberty and self-respect that I give them at the cost of the literary training. And where a choice has to be made between liberty and learning, who will not say that the former has to be preferred a thousand times to the latter! (Gandhi, 2012)

He always regretted sending his sister's son and his elder son to a residential school in India for a few months during his stay in South Africa. He did not feel good about Hari Lal going to a high school in Gujarat either.

I did send my nephew and elder son to be educated at residential schools in India for a few months, but I soon had to recall them. Later, the eldest son, long after he had come of age, broke away from me, and went to India to join a High School in Ahmedabad.<sup>7</sup>

He is upfront with his wife about putting “service before Kastur” even as he implores her to help him practice abstinence.

Kasturba complains “you always want me to give up things” when the Mahatma asks her to give up salt and dal for a year to recover from illness. She also tells him on another occasion that she could survive *Satyagraha* if she could survive him.

Harilal explodes after he learns that his father has decided to send Adajania to London after Chhaganlal. “You treat us like animals in a circus.... your vow...your *Satyagraha*”, he barks. After leaving South Africa for India, he informs his father in a letter that their differences cannot be reconciled. *Making of the Mahatma* establishes Gandhi's position of putting society before self and family when he declares that he “cannot sit and brood over personal problems”, referring to his differences with Harilal.

Chandulal Bhagubhai Dalal's *Harilal Gandhi: A Life, Gandhi, My Father*, to put it simply, tells the story of how Mahatma Gandhi and his eldest son Hari Lal drifted apart after the latter decided to marry a girl without seeking his consent, and how Hari Lal came to epitomize the antithesis of the very values Gandhi practised and espoused.

Harilal, who failed to matriculate thrice, wished to be a barrister like his father, and saw an opening when Pranjivan Mehta, an associate of the Mahatma, offered to sponsor the London education of a person on the latter's recommendation. Harilal drinks, commits financial fraud, goes to prostitutes, and misuses his father's name, and thus breaks all the rules that the Mahatma stood for, forcing his father to disown him.

Ghandi's other sons also felt that their father was partial in giving a formal education in England to their cousins Maganlal and Chhaganlal and denying them the same.

Gandhi's sons sometimes complained that though he did not give them formal education, he had allowed his second cousins, Maganlal and Chhaganlal, to have their education in English. Be that as it may, Gandhi was certainly more attached to or had a better opinion of Maganlal than of his own sons. He had particular admiration for Maganlal because, though married, he had tried to follow Gandhi's ideas on *brahmacharya* and had

even succeeded in persuading his wife using “patient argument instead of imposing his views on her...He was my hands, my feet and my eyes.” When Maganlal died (April 1928), Gandhi wrote movingly,

I hear the sobs of the widow...Little does she realize I am more widowed than she. And but for the living God, I should become a raving maniac for loss of one who was dearer to me than my sons, who never once deceived or failed me. (Ghose, 1991)<sup>8</sup>

Pained by Harilal’s fetish for “money and a life of ease and enjoyment”, Mahatma Gandhi gave up on him in the 1930s. He refers to his disillusionment in a return letter to Kantilal Gandhi, his grandson and the son of Harilal in 1936.

You have given a good account of Harilal. God alone can guide him. That is why I do not say anything to him. I had a letter from him recently. There was nothing in it...He may improve if the Arya Samajists guide him properly, although that correspondent writes that that probability is remote. (CWMG, 1936)<sup>9</sup>

The film has some very poignant dialogues as it puts Gandhi on a pedestal even while juxtaposing his values with Harilal’s multiple failures in life. The confrontation between Gandhi and Harilal is not a confrontation between father and son but between value systems. Gandhi’s value system indeed emerges victorious. In other words, Harilal has to be a failure for Gandhi to be the victor (Rai, 2003).<sup>10</sup>

Harilal gets viewers’ sympathy while the Mahatma rises to new heights for sticking to his principles. It breaks one’s heart when Kasturba implores her husband to think like a father and not to think like Gandhi, and when Harilal regrets he never experienced his father’s love. But the Mahatma paints a much wider canvas when he advises his wife to treat all children like “our own” and beseeches his son, “You have your entire life to fight with me. But this is the last opportunity to fight for the country.”

Feroz Abbas Khan’s *Gandhi, My Father*, for many film critics, was supposed to delineate the reasons for the conflict. They felt the director could not have asked for a better premise as a play on similar lines *Gandhi vs. Mahatma*, starring Naseeruddin Shah and Kay Kay Menon, had enthralled audiences across the country.

The film was never meant to be about India’s freedom struggle or about the transformation of Gandhi from a shy London-educated barrister to the supreme leader of Indian National Congress but it ends up adding to the persona of the Mahatma.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> The Truth about Mahatma Gandhi: he was a wily operator, not India's smiling saint, *The Telegraph*, Patrick French, Jan 31, 2013 available at [http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/india/9840076/The-truth-about-](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/india/9840076/The-truth-about-Mahatma-Gandhi-he-was-a-wily-operator-not-Indias-smiling-saint)

[http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/india/9840076/The-truth-about-](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/india/9840076/The-truth-about-Mahatma-Gandhi-he-was-a-wily-operator-not-Indias-smiling-saint)  
<sup>2</sup> Mahatma-Gandhi-he-was-a-wily-operator-not-Indias-smiling-saint  
<http://publicculture.dukejournals.org/content/23/2/349.abstract>

<sup>3</sup> The Case of the Missing Mahatma: Gandhi and the Hindi Cinema. Rachel Dwyer, *Public Culture* 23 (2): 349–376. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-1161949>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, GBD Books, New Delhi, 2012, Part III, Chapter V, p. 177

<sup>6</sup> *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, GBD Books, New Delhi, 2012, Part III, Chapter V, p. 178

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.mkgandhi.org/autobio/chap59.htm>

<sup>8</sup> *Mahatma Gandhi*, Sankar Ghose, Allied Publishers, 1991, p. 70

<sup>9</sup> *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 64, p. 97, Letter to Kantilal Gandhi, December 1, 1936

<sup>10</sup> *Popular Hindi Cinema as Gandhi's Alter Ego: An Exploration in Respect of Gandhi, My Father*, Dhananjay Rai, 2003

# CHAPTER IV

## COMPARATIVE STUDY: GANDHI IN CAMEOS

Rajkumar Hirani and Vidhu Vinod Chopra's film *Lage Raho Munnabhai* is about two small-time gangsters (Sanjay Dutt as Murali Prasad Sharma alias Munna and Arshad Warsi as Sirkeshwar alias Circuit) who survive by encroaching on real estate and kidnapping people for ransom. The duo know nothing about Mahatma Gandhi except that there is a dry day on his birth anniversary (October 2), that Indira and Rajiv are his children, his name is printed on Indian currency because he drove the English out of India, and to follow Gandhi one should walk three kilometres on Mahatma Gandhi Road every day.

The film takes a turn when, in an attempt to win over the beautiful Jhanvi, Munna pretends to be a history professor and a Gandhian who can conjure up the spirit of Mahatma Gandhi at will. How the spirit of Mahatma Gandhi and the values like truth, non-violence and tolerance he espoused during his 21 years in South Africa and 33 years in India transform Munna into a Gandhian is the crux of the story. With its dialogues (*Gandhigiri mein number one*) and a song sung in the Mumbai dialect – *Bande mein tha dum Vandematram* (the Man had Guts, salute, motherland) – *Lage Raho Munnabhai* greatly emphasizes satya, ahimsa, forgiveness, and *Satyagraha*.

The film touches on asteya (non-stealing) as well when Mahatma Gandhi narrates to Munnabhai how he stole gold from his brother's amulet and confessed his crime to his father by writing a letter.

Mahatma Gandhi, played by Dilip Prabhavalkar, makes it clear within the first few reels that he is not a ghost (You may call me conscience but not spirit). The film wants Indians to remember Gandhi's thoughts and not his name and physical frame. Mahatma Gandhi and Munna's dialogues in the film (My only advice is walk on the path of truth; speak the truth and live with pride; you need the courage to say sorry; Gandhigiri is opposite to *dadagiri*; Bapu said if somebody slaps on your left cheek, offer your right cheek to him) promote the Gandhian values.

When the character of Prabhavalkar reminisces the scene in which Mahatma Gandhi sought the forgiveness of his father Karamchand Gandhi for stealing gold from his brother's amulet, or tells Munna that his thoughts cannot be killed by three bullets, the film makes a profound statement on the promotion of Gandhian values. The film looks for Gandhi in ordinary Indians through laughter, tears, corruption, *Satyagraha*, non-violence, and superstitions.

“It shows the Gandhi in all of us, shows things we have to choose to ignore. It makes you feel good about yourself and what you have,” wrote Suparn Verma (Verma, 2006) who directed a Hindi film in the past.<sup>1</sup>

The best thing about *Lage Raho Munnabhai* is that it delivers Gandhi's message without ever sounding didactic or preachy and in a language that can be understood across the length and the breadth of the country. Film critic Rajiv Masand wrote in his review, “It's evident that the film's main motive is to give you a good time, but it's commendable that writer-director Rajkumar Hirani chose to weave a message into the story. In many ways,” he added, “in fact, *Lage Raho Munnabhai* is like those fables we read in our schoolbooks when we were little. Those simple stories that came with a moral at the end” (Masand, 2006).<sup>2</sup>

Though there is violence in *Lage Raho Munnabhai*, its essence is Gandhian values and principles. Hirani and Vidhu Vinod Chopra (producer) have “not only been successful in providing a complete entertainer but also incorporated the humble teachings of Mahatma in the most palatable manner” (Kumar, 2012).<sup>3</sup>

Sulekha wrote in its review that *Lage Raho Munnabhai*

works best when it doesn't try to force anything down your throat. Take, for instance, the wonderfully written scene where an old man tries to reason with a corrupt government official without losing his temper or getting frustrated but by simply demonstrating his predicament and disrobing himself! (Nsarel, 2006)<sup>4</sup>

The best thing about *Lage Raho Munnabhai* is that it does not deify Mahatma Gandhi, stressing more on messaging than the messenger. And the message is coated in humour.

Given the film's timely and generous purpose, it's incredibly enriching to note a non-cynical, delicate take on a gamut of modern-day issues: civic callousness, corruption, legal mess, superstitions, deification of public figures.... Yet, absolutely, at no moment does the movie lose its brilliant, priceless sense of humour. (Shekhar, 2012)<sup>5</sup>

The author agrees with Rachel Dwyer when she says that in *Lage Raho Munnabhai* Gandhi is not a historical or political figure but an “inner conscience”, “a moral guide” and a “fairy godmother” who has quick fix solutions for the day-to-day problems the person in the street grapples with in their life.

Hirani’s Gandhi will help a gangster woo a radio DJ on World Space Satellite Radio and save an old age home, Second Innings, provided the gangster reveals his real identity to the girl. This Gandhi reveals the power of forgiveness to Munna after Munna slaps his aide, Circuit. He comes to the rescue of Victor after he squanders his father's savings and promises to earn the money back by doing small jobs. He will even pose for photographs with Lucky Singh after the real estate dealer mends his ways.

More than Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the Indian nation, the focus of LRM is on Gandhi’s epistemology on truth and non-violence. The film depicts a moral Gandhi rather than a sentimental Gandhi, expressing his tenets in a lingo which is understood by and appeals to most Indians. Abhijat Joshi, who co-authored the film with Rajkumar Hirani, says,

It was important for us to dispel the myth about Gandhi being a sedate, ascetic person. We wanted to show his other side – witty, humorous, light-hearted and creative. (Jain, 2006)<sup>6</sup>

The Gandhi of LRM is not a historical, political figure who took on the mighty British in South Africa and India but an icon of popular culture. Here, Gandhism and not Gandhi is the message. Gandhigiri in the film stands for Gandhism.

The film takes a part from Gandhi’s life and principles and presents it in a language the audience will relate to and remember. What is noteworthy is that only Munna and Circuit converse in the tapani language in the film. The rest of the cast speak Hindi or Hindi-Punjabi, as in the case of Lucky Singh. The language is in sync with popular culture. “It is this language that sets the agenda of the discourse in and on popular culture”, write Arunabha Ghosh and Tapan Babu (Ganesh, 2006).<sup>7</sup>

Ghosh and Babu quote Italian novelist Umberto Eco to emphasize on the role of language in popularizing Gandhigiri and LRM in their article “*Lage Raho Munnabhai*: Unravelling brand ‘Gandhigiri’”.

What are the common requirements for transforming a movie into a cult object? The work must be loved, obviously, but this is not enough. It must provide a completely furnished world so that its fans can quote characters and episodes as if they were aspects of the fans private sectarian world...I think that in order to transform a work into a cult object, one must be able to break, dislocate, unhinge it so that one can remember only parts of it,



irrespective of their original relationship with the whole. (Ghosh & Babu, 2006)<sup>8</sup>

S Ganesh is right when he writes in the *Economic and Political Weekly* (14 October 2006) that the film “trivialises Gandhi: history as farce”. So is Ajit Duara when he argues in *The Hindu* of October 1, 2006 (Sunday magazine) that

It is a commentary on our times that, 58 years after his assassination, the accomplished cultural sophistication and political genius of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi has to be dumbed down to the astoundingly moronic levels of “*Lage Raho Munnabhai*.” The language and trivialisation was what warranted a condemnation of the film by the Indian National Congress. (The Telegraph, 2006)<sup>9</sup>

But the simplicity of messaging is what made the film a blockbuster and Gandhi relevant to gennext. The author is in agreement with Ghosh and Babu that “it is a trivialisation, no doubt – but a trivialisation necessitated by a decidedly debased contemporaneity”. The duo rightly add, “Gandhi, the man, was once the message. In the India of the post-liberalisation, brand ‘Gandhigiri’ is the message”.

The author is of the view that *Lage Raho Munnabhai* has succeeded in resurrecting Gandhian ideals, which had been clearly overshadowed by Gandhi’s persona and deification. Even the film points to the irrelevance of Gandhian ideology when Munna Bhai visits the Gandhian library to mug up on Mahatma Gandhi before his lecture at Second Innings. “The irony is inescapable. A ‘bhai’, a don, is the sole consumer of the vast literature on Gandhi” (Ghosh & Babu, 2006).<sup>10</sup>

Rajmohan Gandhi, the Mahatma’s grandson and writer of *Mohandas: A True Story of a Man, His People and an Empire*, is right that Gandhi would have loved the film (Srivastava, 2007).<sup>11</sup> So is Tushar Gandhi, his great-grandson, when he said in an interview that *Lage Raho Munnabhai* introduced Gandhi’s philosophies to a new generation (Jha, 2007).<sup>12</sup>

The author is of the view that the critics were wrong in ascribing ‘Gandhigiri’ to LGM. At the most, the film only invented the term. Mahatma Gandhi was indeed the original proponent of changing one’s heart through non-violent acceptance. A few months after Gandhi set up *Satyagraha* Ashram in Ahmedabad on May 25, 1915, he forced his upper caste opponents to swallow opposition to the entry of a family of untouchables through Gandhigiri. The family comprised of Dudabhai, his wife Danibehn and their daughter Lakshmi.

Their admission created a flutter amongst the friends who had been helping the Ashram. The very first difficulty was found with regard to the use of the well, which was partly controlled by the owner of the bungalows. The man in charge of the water-lift objected that drops of water from our bucket would pollute him. So, he took to swearing at us and molesting Dudabhai. I told everyone to put up with the abuse and continue drawing water at any cost. When he saw that we did not return his abuse, the man became ashamed and ceased to bother us. (Gandhi, 2012)<sup>13</sup>

Besides Gandhigiri, LMB greatly promotes the Gandhian epistemology on truth when Munnabhai tells Lucky Singh that since he told the truth about his disguise as a professor to Jhanvi, he was no longer afraid of him.

There are also a few scenes that flout Gandhi's prescription on truth and non-violence. It is unlikely that the Mahatma would have approved of Munna first slapping and then hanging Hari Desai upside down from a skyscraper to force him to attend his father Atmaram's birthday. Apparently, the filmmaker's objective in including the scene was to enhance the commercial appeal of the movie.

But the father of the Indian nation would have approved of Munna advising Indians not to erect statues of him or display photographs of him throughout the country. He would have surely preferred them to keep him in their hearts and follow his principles.

When asked in 1947 whether he knew that his statues were being erected and photographs displayed in many places in the country, Gandhi said,

How can I say I do not know that my statues are being erected and my photographs are being unveiled everywhere in the country, that they are garlanded and lights are waved before them? But I attach no importance to these things, for I dislike such things intensely. They are a sheer waste of money. And I strongly feel that these activities do me no honour but, on the contrary, are an affront to me. If the people wish to honour me, let them honour the charkha, that is, spin daily by way of *yajna*. That will be as good as honouring me. Let them also read the Gita and meditate over its teaching. And if they cannot do even that, let them just repeat Ramanama. To understand a man's virtues and follow his principles in one's own life is as good as honouring the man himself. (CWMG, 1947)<sup>14</sup>

Unlike *Gandhi*, *Gandhi, My Father* and *Making of the Mahatma*, where the Mahatma towers over all other characters and mostly comes across as a superhuman and is not questioned by contemporaries and followers, in films like *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar*, *Sardar: The Iron Man of India*, *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: The Forgotten Hero*, and *Veer Savarkar*, he appears fallible, helpless and weak.

After resigning from the Congress in 1934 in particular, his moral authority over the party slackened off slightly. This was why Nehru and Patel almost overruled him on the issue of partition. But every now and then, Gandhi still exhibited his grip over the party, either with the assistance of the old guard or his *Satyagraha* tools. In 1939, he forced Subhas Chandra Bose to relinquish Congress presidentship despite the Netaji having humbled his candidate in an election. Earlier, he forced Ambedkar to forego his demand for separate electorates for the untouchables. But, overall, his hold over the Indian polity was definitely on the wane in the last one and a half decades of his life.

Take Jabbar Patel's *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar*, which not only poignantly captures the discrimination and humiliation heaped on young Ambedkar by caste Hindus during the early stages of his life but also delineates the differences between Gandhi and the principal constitution drafter. Jointly funded by the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and the Maharashtra government, and produced by the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC), *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar* had Malayalam superstar Mammootty playing the role of Ambedkar.

The film shows how Ambedkar is maltreated in the accounts department at Baroda, which he joins after gaining an education abroad on a scholarship awarded by the Baroda kingdom. He launches *Satyagraha* against untouchability, leading a march of satyagrahis to a pond in Mahad which was hitherto open only for upper castes. This is followed by his attempt to take untouchables into a temple in Nashik. But the film picks up momentum from the moment the confrontation between Ambedkar and Gandhi builds.

Ambedkar believed the four-caste system in Hinduism was the primary cause of suffering because of untouchability, and unless this was abolished, the condition of the Dalits was unlikely to improve. Gandhi, on the contrary, felt the caste system (*Varnashram*) was integral to Hinduism. Ambedkar demanded a separate electorate for untouchables; Gandhi would not agree to this at any cost. Gandhi, a devout Hindu, sought forgiveness for upper castes for what they had done to untouchables. He would not support conversion, as religion, according to him, should not be changed like a house or a cloth.

Gandhi carefully chose religious and cultural symbols to bring the Hindus and the lower castes together and drew his morals largely from the *Gita* and *Ramayana*. He claimed to have become untouchable by choice.

Ambedkar was unimpressed by Gandhi's Mahatmaship. He was sure mahatmas had had no impact on untouchability. "Mahatmas have come and mahatmas have gone but untouchables have remained", he comments tersely at one point in the film.

Besides, Ambedkar, except in the twilight of his life when he embraced Buddhism with his followers, disliked religion for being unfair to untouchables. He did not even like to visit temples, and said to his first wife Ramabai “Why go to a God who does not bless us (untouchables)?”

Gandhi felt Ambedkar was an impatient man and did not understand why men like him opposed him. Gandhi wanted *swaraj* from the British, while Ambedkar feared that *swaraj* could lead to *Hindu Raj* and was for *swaraj* for untouchables from caste Hindus.

The two came into direct conflict when Gandhi started a fast unto death against Ambedkar’s demand for a separate electorate for the oppressed castes in Yerwada jail. Gandhi believed Ambedkar’s bitterness clouded his judgement while the latter called the former a seasoned politician who resorted to intrigue to get his demands accepted. Ambedkar considered untouchables a minority and considered a special electorate “as a means of protecting the minorities”.

In a paper Ambedkar wrote at the invitation of the Institute of Pacific Relations for a session of a conference to be held in December 1942 at Mont’ Trablant in Quebec, Canada, he drew a parallel between the untouchables in India and the slaves and Negroes.

I accepted the invitation to write this paper because I felt that it was the best opportunity to draw the attention of the world to this problem in comparison to which the problem of the Slaves, the Negroes and the Jews is nothing. I hope the publication of this paper will serve as a notice also to the Hindus that will have to answer for it before the bar of the world. (Ambedkar, 1943)<sup>15</sup>

In the paper, Ambedkar referred to the resolutions passed at the All India Scheduled Castes conference held in Nagpur on the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of July, 1942.

This Conference declares that no constitution will be acceptable to the Scheduled Castes unless i) it has the consent of the Scheduled Castes, ii) it recognizes the fact that the Scheduled Castes are distinct and separate from the Hindus and constitute an important element in the national life of India. (Ambedkar, 1943)<sup>16</sup>

Ambedkar accused Gandhi of opposing the just demands of the untouchables.

Mr. Gandhi, the friend of the untouchables, preferred to fast unto death rather than consent to them and although he yielded he is not reconciled to the justice underlying these demands...Will Mr. Gandhi and Hindus establish a New Order or will they be content with rehabilitation of the

traditional Hindu India, with its castes and its untouchability, with its denial of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity? (Ambedkar, 1943)<sup>17</sup>

The Dalit icon wanted Americans to question Gandhi on his commitment towards the abolition of untouchability at the Canada Conference. He charged Gandhi with backing upper castes in their clash with the untouchables.

Every Hindu is a social Tory and political Radical. Mr. Gandhi is no exception to this rule. He presents himself to the world as a liberal but his liberalism is only a very thin veneer which sits very lightly on him as dust does on one's boots. You scratch him and you will find that underneath his liberalism he is a blue-blooded Tory... He is a fanatic Hindu upholding the Hindu religion. (Ambedkar, 1943)<sup>18</sup>

Ambedkar had serious doubts about whether Mahatma Gandhi was against untouchability and prepared untouchables to win their freedom from their Hindu masters, to them their social and political equals.

Mr. Gandhi had never had any such object before him and he never wants to do this, and I say that he cannot do this. This is the task of a democrat and a revolutionary. Mr. Gandhi is neither. He is a Tory by birth as well as faith. (Ambedkar, 1943)<sup>19</sup>

In the paper, Ambedkar questioned the intent of Jawaharlal Nehru and the Congress as well.

He (Nehru) draws his inspiration from the Jeffersonian Declaration; but has he ever expressed any shame or any remorse about the condition of the 60 million of Untouchables? Has he anywhere referred to them in the torrent of literature which comes out from his pen? (Ambedkar, 1943)<sup>20</sup>

The author is of the view that there was a definite contradiction in Gandhi's epistemology on untouchability. He wanted caste divisions to continue but also pressed for the entry of untouchables into public places. Moreover, Gandhi believed that Congress represented Dalits. Ambedkar also went back and forth in demanding rights for the untouchables. He asked the Simon Commission for a joint electorate for untouchables but at the Round Table conference argued for separate electorates. After the Communal Award in 1932, which gave separate electorates to untouchables and Gandhi launched a fast unto death against the decision, Ambedkar accused him of "not playing the honest foe" (Dhavan, 2015).<sup>21</sup>

Gandhi emphasised on social reforms to bring about a transformational change in the condition of the oppressed castes. Ambedkar, on the other hand, insisted on the state abolishing the caste system and recognising untouchables as a minority. He did not wish to leave the task to politics. Ambedkar warned if the state did not bring about social justice “at the earliest.... Those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy, which this Assembly has so laboriously built up”. (Dhavan, 2016)<sup>22</sup>

Despite there being disagreement between the two, the worlds of Gandhi and Ambedkar converged on several points. For one, Ambedkar stressed *Satyagraha*, a tool Gandhi had patented in his fight against British imperialism first in South Africa and later in India, to gain the right of untouchables to enter public places. If Gandhi published *Indian Opinion* and *Harijan* to write about the colour prejudice practiced against Indians in South Africa and untouchability in India, Ambedkar used the bi-monthlies *Mook Nayak (Dumb Hero)* and *Bahiskrat Bharat (Untouchable India)* to highlight the plight of the deprived sections.

Unlike Ambedkar, to his credit, Mahatma Gandhi hardly held forth on his conflict with the Dalit leader. There is no mention of it in the writings he left behind as his legacy. In fact, the father of the nation was magnanimous enough to suggest Ambedkar’s name for the post of law minister to Jawaharlal Nehru in the first Indian government.

Like Gandhi, Ambedkar too turned to religion (Buddhism) to achieve the reforms he struggled to achieve all his life from the government apparatus. This brought about some reconciliation between the two warring leaders. Ambedkar’s “turn to religion brought him closer to the Mahatma, who also placed more emphasis on faith and social reform than he did upon the state” (Devji, 2016).<sup>23</sup>

Ambedkar was not opposed to Mahatma Gandhi’s fight against untouchability per se but he had serious doubts about whether the way the Mahatma was planning to achieve it would succeed. Gandhi wanted gradual and message-oriented social change while Ambedkar was for its implementation through law. The difference in approach pit Ambedkar directly against the Mahatma during the Poona Pact.

Though both Gandhi and Ambedkar held a mutual understanding about the magnitude and seriousness of the problem (and so reigning in India); both were seized of addressing this humanly most sensitive subject in different ways. (Murthy, 2014)<sup>24</sup>

In her study *The Medieval in Film: Representing a Contested Time on Indian Screen (1920s–1960s)*, Urvi Mukhopadhyay has given a good account of the ideological difference between Gandhi and Ambedkar.

Gandhi's personal presence in mass political activities, however, decreased perceptibly during the 1930s compared to the 1920s. His presence became more visible in campaigns against the social ostracisation of lower-caste people in the name of "untouchability". Gandhi condemned this age-old practice as a hindrance in the path towards national unity and a future, an egalitarian Indian nation, thus converting this social issue into a political one...His personal involvement in the anti-caste program in Kerala during 1924-25 had earned him the respect and the confidence of lower-caste groups. In 1927 the young Dalit leader B R Ambedkar invoked the name of Gandhi during the Dalit struggle in Konkan, where the lower castes were prevented from using a public tank in the Brahmin quarter of a town. By the end of the 1920s, however, lower-caste movements were becoming confrontational in nature, to the point where Gandhi's status as a spokesperson for the lower orders was questioned (as cited in Murthy, 2014).<sup>25</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi backed the caste system as it, according to him, helped villagers redress their local grievances and made Indians good organizers. He was of the firm belief that Hinduism had the potential to rid itself of all deficiencies.

The villagers managed their internal affairs through the caste system, and through it, they dealt with any oppression from the ruling power or powers. It is not possible to deny of a nation that was capable of producing from the caste system its wonderful power of organisation. One had but to attend the great Kumbh Mela at Hardwar last year to know how skilful that organisation must have been which, without any seeming effort, was able effectively to cater for more than a billion pilgrims. (Gandhi, 1916)<sup>26</sup>

Gandhi desired to co-opt Ambedkar into his campaign against untouchability and asked him to send a message for the first issue of *Harijan*. Ambedkar's answer was a rejection.

The outcaste is a by-product of the caste system. There will be outcastes so long as there are castes. Nothing can emancipate the outcastes except the destruction of the caste system. (Brackney, 2013)<sup>27</sup>

There is no other leader than Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, India's first deputy prime minister and home minister, being appropriated by two rival parties – the Congress and Bharatiya Janata Party – one left-of-centre and the other extreme right. The BJP invokes the memory of the iron man of

India, flaunts his Gujarati roots and never fails to rub in the fact that Patel was unfairly denied prime ministership, while the Congress exults in reminding the saffron party that Patel was a congressman, and as home minister he banned Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), the parent organization of the BJP.

Patel's legacy, in fact, is being debated even six decades after his demise. There is one stream of history that prefers to go by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Patel's colleague in the Congress party around independence, who accused him of being anti-Muslim. There are others who refuse to rely on Azad's version in the book *India Wins Freedom (1960)* and claim that Sardar, like (Bal Gangadhar) Tilak, was "a victim of the miscarriage of historical scholarship" (Kriplani, 1970).<sup>28</sup>

Thankfully, *Sardar: The Iron Man of India*, the film co-written by noted playwright Vijay Tendulkar and directed by Ketan Mehta, steers clear of the claims and counter claims on his legacy. It keeps away from Patel's differences with Nehru over the allotment of houses vacated in Delhi by Muslims who migrated to Pakistan. Nehru wanted them to be converted into compact Muslim localities but his home minister believed that creating exclusive Muslim settlements did not gel with the secular ideology of India.

The film begins with a scene in the Gujarat Club, where Patel (played by Paresh Rawal) is shown making fun of the methods adopted by "social reformer" Mahatma Gandhi (portrayed by Annu Kapoor) in his quest for freedom from British rule. If observation of celibacy and cleaning of one's latrine will get us freedom, it's better to play cards, he says to a friend, dismissing the Mahatma. But when he hears him speak, "the seriousness in Gandhi's voice and the economy in his words" (Rajmohan Gandhi, 2007)<sup>29</sup> change his outlook towards the Mahatma.

The film moves to the Kheda *Satyagraha* (1918), the peasant agitation, where Gandhi anoints Patel, the England-returned barrister, as the leader. The peasants of Kheda sign a petition calling for the scrapping of land tax. The tax is suspended for one year and then the next. Patel credits the success of the *Satyagraha* to Gandhi, the *sanyasi* (renouncer).

The Champaran agitation in Bihar in 1916 is usually described as the crystallization of Gandhi's *Satyagraha* strategy, but the term was first used in Kheda while describing the resistance of the peasant community, comprising Patidars, Muslims and landless labour, against a new unfair agricultural tax. With Gandhi away, Patel took charge impressively, instilling in the resisters the importance of collective action. As Gandhi wrote to Patel at the time,

We can certainly tell the Kheda peasants that through our local struggle we are fighting for the *Swaraj* of all of India. (Akbar, 2015)<sup>30</sup>



Next, the camera pans to capture the Bardoli (a taluka in Surat) *Satyagraha* (1928), where Vallabhbhai Patel gained the title of *Sardar* (head of a group) and showed his organization skills. He organized the peasants in such a way that, except for one village, no village in the taluka pays land revenue, and when the British government decides to auction the farmers' properties, it finds no buyers.

The question of the partition of India is the first turn where Mahatma Gandhi and Patel are seen standing on opposite flanks in the movie. Gandhi is opposed to the split at any cost and pleads with Mohammad Ali Jinnah (*Why are you talking of divorce before marriage?*) up to the last moment, and even agrees that the Muslim League should rule the country, which is firmly rejected by Nehru and Patel though the duo seem acquiescent to a split after a point. Patel also differed with Gandhi over backing Britain during World War II, though the film makes no mention of this.

The defining moment of the story comes when 12 out of 15 Congress committees propose Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel to head the interim government but Gandhi makes him withdraw his name in favour of Nehru. The Mahatma tells Patel and Nehru, "You two will have to work as two wheels" of one vehicle. When Gandhi pleads with Nehru and Patel to let the Muslim League rule India instead of the Congress, Patel reminds him, "Bapu, you are a mahatma. We are ordinary people. Nobody will agree to handing over the nation to the Muslim League".

The Gandhi *Sardar: The Iron Man of India* portrays is a helpless man who fails to convince Congress to vote against the partition and for the rule of Muslim League. He even faced resistance to his plea to release Rs.55 Crores as the second instalment of the arrears to be paid to Pakistan under the terms of the division of assets and liabilities. When a fasting Gandhi writes a note to Patel reminding the latter of the immorality of not fulfilling the promise, the then home minister again retorted, "You're a mahatma and I am an ordinary person". Apparently, Patel was upset over the Pakistani deceit in Jammu & Kashmir and would pay the instalment only after driving that point home. Patel even persuades Gandhi to stay in Birla House against his will after the government of India fears a threat to his life.

To his credit, Ketan Mehta's *Sardar: The Iron Man of India* dispels the myth that Gandhi, if he wanted, could have averted the partition of India and kept Hindus and Muslims together. The movie makes it clear how the Mahatma became isolated within the Congress over the issue, with not even Sardar Patel and Jawaharlal Nehru standing by him.

It is interesting to learn that from 1935 onward, though Gandhi participated in meetings between Congress and Jinnah's All India Muslim League to discuss various Hindu-Muslim issues, he wielded no power. The

real negotiators here were Jinnah and the Congress president. Gandhi tagged along with the Congress chief.

The Mahatma himself disclosed this in a statement to the press in 1938 before one such meeting.

I am not approaching the forthcoming interview in any representative capacity. I have purposely divested myself of any such. If there are to be any formal negotiations, they will be between the President of the Congress and the President of the Muslim League. I go as a lifelong worker in the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity. (CWMG, 1938)<sup>31</sup>

N S Gundur quotes from Sandhya Chaudhary's book in his paper "Gandhi and the Great Divide: Portrayal of Gandhi/sm in Partition Novels", saying Gandhi was

the most helpless man in the whole sordid drama (Partition), never party to it, yet a victim to the charges that he did not assert himself to avoid it. While the prime responsibility of it lay with the British and the Congress high command for their collective inability in finding an alternative solution to division. (Chaudhary, 1984)<sup>32</sup>

It is apparent that Gandhi always had differences with the leaders of the Congress over his epistemology on spinning wheels and his boycott of legislative councils, courts, government schools, titles, and mill-made cloth even before he resigned from the party in 1934. Swarajists led by Pandit Motilal Nehru in 1924 opposed Gandhi's resolution declaring that members who did not spin for half an hour a day and "observe the five-fold boycott of legislative councils, law courts, government schools, titles, and mill-made cloth would have to resign from the All India Congress Committee" and forced him to withdraw the resolution.

We decline to make a fetish of the spinning wheel or to subscribe to the doctrine that only through that wheel can we obtain Swaraj. Discipline is desirable but it is not discipline for the majority to expel minority. We are unable to forget our manhood and our self-respect and to say that we are willing to submit to Gandhi's orders. That Congress is as much ours as our opponents and we will return with the greater majority to sweep away those who stand for this resolution,

Motilal Nehru said, leading the Swarajists (Pal, 2009).<sup>33</sup> Gandhi experienced his second defeat in 1939 when a young Subhas Chandra Bose humbled his nominee, Dr Pattabhi Sitaramayya, in the election for Congress president. Gandhi acknowledged after the election that "Pattabhi's defeat is my defeat" (Pal, 2009).<sup>34</sup>

Many Congress leaders were also opposed to Gandhi's call for a Quit India movement. This included Aruna Asaf Ali and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. Ali wrote about the movement, "We know ours is the voice of lost souls that championed a cause" (Pal, 2009).<sup>35</sup> Azad writes in his book *India Wins Freedom* that he tried to dissuade Gandhi from launching the Quit India movement but Gandhi asked him to resign from the presidentship of the Congress and withdraw from its working committee. Patel, who had differences with Azad, pressured Gandhi to take back the letter (Pal, 2009).

Gundur lauds Gandhi's work for Hindu-Muslim unity and writes in his book that

Gandhi was hardly understood by the Indians in a proper perspective. It was partly because people did not make sense of Gandhi's idiom. His use of symbols and mythology from Hinduism in both his speech and writings dubbed him a staunch Hindu. At the same time, his respect for the Quran and upholding the cause of the Muslim community made him a target of the staunch Hindus. Gandhi's use of the religious idiom was beyond the parochial view. He believed that genuine religion should bring people together rather than separate them (Gundur, 2008).<sup>36</sup>

He also firmly puts the blame for the partition and its consequential communal frenzy at the door of the British, Jinnah and Congress leaders. He applauds Gandhi's humanism and fight against injustice through *Satyagraha*.

The sub-text of Gandhi/sm was different. He loved each and every creature and was intolerant of injustice. Though his external fight was against the British Empire, his internal fight was against socio-political unfairness. He condemned colonialism, not individual Britishers. In spite of his confidence that he could combat violence, he was helpless during the division of the country. The political situation of the day went beyond his control. His followers in the Congress side-lined him.<sup>37</sup>

If Patel accepted Nehru's leadership, withdrew from the race for prime ministership and didn't resign from Nehru's cabinet despite having differences with him over Jammu & Kashmir (Patel was against Nehru promising a plebiscite in Kashmir), settling only Muslims in houses vacated by people who migrated to Pakistan, the credit goes to Mahatma Gandhi. Bapu's last wish was to see Nehru and Patel work together. Nehru was like a son to him while Patel was more like a younger brother he could share jokes with.

*Sardar: The Iron Man of India* stresses peace, non-violence and equality of religions when India's then home minister is shown visiting the shrine of

eminent Sufi saint Nizamuddin Auliya, after hearing about a threat to the tomb, and Amritsar, where he went on September 30, 1947 to plead with 200,000 refugees for the restoration of peace and stop the revenge killings of Muslim refugees trying to cross over to Pakistan.

Here, in this same city, the blood of Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims mingled in the bloodbath of Jallianwala Bagh. I am grieved to think that things have come to such a pass that no Muslim can go about in Amritsar and no Hindu or Sikh can even think of living in Lahore. The butchery of innocent and defenceless men, women and children does not behoove brave men... I am quite certain that India's interest lies in getting all her men and women across the border and sending out all Muslims from East Punjab. I have come to you with a specific appeal. Pledge the safety of Muslim refugees crossing the city. Any obstacles or hindrances will only worsen the plight of our refugees who are already performing prodigious feats of endurance. If we have to fight, we must fight clean. Such a fight must await an appropriate time and conditions and you must be watchful in choosing your ground. To fight against the refugees is no fight at all. No laws of humanity or war among honourable men permit the murder of people who have sought shelter and protection. Let there be truce for three months in which both sides can exchange their refugees. This sort of truce is permitted even by laws of war. Let us take the initiative in breaking this vicious circle of attacks and counter-attacks. Hold your hands for a week and see what happens. Make way for the refugees with your own force of volunteers and let them deliver the refugees safely at our frontier. (Roychoudhary, 2013)<sup>38</sup>

The film partly takes the focus away from Gandhi and partly the Mahatma had retired from political life and had a diminished role in national affairs for over 15 years after Patel made his entry.

In *Sardar*, the just-completed feature film directed by Ketan Mehta and produced by the former home minister, the late H.M. Patel, for The Foundation for Films on India's War of Independence, the Man of Iron has been blown to larger-than-life-size. And it's the other two who seem to have shrunk. (Jain, 1994)<sup>39</sup>

*Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: The Forgotten Hero*, directed by Shyam Benegal who, incidentally, also directed *Making of the Mahatma*, mainly covers the period around World War II. It depicts how the Netaji sneaked out of India after quitting Congress over irreconcilable differences with Mahatma Gandhi to enlist the support of Russia, Germany and Japan for what he termed a fight to the finish against British imperialism. It portrays that Gandhiji wanted the Bose brothers – the older Sarat Chandra Bose and Subhas Chandra Bose – to apologize for indiscipline. It claims Gandhi and

Subhas Chandra Bose were not quite on the same page when it came to fighting the British occupants.

Gandhi insisted he could not compromise on non-violence while Subhas was of the view that non-violence was no longer an option when “war drums were being beaten all around the world.” Subhas asked Gandhi “who would listen to the flute of non-violence in such an atmosphere?” The movie claims to be a fictional representation based on historical facts. It says Subhas Chandra Bose resigned from Congress presidentship in 1939 during the Tripuri meeting, and attributes the separation of ways between “Gandhiates” (a term used by Subhas in his correspondence with Gandhi) and Subhas to their conflict over non-violence.

But the exchange of letters and telegrams between the Mahatma and Subhas after the Tripuri congress and historical facts fly in the face of claims in the film. The exchange reveals that the Netaji continued to be party president for at least a few months after the Tripuri session and resigned in April 1939 after he failed to arrive at a compromise with the Mahatma over the nature of the Congress Working Committee and the manner in which it was to be nominated. Gandhi wanted the committee to be homogenous and insisted Subhas pick all 14 committee members while the latter wanted the committee to be composite, with both the factions – one led by Subhas Chandra Bose and the other by Sardar Patel – getting equal representation.

When Gandhi did not budge from his stance, Subhas requested he choose the working committee of his choice, a demand made by Govind Ballabh Pant through a resolution at the Tripuri session. Netaji wanted the resolution to be amended. Gandhi did not agree with this either. Once the about month-long communication between them failed to bring about a resolution, Subhas also implored Gandhi for a face-to-face meeting, which also did not come to fruition. Subhas also wanted to know from Bapu whether he should interpret Pant’s resolution as a vote of no-confidence against him and put in his papers. To this, Mahatma replied in the negative and asked him to nominate the working committee.

Subhas repeatedly asked Gandhi whether he agreed with the terms mentioned in Pant’s resolution.

The Congress declares its firm adherence to the fundamental policies which have governed its programme in the past years under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi and is definitely of opinion that there should be no break in these policies and they should continue to govern the Congress programme in future. This Congress expresses its confidence in the work of the Working Committee which functioned during the last year and regrets that any aspersions should have been cast against any of its members.

In view of the critical situation that may develop during the coming year and in view of the fact that Mahatma Gandhi alone can lead the Congress and the country to victory during such a crisis, the Congress regards it as imperative that the executive should command his implicit confidence and requests the President to appoint the Working Committee in accordance with the wishes of Gandhiji. (Bose's letter to Gandhi, April 10, 1939)<sup>40</sup>

but the latter never gave a straight answer. Subhas wanted the resolution to be amended before it was to be passed by the Congress.

In view of various misunderstandings that have arisen in the Congress and the country on account of the controversies in connection with the Presidential Election and after, it is desirable that the Congress should clarify the position and declare its general policy. (April 10, 1939)<sup>41</sup>

Also, to say that Gandhi and Subhas parted ways due to their differences on non-violence alone would be like not seeing the wood for the trees. Even on non-violence, the differences were too vast and deep to be confined to a war-like situation.

Gandhi also felt that violence had increased in the country, making it unfit for the launch of an immediate non-violent agitation against the British. "Our mutual distrust is a bad form of violence. The widening gulf between Hindus and Musalmans points to the same thing", Gandhi wrote to Subhas (Letter, April 2, 1939).

In the same letter, the Mahatma adds, "I have the firm belief that the Congress as it is today cannot deliver the goods, cannot offer civil disobedience worth the name. Therefore, if your prognosis is right, I am a backnumber and played out as the Generalissimo of *Satyagraha*". Subhas charged Gandhi with raising the bogey of violence and contested him through eight-page letter, "Within the ranks of the congressmen and of those who are supporters of Congress, there is, on the whole, less violence today than before" (Bose's letter to Gandhi, April 10, 1939).

Besides violence, Gandhi believed corruption had also increased in Congress. He felt that apart from political differences, he also had differences with Subhas on the economic front. Even when it came to political differences, these were of a very basic nature for Gandhi fought for a spiritual Swaraj and emphasized politics driven by religious morals while Bose was for politics based on rationality and modernization. "For a people so prone to mysticism and supernaturalism, the only hope of political salvation lies in the growth of a sane rationalism and in the modernization of the material aspect of life" (Bose, p. 127, 1935). On the economic front, the Mahatma stressed cottage industries, spinning, and local self-sufficiency

at the village level while Subhas was for all for large industries under the public sector.

Machinery has begun to desolate Europe. Ruination is now knocking at the English gates, Machinery is the chief symbol of modern civilization; it represents a great sin. The workers in the mills of Bombay have become slaves. The condition of the women working in the mills is shocking. When there were no mills, these women were not starving. If the machinery craze grows in our country, it will become an unhappy land. It may be considered a heresy, but I am bound to say that it were better for us to send money to Manchester and to use flimsy Manchester cloth than to multiply mills in India. By using Manchester cloth, we only waste our money; but by reproducing Manchester in India, we shall keep our money at the price of our blood, because our very moral being will be sapped, and I call in support of my statement the very mill-hands as witnesses (The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. III).

On industrialization, Gandhi was not even in sync with the Congress and India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru.

The Congress seemed to stand for projects of industrialism in which he saw no deliverance for the masses from their grinding poverty. He did not believe in mill-made civilization as he did not in mill-made cloth. He did not believe in an army for the removal of the menace to the real freedom of the country. If he was to impatiently fast, in the symptoms he had described and others he could add, there were reasons enough to justify a fast unto death. He felt that he must be steadfast in the midst of the fire raging around him and prove his faith in the ultimate triumph of truth. (Bose, 1947)

Moreover, in June 1942, when American journalist Louis Fischer asked Gandhi: "Very highly placed Britishers had told me that Congress was in the hands of big business and that Gandhi was supported by the Bombay mill-owners who gave him as much money as he wanted. What truth is there in these assertions?" Gandhi replied: "Unfortunately, they are true" (Fischer, 2015).<sup>42</sup>

Subhas Chandra Bose was all for industrial development under the public sector. His presidential address at Haripura after being elected Congress president in February 1938 says it all.

To solve the economic problem, agricultural improvement will not be enough. A comprehensive scheme of industrial development under state-ownerships and state-control will be indispensable. A new industrial system will have to be built up in place of the old one which has collapsed as a result of mass production abroad and alien rule at home. The planning commission will have to carefully consider and decide which of the home industries

could be revived despite the competition of modern factories and in which sphere large scale production should be encouraged. However much we may dislike modern industrialism and condemn the evils which follow in its train, we cannot go back to the pre-industrial era, even if we desire to do so. It is well, therefore, that we should reconcile ourselves to industrialisation and devise means to minimise its evils and at the same time explore the possibilities of reviving cottage industries where there is the possibility of their surviving the inevitable competition of factories. In a country like India, there will be plenty of room for cottage industries, especially. (Rai, 1946)<sup>43</sup>

Gandhi was content to demand dominion status under the British while Bose would not settle for anything less than *Purna Swaraj* (complete freedom).

He (Bose) has been unambiguous that he would seek political emancipation throughout the most efficacious means, which could involve armed conflict or even a total war. Mahatma Gandhi, on the other hand, identified Spiritual Swaraj, which would cure Indian civilisation from evils such as doctors, lawyers, railways, mill-made cloth, heavy machinery, medicine, and contraceptives, as his goal early on. He subsequently verbally demanded Dominion Status with membership in the British Commonwealth most of the time, without, however, revoking his articulation of spiritual Swaraj (Sarkar & Dikgaj, 2015).<sup>44</sup>

It was clear from day one that Mahatma Gandhi would not compromise on his principles.

How can we meet on the political platform? Let us agree to differ there and let us meet on social, moral and municipal platforms. I cannot add the economic, for we have discovered our differences on that platform also. (Gandhi's letter to Bose, April 10, 1939)

The situation reached a deadlock when Bose refused to budge from his beliefs.

You know very well that I do not follow you blindly in all that you say or believe as so many of my countrymen do. (Bose's letter to Gandhi, April 6, 1939)

The author strongly believes politics is what accentuated the differences between Gandhi and Bose. Bose had become president of the Congress after humbling the Mahatma's personal nominee Dr Pattabhi Sitaramayya, and this caused a rift between the old guard – Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Govind Ballabh Pant and Bhulabhai Desai – and youthful, radical and progressive



elements led by the Netaji. Also, Gandhi's reluctance to launch an agitation for Purna Swaraj acted as a *fait accompli* for Subhas.

We should lose no time in placing our National Demand before the British Government in the form of an ultimatum. The idea of an ultimatum does not appeal to you or to Pandit Jawaharlal. (Bose's letter to Gandhi, March 31, 1939)

To their credit, Mahatma Gandhi and the Netaji never allowed their differences to cause bitterness and continued to hold each other in high esteem until the assassination of the former on January 30, 1948. Gandhi hoped that "our private relations will not suffer in the least. If they are from the heart, as I believe they are, they will bear the strain of these differences" (his letter to Bose, April 2, 1939), to which Bose responded in a letter four days later, "You have remarked in one letter that you hope that whatever happens, 'our private relations will not suffer'. I shall cherish this hope with all my heart."

Bose named one of his Indian National Army brigades after Gandhi, and proclaimed time and again that Gandhi was the biggest mass leader in India, bestowing the title "Father of the Nation" on the Mahatma in his broadcast from a radio station in Burma (now Myanmar) in 1944.

Gandhi wrote in the February 24, 1946 issue of *Harijan* that "Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's patriotism is second to none". He initially refused to believe he had died in plane crash and wondered in 1945 how Subhasbabu could die when India was yet to achieve *Swaraj*. Writing about why he did not believe that Netaji could have died in the plane crash, Gandhi wrote in *Harijan* on March 30, 1946, under the title, "Is Netaji Alive?"

Some time back it was announced in the newspapers that Subhas Chandra Bose had died. I believed the report. Later the news was proved to be incorrect. Since then I have had a feeling that Netaji could not leave us until his dream of *Swaraj* had been fulfilled. To lend strength to this feeling was the knowledge of Netaji's great ability to hoodwink his enemies and even the world for the sake of his cherished goal.

Later, when Captain Habibur Rahman narrated the last moments of Netaji, Gandhi reconciled to the fact that Subhas Chandra Bose was no more. At the same time, he emphasized that "He (Bose) is living with us in his message and the ideals he placed" (UNI, January 22, 2016).

Despite there being differences between the two, Subhas believed in the power of fast and observation of silence, weapons Gandhi practiced and preached for his countryman in the fight against injustice. Bose announced

a fast unto death in Presidency Jail (Calcutta) on September 30, 1940. He wrote to the Superintendent of Prison,

I repeat that this letter, written on the sacred day of Kali Puja, should not be treated as a threat or ultimatum. It is merely an affirmation of one's faith, written in all humility. (Bose, 2004)<sup>45</sup>

Directed by Ved Rahi for *Savarkar Darshan Pratishthan's* president Sudhir Phadke, *Veer Savarkar* is one of the very few films in the history of Indian cinema made from money collected from the general public. The 19-reel- long movie, which was believed to have taken ten long years to complete and changed seven directors and five screenplay writers along the way, covers the controversial freedom fighter's story from childhood to the years he was settled in Ratnagiri by the English on the condition that he would not take part in politics or leave the place without permission of the district collector.

The film portrays a young Vinayak Damodar Savarkar burning a pyre of foreign clothes under the inspiration of Bal Gangadhar Tilak. It shows him pledging under the goddess Ashtabhuja Devi's feet, "I shall win back freedom for my country and unfurl the flag of armed revolution for it. If I succeed in this, I shall set up Swaraj like Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and place the crown of freedom on your forehead. Mother, give me strength." It refers to the formation of Abhinav Bharat in Pune and India House events in detail.

The film gives the details of Savarkar's escape from the merchant vessel *Morea* at the French port of Marseilles and rearrest while being brought to India by the British government for trial. Savarkar escaped through a porthole and swam ashore but was rearrested by the guards on the ship. It also depicts the torture scenes and fasts against jailor Barrie in Cellular Jail in Andaman where he was incarcerated for over a decade with his elder brother Ganesh alias Babarao. It also gives glimpses of his work against untouchability.

As in the case of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Dr B R Ambedkar and Sardar Patel, Mahatma Gandhi had both convergence and divergence of views with Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. If one goes by the film, Gandhi met Savarkar twice in his lifetime – first in November 1906 when Savarkar organized a public gathering of Indians to celebrate the festival of Vijayadashami, and then in 1927 in Ratnagiri where Savarkar was serving his internment. In his speech in London, Gandhi said, "Though I have my differences with Savarkar, I consider it a great honour to be in his company today." In Ratnagiri, the father of the nation remarked,

As Ratnagiri is the birth place of Lokmanya Tilak, it is a place of pilgrimage to all Indians. I wanted to visit this place because, in addition, it is also a place where Savarkar lives. I had previously met him in London. I admire his patriotism and sacrifices. As he is in internment, It was my duty to come to Ratnagiri to meet him ([www.savarkar.org](http://www.savarkar.org)).

Rahi's film portrays Mahatma Gandhi and Veer Savarkar having divergent views only on non-violence and untouchability but the fact is the duo held conflicting opinions on practically almost every subject under the sun, from cinema to religion, partition, industry, independence for India, and even reconversions. In an undated interview with a Marathi journalist that has been republished in a book of his essays, *Vividha Lekh*, or Various Essays, when Savarkar was asked whether he talked of the film medium in glowing terms to lampoon Gandhi for not liking cinema, he retorted, "Is there anything common between Gandhi and me?" (Rajadhyaksha, 2016).<sup>46</sup>

It seems the worlds of Gandhi and Savarkar converged only on *Swadeshi*. Even here, the latter conceded leadership to Bal Gangadhar Tilak and his *Kesari* newspaper, and not Gandhi. Though both belonged to upper caste families – Gandhi, a baniya, and Savarkar, a Chitpawan Brahmin from Konkan, a caste which was always looked at with suspicion by the British – they had hardly anything in common.

The film, surprisingly, makes no mention of Gandhi's assassination, for which Savarkar was charge-sheeted and tried before being acquitted because of what A G Noorani, author of *Savarkar and Hindutva: The Godse Connection*, published in 2002 by LeftWord Books, calls a lack of independent corroboration of the evidence provided by approver Digambar Badge, whom the trial judge Atma Charan hailed for telling his version "in a direct and straight-forward manner" (Noorani, 2012).<sup>47</sup>

Apparently, Rahi decided to skip what was called by Morarji Desai "the present disservice" (a reference to Gandhi's assassination) of Veer Savarkar because it would have offset the "past services" of the Savarkar brothers. Besides, how could he have avoided referring to Supreme Court Judge Justice J L Sitar, who called Veer Savarkar "the main conspirator", and then Home Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's letter to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in which he wrote, "It also clearly emerges from these statements (of the accused) that the RSS was not involved in it at all. It was a fanatical wing of the Hindu Mahasabha directly under Savarkar that (hatched) the conspiracy and saw it through."

Both Mahatma Gandhi and Veer Savarkar invoked religion to unite people against the British Empire, but for Gandhi the essence of his religion was morality. He used Hindu idioms to reach the Hindus and Muslims as well as other religious minorities in India. Savarkar, on the other hand,

looked to establish Hindutva as an overarching influence in the country under which Islam, Christianity and other faiths could survive and sustain.

In the case of some of our Mohammedan or Christian countrymen who had originally been forcibly converted to a non-Hindu religion and who consequently have inherited along with Hindus, a common Fatherland and a greater part of the wealth of a common culture—language, law, customs, folklore and history—are not and cannot be recognized as Hindus. For though Hindustan to them is Fatherland as to any other Hindu yet it is not to them a Holyland too. Their holyland is far off in Arabia or Palestine. Their mythology and Godmen, ideas and heroes are not the children of this soil. Consequently, their names and their outlook smack of a foreign origin. Their love is divided,

he wrote in *Essentials of Hindutva* in 1923 (p. 42).

Both Gandhi and Savarkar considered religion to be the basis of masculinity, but the former credited no particular religion for this while the latter always had Hindu masculinity superseding Muslim and Christian masculinity.

For communal harmony, Gandhi advocated “mutual generosity” to be an ingredient of the masculinities in both Hindus and Muslims, but critics like Dhananjay Keer feel that Gandhi’s “mutual generosity” always remained one-sided. Gandhi never asked the Muslims to concede anything to the Hindus. Thus, the majority (Hindus) giving concessions to the minority made “non-Hindus” view India as a “too Hindu nation” in which the minority is at the mercy of the majority, and Hindus view India as a “not-Hindu enough” nation where they have to constantly give in to minorities (Keer 1973, as cited in Gopi 2014).<sup>48</sup>

Savarkar’s vision of India as a nation had room only for Hindu masculinity. Gopi writes in her research paper quoting from Savarkar’s books and an essay written by Aloysius G in *Economic and Political Weekly* in 1994 (*Trajectory of Hindutva*, June 11, pp. 1450–452) that

Savarkar based his idea of masculinity on Hindutva, not Hinduism. Hindu masculinity of Savarkar was based on the valour of arms, purity of aims and sublimity of souls.... Savarkar concealed divisions within Hindu men in terms of caste, creed, language or region. Similarly, he concealed socio-economic and political similarity of the Muslims to the lower caste Hindi men. Savarkar built monolithic Hindu masculinity always in opposition to “threatening others” (both British and Muslims).

Unlike Gandhi, who was steadfast in his opposition to the partition of India, Savarkar initially opposed the division of Bengal but later came

around to back Mohammad Ali Jinnah's demand for Pakistan. The theory of two nations, proposed in *Essentials of Hindutva*, was approved as a resolution by the Mahasabha in 1937.

The 19th session of the Mahasabha in Ahmedabad declared, "There are two antagonistic nations living side by side in India. Several infantile politicians commit the serious mistake in supposing that India is already welded into a harmonious nation, or that it could be welded thus for the mere wish to do so.... India cannot be assumed today to be a unitarian and homogenous nation. On the contrary, there are two nations in the main: the Hindus and the Muslims, in India. (Islam, 2004)<sup>49</sup>

It would be clear even to a child that Savarkar's "infantile politicians" jab was targeted at Mahatma Gandhi.

Clearly Gandhi was meant in the comment about infantile politicians, given his defence of Muslims and his objections to the kind of characterization of Muslims seen in Mahasabha propaganda. (Coward, 2003)<sup>50</sup>

Savarkar and Gandhi were on opposite flanks on reconversions as well, though both of them were against proselytization. For the former, reconversions would contribute to the number of Hindus and making India a Hindu nation. He could accept Parsees, Christians and Jews, and other minorities because they had no extraterritorial designs. Savarkar believed that the "appropriate response to the proselytizing activities of Christians and Muslims was to engage in an aggressive policy of *shuddhi* rather than the Gandhian program of appeasement and its misplaced optimism about Hindu-Muslim unity" (Coward, 2003).<sup>51</sup> Gandhi felt that an aggressive *shuddhi* campaign could jeopardize Hindu-Muslim unity and create more divisions in society. He even objected to the Mahasabha associating his name with the programme.

Gandhi's response to the Mahasabha appeal for a memorial for Swami Shraddhanand of the Arya Samaj said it all.

For my part I still remain unconvinced about the necessity of the *shuddhi* movement, taking *shuddhi* in the sense it is generally understood. *Shuddhi* of sinners is a perpetual inward performance. *Shuddhi* of those who can be identified neither as Hindus nor Mussalmans or who have been recently declared converts but who do not know even the meaning of conversion and who want to be known definitely as Hindus is not conversion but *prayaschitta* or penance. The third aspect of *Shuddhi* is conversion properly so called. And I question its use in this age of growing toleration and enlightenment. I am against conversion whether it is known as *shuddhi* by

Hindus, or tabligh by Muslims or conversion by Christians. Conversion is a heart-process known only to and by God. (Gandhi, 1969)<sup>52</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi's masculinity was an amalgamation of what he borrowed from the West (punctuality, self-control and sexual abstinence) and the East (non-violence, vegetarianism, spirituality, etc.) while in the case of Savarkar, it was the fair-skinned Aryans, not the dark skinned, who defined masculinity. Neither Gandhi nor Savarkar gave women much of a role in public affairs outside the threshold of the home. The former, at the most, allowed them to picket drink and drugs outlets because these induced their men to perpetrate violence on them. Gandhi wanted education (in local language) to imbibe morality in students. Savarkar, on the other hand, wanted mandatory military training for Hindu boys so that they could protect the honour of the women and the nation (Gopi, 2014).<sup>53</sup>

A lesser known fact is that Gandhi looked down on the power of Hindi cinema and accused it of corrupting youth while Savarkar believed cinema was one of the most beautiful gifts of the 20th century.

This is the machine age. We are surrounded by things that have been made with the help of machines. The world of entertainment cannot be an exception to this rule. Please understand that I refuse to condemn the advances made in technology. I would like modern machines to spread rapidly so that the whole of humanity is happier.... I dislike any restrictions on the innovative spirit of the human mind. That is because modern progress and modern culture have emerged out of innovation. The very essence of the progress made by humanity over the past many years in science and knowledge can be found in contemporary cinema. There is no better example of the use of modern technology than the movies, and that is why I will never back any restrictions on them. (Rajadhyaksha, 2016)<sup>54</sup>

Savarkar, who saw his first silent movie during his stay in London, rated cinema higher than books, and wanted it to tell the stories of Hindu legends who fought against the Muslim aggressors and the British Empire. "Films are even superior to novels. However well written be the biographies of national heroes such as Shivaji, Pratap or Ranjit, there is no doubt their stories will be more enjoyable and impactful on the screen."

He also wanted to use cinema to educate the youth.

"Films can even be used to educate our youth. We see life reflected very well on screen. It is better to borrow a good thing rather than have nothing at all. But one should neither blindly copy the work of other". He was for filmmakers promoting the cause of India's freedom through their work. "As in all other fields, it is essential that our people are nationalists in the field of cinema as well. Everything else comes after that. The film industry too

should believe that it will do everything possible for the progress of the entire nation” (Rajadhyaksha, 2016).<sup>55</sup>

Unlike Gandhi, who emphasized cottage industry (spinning wheels, etc.) and villages becoming self-sufficient, Savarkar was all for modern machines and the development of scientific temperament, and condemned the Mahatma for calling the Bihar earthquake (1934) punishment for the caste system.

“Such naïve people were incapable of even understanding that there were physical explanations for earthquakes, let alone trying to use seismology to design machines that could perhaps help them predict the risk of an earthquake. Europe could truly embrace the machine age only when its religious beliefs were demolished by scientific approach” he wrote in a magazine called Kirloskar. (Rajadhyaksha, 2016)<sup>56</sup>

Savarkar lauded Article 17 of the Indian Constitution which abolished untouchability and declared its practices forbidden and punishable in accordance with the law.

It was a golden day for all humankind and Hindu Sanghatan when the Constituent Assembly unanimously took this decision. These words should now be carved on some eternal pillar like the Ashoka pillar, so important are they. (Rajadhyaksha, 2016)<sup>57</sup>

Savarkar backed Ambedkar in the latter’s campaigns in Mahad and Nashik against untouchability, organized mass inter-caste dining, constructed the Patitpavan temple at Ratnagiri in 1929 and appointed a Dalit priest there and ensured that the trust managing the temple included members from all four Hindu castes. No other Indian freedom fighter, not even Mahatma Gandhi, has been portrayed on the 70 mm screen more than Bhagat Singh in Hindi cinema. Narwekar writes in his research paper

Not even Mahatma Gandhi, more enduring and more revered today, has been made so many times, though he may have been portrayed in other films oftener than Bhagat Singh. (HCFS, Narwekar)<sup>58</sup>

Such is the romanticism (he was hanged at the age of 23 along with Sukhdev (older than him by a few months) and Shivaram Rajguru (younger by close to a year) after a prolonged court drama in what was known as the Lahore conspiracy case, which exposed British imperialism and aroused the Indian masses against it) and appeal of Bhagat Singh’s story that at least half a dozen films – *Shaheed-E-Azam Bhagat Singh* (1954), *Shaheed Bhagat Singh* (1963), *Shaheed* (1965), *Shaheed-E-Azam, 23rd March 1931*:

*Shaheed*, and *The Legend of Bhagat Singh* (2002) – have been made on his life until now.

*Rang De Basanti* (2006) was inspired by Bhagat Singh's revolutionary act. Films have been made on his life in the Punjabi language as well.

*The Legend of Bhagat Singh, 23rd March 1931: Shaheed* and *Shaheed-E-Azam* were all released in 2002. The release date of the first two, in fact, clashed at the box office as Rajkumar Santoshi (TLBS) and Sunny Deol (23rd March 1931: Shaheed) raced against time and each other to get their films to the public.

Starring Ajay Devgan (Bhagat Singh), Sushant Singh (Sukhdev Thapar) and Shivaram Rajguru (D. Santosh), *The Legend of Bhagat Singh* tells the story of Bhagat Singh from his childhood to the date of his hanging. It shows the young Bhagat Singh picking up the blood-stained soil of Jallianwala Bagh where English Officer General Dyer ordered fire on an unarmed gathering, being a big votary of Mahatma Gandhi and his call for non-cooperation against the British Empire and getting disillusioned when Gandhi withdraws the agitation after the burning of a police post in Chauri Chaura (Bengal). The story captures the details of how Bhagat Singh befriends Sukhdev (a fellow student at National College) and joins Chandrasekhar Azad's Hindustan Revolutionary Party (later rechristened the Hindustan Socialist Revolutionary Party (HSRP) at his behest), and how the revolutionaries, led by Azad, Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, and Rajguru, decide to avenge the killing of Lala Lajpat Rai, who was beaten to death during a demonstration against the Simon Commission. They end up shooting ASP John Saunders instead of SP J.A. Scott. A few months later, Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt hurl bombs into the Central Legislative Assembly Hall in Delhi to draw the attention of the British rulers to the plight of Indians. Singh and Dutt are arrested after the bombs explode. Dutt is sentenced to life imprisonment while Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru are given death sentences after a prolonged court battle in which the trial judge was replaced with a tribunal to hasten the execution.

The revolutionaries successfully use the court battle to reach out to the Indian and international audience. Singh and his associates also launch a hunger strike in Lahore jail against the inhuman conditions prevailing in the prison. The strike lasts for over five months, which may be longer than the number of days Mahatma Gandhi fasted in his life against the British. The strike is only withdrawn after the All India Congress Committee makes an appeal and the British administration accedes to some of the major demands. Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru are sentenced to death in October 1930 by a three-judge tribunal set up by the British Viceroy through an ordinance.



The trio are hanged on 23rd March, 1931, a day before their scheduled hanging as public uproar against the death sentence has reached a crescendo.

Except for *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, The Legend of Bhagat Singh* is perhaps the only Indian film that portrays Mahatma Gandhi in a negative light. The film takes the shine off Gandhi to increase the glow on Bhagat Singh and his HSRP accomplices. Gandhi is shown discussing the Gandhi-Irwin pact with British viceroys as the country rises in revolt against the hanging. The film adds grist to the public perception that Gandhi did not save Bhagat Singh from the gallows deliberately, and instead preferred to discuss the pact with Irwin as he feared that the young revolutionary might steal a march over him in popularity. There are numerous examples of this perception being sustained for over eight decades.

In March 2010, Abhay Singh, the son of Bhagat Singh's younger brother Kulbir, said that people in India were angry with the Congress party for having portrayed his uncle as a terrorist.

“Bhagat Singh was always projected as a terrorist who hurled bombs and fired bullets, which is not true. I feel this is a conspiracy of the Congress to give mileage to the Nehru-Gandhi family and marginalise the freedom fighters like Bhagat Singh and Subhas Chandra Bose as they were against the ideology of Congress”, Abhay Singh alleged. “In a recent issue of a national magazine, Bhagat Singh was rated on top in a survey while Mahatma Gandhi was number six. This shows how angry people are with the policies of the Congress”. (Mid-Day, 2010)<sup>59</sup>

The problem with *The Legend of Bhagat Singh* is that its writer Anjum Rajabali and director Rajkumar Santoshi are unfair to Mahatma Gandhi (played by Surendra Rajan) and have made his character caricaturish. It seems to deplore and make fun of the non-violent means adopted by the Gandhi-led Congress as a British officer is shown telling another that Gandhi was an “ideal enemy” because he “doesn't fight back”. In contrast, Bhagat Singh is portrayed as a “sincere revolutionary” (a phrase used by the trial judge in the Lahore conspiracy case) whose objective behind hurling the bombs is “to make the deaf hear” and who fought for a better life for workers and farmers in an independent India against Congress's capitalist India.

The film runs Gandhi down to build Bhagat Singh up instead of exposing the unjust means adopted by the British administration during the farcical trial, which from day one aimed at judicial murders.

At the same time the film is industriously building up Singh's stature, it is quietly tearing down Gandhi's. For the Western viewer, this is probably the picture's most interesting aspect: far from being the serene sage played by

Ben Kingsley in Richard Attenborough's 1982 biographical film, *Mr. Santoshi's Gandhi* (Surendra Rajan) is a faintly ridiculous poseur, whose policies play directly into the hands of the British. (Kehr, 2002)<sup>60</sup>

From the film, it seems as if Gandhi was doing the wrong thing by preaching non-violence. Indirectly, Gandhi is held responsible for Bhagat Singh's death, something which can arouse controversies. Santoshi fails in the sense that he lacks some fairness. He should have known that if a film were to be made on Gandhi, Bhagat Singh would have been regarded as a villain, not as a national hero. (Gujadhur, 2002)<sup>61</sup>

The film makes hardly any effort to expose the farcical trial put in place by Britain's India administration to try Bhagat Singh and his fellow revolutionaries. Eminent scholar A G Noorani, in his book, *The Trial of Bhagat Singh*, calls the execution political killings. The book points out that the lawyers engaged by the revolutionaries were not allowed to cross-question prosecution witnesses and were insulted by the tribunal.

Bhagat Singh represented a particularly dangerous political enemy whom the British wished to see dead. They conducted a trial that was a classic example of the deliberate miscarriage of the law for political ends. Halfway through the trial, an Indian member of the three-member Tribunal and a sitting judge of the Lahore High Court, Justice Agha Haidar, was removed, as the British did not wish to see the Tribunal split on a verdict. (Menon, 2005)<sup>62</sup>

*The Legend of Bhagat Singh* does not try to explain the serious ideological differences that existed between Mahatma Gandhi and Bhagat Singh. Gandhi cared as much for the means (non-violence) as for the end (*Swarajya*).

The Mahatma had serious doubts about whether revolutionary actions could win freedom for India. In fact, he believed it harmed the cause and washed away the gains made through non-violent struggle. In response to a letter written to him by Sukhdev, Bhagat Singh's comrade, before his hanging, Gandhi denied that revolutionary activity had brought India near her goal and "contributed to mass awakening". He was of the opinion that it had "added to military expenditure in the country", "given rise to reprisals on the part of the Government", "demoralized the people", and served a double blow to the masses because the latter "had to bear the burden ultimately of additional expense and the indirect effect of Government wrath" (CWMG, 1931).<sup>63</sup>

He believed that revolutionary murders were against the non-violent culture of India and revolutionaries would have to wait 'for an indefinitely

long time for it to permeate the masses and then to gain freedom'. He wanted them to learn from the 'ocular demonstration of the efficacy' of non-violent method which had gone on despite violence on their part and occasional violence by so-called votaries of non-violence (CWMG, 1931).<sup>64</sup>

Revolutionaries should accept my testimony when I tell them that their activity has not only not done any good to the movement of non-violence, but it has, on the contrary, harmed the cause. In other words, if I had a completely peaceful atmosphere we would have gained our end already. (CWMG, 1931)<sup>65</sup>

Gandhi rejected Sukhdev's charge that he helped the bureaucracy crush the revolutionary movement by making public appeals to it against violence.

Surely the bureaucracy is in no need of my help to deal with the (revolutionary) movement. It fights for life both against the revolutionary and me. It scents more danger from the non-violent movement than from the violent. It knows how to deal with the latter. It is baffled by the former which has already shaken it to the foundations. (CWMG, 1931)<sup>66</sup>

He justified the public appeals to the revolutionaries, saying that since the latter worked in secret, he had no other way to reach them. He also said it was not possible for him to insist on the release of prisoners other than *satyagrahis* (CWMG, 1931).<sup>67</sup>

At the same time, Gandhi acknowledged the spirit of nationalism that took Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, and Rajguru to the gallows. "However condemnable political murder may be, it is not possible to withhold recognition of the love of the country and the courage which inspire such awful deeds" (CWMG, 1931).<sup>68</sup>

Singh was for an armed struggle until the British left India. The paths he and Gandhi followed in their struggle against British rule, however, were both complementary and competitive. Bhagat Singh was second only to Gandhi in popularity (he was more popular in Punjab before and after his hanging) in the country.

Their paths were complementary because Bhagat Singh's martyrdom expanded the national base for the Independence struggle, which in turn strengthened Gandhi's bargaining power with the British while Mahatma Gandhi's country-wide support base ensured greater popularity for Bhagat Singh. (Singh, 2015)<sup>69</sup>

*The Legend of Bhagat Singh* forgets that the death sentence awarded to Bhagat Singh and his fellow revolutionaries was also violence sanctioned by law and Gandhi, being an opponent of all forms of violence, would never

have supported it. Chander Pal Singh, in his research paper *What Mahatma Gandhi did to Save Bhagat Singh*, quotes what Gandhi said at a public meeting in Delhi on March 7, 1931, from the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, volume XLV, “I cannot in all conscience agree to anyone being sent to gallows, much less a brave man like Bhagat Singh” (p. 273).<sup>70</sup>

The film also makes no mention of the fact that Mahatma Gandhi was even opposed to the constitution of the three-member tribunal on May 1, 1930 by the British administration with the sole objective of hastening the execution of Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru. The tribunal replaced the Punjab High Court judge in whose court the trial was being conducted. In a letter written to Viceroy Lord Irwin on May 4, 1930, Gandhi said

And now you have sprung upon the country a Press Ordinance surpassing any hitherto known in India. You have found a short cut through the law's delay in the matter of the trial of Bhagat Singh and others by doing away with the ordinary procedure. Is it any wonder if I call all these official activities and inactivities a veiled form of Martial Law? (Famous Letters of Mahatma Gandhi, pp. 68–75)<sup>71</sup>

Gandhi spoke at Allahabad on the subject of Bhagat Singh's execution on 31 January 1931 after Singh had been given death sentence.

Those under a death sentence should not be hanged. My personal religion tells me not only that they should not be hanged but also that they should not even be kept in prison. However, that is my personal opinion and we cannot make their release a condition. (Chander Pal Singh, 2010)<sup>72</sup>

Those critics who see a design in Gandhi's decision to seek a suspension and not a commutation of the death sentence forget that legally, after the Privy Council decision, Viceroy Irwin's commutation had no meaning. This is why Gandhi demanded suspension of the sentence, hoping that once the environment became conducive, he could seek its conversion into a remission or release of the revolutionaries. Gandhi wrote to Viceroy Irwin on March 23, 1931, a day before Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were scheduled to be hanged (hanging was preponed and carried out at 7 p.m. on March 23 itself).

If there is any room left for reconsideration, I invite your attention to the following. Popular opinion rightly or wrongly demands commutation. When there is no principle at stake, it is often a duty to respect it. In the present case, the chances are that, if commutation is granted, internal peace is most likely to be promoted. In the event of execution, peace is undoubtedly in danger. Seeing that I am able to inform you that the revolutionary party has assured me that, in the event of these lives being spared, that party will stay

its hands, suspension of sentence pending cessation of revolutionary murders becomes, in my opinion, a peremptory duty. Political murders have been condoned before now. It is worthwhile saving these lives if thereby many other innocent lives are likely to be saved and maybe even revolutionary crime almost stamped out.... Execution is an irretrievable act. If you think there is the slightest chance of error of judgment, I would urge you to suspend for further review an act that is beyond recall. If my presence is necessary, I can come. Though I may not speak, I may hear and write what I want to say. "Charity never faileth". (Chander Pal Singh, 2010)<sup>73</sup>

Gandhi had also raised the issue with the Viceroy earlier, a day after their talks on Gandhi-Irwin pact began.

"This has no connection with our discussion, and it may even be inappropriate on my part to mention it. But if you want to make the present atmosphere more favourable, you should suspend Bhagat Singh's execution" is what Gandhi claimed to have told Irwin. (Chander Pal Singh, 2010)

Irwin admitted in his farewell speech on March 26, 1931 that Gandhi had appealed to him for a suspension of Bhagat Singh's sentence. He said,

As I listened the other day to Mr. Gandhi putting the case for commutation formally before me, I reflected first on what significance it surely was that the apostle of non-violence should so earnestly be pleading the cause of devotees of a creed fundamentally opposed to his own, but I should regard it as wholly wrong to allow my judgment on these matters to be influenced or deflected by purely political considerations. I could imagine no case in which under the law the penalty had been more directly deserved. (NIE, 2016)<sup>74</sup>

Lord Irwin also talks about the issue in his autobiography.

Mr. Gandhi said he greatly feared that unless I do something, the effect would destroy our pact. I said I would regret this no less than he. There were only three possible courses. First was to do nothing and let the execution proceed. The second was to change the order and grant Bhagat Singh reprieve. The third was to hold up any decision till after the Congress meeting was over. (Halifax, 1957, as cited in Sharma, 2012)<sup>75</sup>

Gandhi wrote in *Young India* that he had made sincere efforts to save Bhagat Singh. He even sent Tej Bahadur Sapru, M R Jayakar and Srinivasan Sastri to the Viceroy to plead for the commutation of Bhagat Singh's sentence. He also disclosed that it was a decision of the Congress not to

make a suspension of Bhagat Singh's execution a precondition for dialogue on the Gandhi-Irwin pact.

I pleaded with the Viceroy as best as I could. I brought all the persuasion at my command to bear on him. I wrote a personal letter to the viceroy...I poured out my soul in it but to no avail. I might have done one thing more, you say. I might have made the commutation a term of settlement. It could not be so made. And to threaten withdrawal would have been a breach of faith. The Congress Working Committee had agreed with me in not making commutation a condition precedent to a truce. I could only mention it apart from the settlement. I had hoped for magnanimity. My hope was not to materialise. But that can be no ground for breaking the settlement. (YI, 1931)<sup>76</sup>

Gandhi paid glowing tribute to Bhagat Singh after the execution and even blamed his violence on British atrocities. At the same time, he advised the young generation to abide by the creed of non-violence at all costs.

Bhagat Singh and his two associates have been hanged. Congress made many attempts to save their lives and the Government entertained many hopes of it, but all has been in a vain.

Bhagat Singh did not wish to live. He refused to apologize, or even file an appeal. Bhagat Singh was not a devotee of non-violence, but he did not subscribe to the religion of violence. He took to violence due to helplessness and to defend his homeland. In his last letter, Bhagat Singh wrote, "I have been arrested while waging a war. For me, there can be no gallows. Put me into the mouth of a cannon and blow me off." These heroes had conquered the fear of death. Let us bow to them a thousand times for their heroism.

But we should not imitate their act. In our land of millions of destitute and crippled people, if we take to the practice of seeking justice through murder, there will be a terrifying situation. Our poor people will become victims of our atrocities. By making a dharma of violence, we shall be reaping the fruit of our own actions.

Hence, though we praise the courage of these brave men, we should never countenance their activities. Our dharma is to swallow our anger, abide by the discipline of non-violence and carry out our duty. (Young India, March 29, 1931)<sup>77</sup>

In his book *Without Fear: The Life and Trial of Bhagat Singh*, veteran journalist Kuldip Nayar says that Gandhi was concerned about saving Bhagat Singh's life but at the same time did not wish to be identified with the revolutionaries because that would negate his stand on violence. The

differences between the Gandhi-led Congress and the revolutionaries, according to Nayar, went far beyond the question of violence and non-violence. Bhagat Singh was under the influence of Marxism while the Congress was more a right-of-the-centre organization. The latter wanted minimal socio-economic transformation after the transfer of power from British to Indians; the former, on the other hand, sought an egalitarian society where everybody – from workers to farmers – would be equal and not subject to exploitation.

After the execution of Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru on March 23, 1931, Mahatma Gandhi faced very angry reactions from the public. When he arrived in Karachi a week later to attend the Congress session, youth shouted slogans like ‘Down with Gandhi’ against him. The socialism of Bhagat Singh, in a way, laid bare Mahatma Gandhi’s lack of understanding of the political economy.

Surprisingly, despite his fundamental differences with Mahatma Gandhi, Bhagat Singh became very close to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose during his incarceration.

Bhagat Singh exhorts Punjab’s youth to follow Nehru. He had seen the emergence of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose as a “redeeming feature of the freedom struggle” during the 1920s. Before his hanging, he asked his lawyer, Pran Nath Mehta, to convey his thanks to Pandit Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose for their support. (Capt. Davar, 2016)<sup>78</sup>

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- <sup>63</sup> *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 51, p. 414–415, Response to Sukhdev's "One of the Many", letter printed in *Young India* on April 23, 1931
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid
- <sup>66</sup> Ibid
- <sup>67</sup> Ibid
- <sup>68</sup> Ibid
- <sup>69</sup> Bhagat Singh, Gandhi and the British, Pritam Singh, *Tribune India*, March 25, 2015
- <sup>70</sup> What Gandhi did to save Bhagat Singh, Chander Pal Singh, October–December 2010, *Gandhi Marg*, Vol. 32, No. 3

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<sup>71</sup> [www.mkgandhi.org/faq/q26.htm](http://www.mkgandhi.org/faq/q26.htm)

<sup>72</sup> Ibid

<sup>73</sup> Ibid

<sup>74</sup> Gandhi tried his best to save Bhagat Singh's life, *New Indian Express*, March 22, 2016

<sup>75</sup> *Fullness of Day*, Viscount Halifax, 1957, pp. 149–150, cited in Mahatma Gandhi and Bhagat Singh: A class of ideology, Jai Narain Sharma, Jan–March 2012, pp. 427–439

<sup>76</sup> *Young India*, April 2, 1931

<sup>77</sup> Ibid

<sup>78</sup> Gandhi tried his best to save Bhagat Singh, Captain Praveen Davar, *IANS*, March 22, 2016



# CHAPTER V

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the author analyses Mahatma Gandhi's epistemology on truth, non-violence, *Swadeshi*, untouchability, and equality of religions on the basis of data collected from Hindi films based on these principles. The chapters are divided into five sections (a-truth, b-non-violence, c-*Swadeshi*, d-untouchability, e-equality of religions), with each chapter reviewing five films vis-à-vis what the Mahatma said in his writings. Since none of these films had Mahatma Gandhi as a flesh-and-blood character, it may be appropriate to call them indirect references.

### a) Truth

In this part, the author appraises five films that promote truthfulness and honesty through their principal or peripheral characters in the context of Gandhi's epistemology on truth.

*Raja Harishchandra* (1913), *Phir Subah Hogi* (1958), *Shriman Satyawadi* (1960), *Satyakam* (1969) and *Satyagraha* depict protagonists being put through the severest of ordeals to test their commitment towards truth and honesty.

For the Mahatma, the truth was supreme to everything he believed in. He equated untruth with violence, and believed that truth and non-violence were complementary and the search for one was bound to lead to the other.

Why should truth and non-violence be compared? But, if one must make the comparison, I would say that truth is superior even to non-violence, for falsehood too is violence. And he who loves truth is bound to turn to non-violence someday. (CWMG, 1932)<sup>1</sup>

Non-violence, he maintained, was the means for reaching the end, truth.

Without ahimsa, it is not possible to seek and find Truth. Ahimsa and Truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like the two sides of a coin, or rather of a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Who can say which is the obverse and which is the reverse?

Nevertheless, ahimsa is the means and Truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our reach, and so ahimsa becomes our supreme duty and Truth becomes our God for us. If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later.... Whatever difficulties we encounter, whatever apparent reverses we sustain, we should not lose faith but should ever repeat one mantra: "Truth exists, it alone exists. It is the only God and there is but one way of realizing it, and there is but one means and that is Ahimsa". (CWMG, 1930)<sup>2</sup>

I am practicing ahimsa and truth which are the obverse and reverse of the same coin. Ahimsa is my God and truth is my God. When I look for ahimsa, truth says, "Find it out through me". When I look for truth, ahimsa says, "Find it out through me". So, the rhapsody easily become one on charkha and ahimsa instead of that on ahimsa alone. (CWMG, 1925)<sup>3</sup>

Gandhi believed the observance of truth required self-sacrifice and pain and that one should persist in abiding by it. Speaking truth was the true *bhakti* of God and was bound to lead to Him. For him, the truth was synonymous with the ultimate Truth, God. At the same time, he was sure that truth would bring no harm to a person.

Search for Truth is the search for God. Truth is God. God is because Truth is. We embark upon the search because we believe that there is the truth and that it can be found by diligent search and meticulous observance of the well-known and well-tried rules of the search. (CWMG, 1934)<sup>4</sup>

The Mahatma was against confining truth to an individual and was sure that a truth seeker was bound to spread it all around the world.

You cannot so circumscribe truth even if you try. Every expression of truth has in it the seeds of propagation, even as the sun cannot hide its light. (CWMG,1934)<sup>5</sup>

Gandhi was of the view that truth and non-violence were fundamental principles of Hinduism and that all Hindu scriptures propagated them.

The fundamental principles of Hinduism are an absolute belief in Satya (truth) and Ahimsa (non-violence). The Upanishads proclaim, the Mahabharata proclaims, from the housetop: "Put in one scale all your *rajasuyas* (Imperial Sacrifice or the king's inaugural sacrifice), all your Ashvamedhas (horse sacrifice performed by a king desirous of winning the world) and all your merits and put truth in the other scale; the scale in which truth is thrown will outweigh everything else". Therefore, use truth as your

anvil, non-violence as your hammer and anything that does not stand the test when it is brought to the anvil of truth and hammered with ahimsa, reject as non-Hindu. (CWMG, 1925)<sup>6</sup>

For the Mahatma, a man who spoke untruth suffered from attachment and hatred, the two vices the Gita warns against. He greatly believed in the celestial song.

The man who resorts to the falsehood with a view to acquiring worldly goods for some other reason is full of attachment and hatred; he cannot possibly reach God. (Gandhi, 1932)<sup>7</sup>

He knew the truth was relative and that different truth-seekers might reach different conclusions, but what mattered to him was honesty of purpose.

Truth is one but we only see it through the glass darkly, and only in part and each according to his light. The result is naturally a multitude of viewpoints. But if all proceed like the beams of the sun from one central fact, all is well...Though we may differ, I know that we are sailing in the same direction. (CWMG, 1926)<sup>8</sup>

The Mahatma did not condone untruth even when the motive was pure. He believed it was a prerequisite to put one in good company for the cultivation of truthful behaviour.

Untruth does not become truth because of the purity of motive. Just as a moneyed man is said to have but one eye for watching things, there is only one path of truth. Likewise, there are many paths of untruth, in the same way, that a thief has as many as four eyes.... No one has ever come or will come, to harm through the truth. (CWMG, 1918-19)<sup>9</sup>

Man has to cultivate the inner sense (for the truth). It does not belong to every man as a natural gift. Its cultivation needs spiritual surroundings and constant efforts. (CWMG, 1918-19)<sup>10</sup>

Gandhi was of the opinion that it was a must to strive constantly to attain truthfulness. He believed that truthfulness could absolve one of one's fears and, at the same time, he wanted the truth seeker to be fearless.

It seems to me that we do require truth in one hand and fearlessness in the other hand. Unless we carry the torchlight of truth, we shall not see the stall in front of us and unless we carry the quality of fearlessness we shall not be able to give the message that we might want to give and on proper occasion. (CWMG, 1915-17)<sup>11</sup>

We are afraid at the sight of a policeman. We feel afraid if it is but a station master. Why this fear? It is there because we are afraid of speaking the truth. (CWMG, 1915-17)<sup>12</sup>

The Mahatma was of the view that truth only existed and thus sustained the world. He was also conscious that he was on the way to leaving a legacy of truth for his sons and he wanted them to treasure it.

This world rests upon the bedrock of *Satya* or truth. *Asatya* meaning untruth also means non-existent, and *Satya* or truth also means that which is. If untruth does not so much as exist, its victory is out of the question. And truth being that which is can never be destroyed. This is the doctrine of *Satyagraha* in a nutshell. (CWMG, 1925-26).<sup>13</sup>

Had you been here, you would have every moment observed the supreme wonder and power of truth. This is all the legacy I can leave for you. As I believe, it is an inexhaustible legacy. For him who knows its worth, it is priceless. Such a one would ask to have or desire no other legacy. (CWMG, 1919-20)<sup>14</sup>

Gandhi also felt at times that it was difficult to attain the ultimate truth (God) in a mortal form. He wanted the pursuer of truth to be a man of care and few words.

One can realise truth and ahimsa only by ceaseless striving. But it is impossible for us to realise perfect truth so long as we are imprisoned in this moral frame. (CWMG, 1930)<sup>15</sup>

A public worker should not make statements of which he has not made sure. Above all, a votary of truth must exercise the greatest caution. To allow a man to believe a thing which one has not fully verified is to compromise truth. I am pained to have to confess that, in spite of this knowledge, I have not quite conquered my credulous habit, for which my ambition to do more work than I can manage is responsible. (Gandhi, 2012)<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, it is apparent that for Gandhi, truth promoted humility, fearlessness, social service, and love. It is intrinsically linked to *ahimsa*, *swaraj*, morality, and religion. He considered truth, non-violence and celibacy as his real wealth.

What is abiding worth is my insistence on truth, non-violence, and *Brahmacharya*, which is the real part of me. That permanent part of me, however small, is not to be despised. It is my all. I prize even in failures and disillusionments which are but steps towards success, (CWMG, 1926)<sup>17</sup>

Truth and non-violence were the pivots around which Gandhi's *Satyagraha* revolved and drew sustenance from. These were what enabled Gandhi to purge himself of any animosity towards his adversaries in Congress and the British Empire.

The Mahatma advised truth seekers to first experiment with himself and only then propagate to others.

My object is only to show that he who would go in for novel experiments must begin with himself. That leads to a quicker discovery of truth, and God always protects the honest experimenter. (Gandhi, 2012)<sup>18</sup>

Despite being a deeply religious person, Gandhi was scathing about superstitions and uncleanness at Hindu pilgrimages and in the third class of Indian Railway trains. During a trip to Kumbh fair in Hardwar, he observed mostly the pilgrims'

absent mindedness, hypocrisy, and slovenliness than their piety. (Gandhi, 2012)<sup>19</sup>

He found it unnecessary to wear a thread across his chest.

I saw no adequate reason for adopting what was to me an unnecessary custom. I had no objection to the thread as such, but the reasons for wearing it were lacking. (Gandhi, 2012)<sup>20</sup>

He believed that *Satyagraha*, "an absolutely non-violent weapon", was potent enough to challenge the British government.

I regard it as my duty to explain its practice and its limitations. I have no doubt that the British Government is a powerful Government, but I have no doubt also that *Satyagraha* is a sovereign remedy. (Gandhi, 2012)<sup>21</sup>

Gandhi had no doubt at all that it was possible to practice law truthfully. He writes in his autobiography (p. 321) that he never resorted to untruth in his profession and had built up such a reputation that no false cases came to him. He rebuked a client in a magistrate's court in Johannesburg because he had deceived him.

The Mahatma also believed there was nothing wrong for a truth seeker to seek forgiveness and correct himself.

A devotee of truth may not do anything in deference to convention. He must always hold himself open to correction, and whenever he discovers himself to be wrong he must confess it all at all costs and atone for it. (Gandhi, 2012)<sup>22</sup>



Gandhi felt it was possible for a man to pursue truth without feeling anger, hatred and selfishness. For him, attachment and aversion are the enemies of truth.

A man who is swayed by passions may never find the Truth. A successful search for Truth means complete deliverance from the dual throng such as of love and hate, happiness and misery. (Gandhi, 2012)<sup>23</sup>

*Raja Harishchandra*, the first black and white feature movie in India, directed by Dhundiraj Govind Phalke née Dada Saheb Phalke, the father of Indian cinema, celebrates the legend of the righteous Ayodhya (36<sup>th</sup> king of the Solar Dynasty) Harishchandra, who sacrificed his kingdom, wife Taramati, and son Rohitasav to honour his commitment to the sage Vishwamitra.

Mahatma Gandhi was greatly influenced by the story of Harishchandra, and in his adolescence often wondered why everybody did not behave like him. During his childhood, Gandhi watched a play on Harishchandra and it captured his heart.

I literally believed in the story of Harishchandra. The thought of it all often made me weep. (Gandhi, 2012)<sup>24</sup>

The film, which was shot on a fixed camera over seven months, with male actors playing the roles of Taramati and the other female characters, places truth above religion. Trikaladarshi Brahmin (who can see the past, present and future), at whose house Prince Harishchandra stays during a hunting expedition, is shown telling the young prince that truth is the best religion among all the religions. At this, Harishchandra pledges to abide by the truth in thought, speech and action. Sage Vishwamitra vows to break his pledge. He conspires to take over Harishchandra's kingdom and later leaves him with no option but to sell himself, his wife and his son to repay his dakshina (donation to a priest). Harishchandra does not waver from righteousness even when his wife turns up at the crematorium, where he is employed, with their son Rohitasav's body. Impressed by his steadfastness, God restores Harishchandra's kingdom and his son.

The story of Harishchandra seems to be a myth. Even Mahatma Gandhi believed that the legend could not have been real and yet it appealed to his soul.

My common sense tells me today that Harishchandra could not have been a historical character. Still, both Harishchandra and Shravana are living realities for me, and I am sure I should be moved as before if I were to read those plays again today. (Gandhi, 2012)<sup>25</sup>

Interestingly, the first Indian feature film also inspired a legend about the kind of ordeals Phalke went through to complete it. In 2009, the making of the film became a screenplay for a new movie called *Harishchandrachi Factory*. The film first screened on April 21, 1913 at the Coronation Cinematograph, Bombay. William J Jackson, a former professor who taught in the Department of Religious Studies at IUPUI (Indiana University- Purdue University Indianapolis), compares the tale of Harishchandra to the story of Job (Old Testament).

Instead of God and the Devil wagering to test Job, the gods argue over Harishchandra's character and test him to see if he will remain a righteous man if he suffers great misfortunes... this story influenced Gandhi's sense of sticking to dharma, his duty and his conscience, regardless of trials and tribulations. (Jackson, 2013)<sup>26</sup>

Jackson says archetypal dramas (*Raja Harishchandra* and *Shravana Pitribhakti Nataka*) showing loyalty and adherence to a "vow of truth" were "root paradigms" in Gandhi's background.

The life story of Raja Harishchandra was parallel to the philosophy of *Satyagraha*, to endure suffering with belief in the final victory of good over evil. (Kaul, 1998)<sup>27</sup>

Ramesh Saigal's *Phir Subah Hogi* tells the story of Ram Mehra, an idealist youth who spends the money he has raised to pay his college fees by mortgaging his pocket watch on the treatment of an ill child.

Mehra, who is in love with Bano (Mala Sinha), ends up killing money lender Dhanne Shah during a robbery attempt to clear Bano's debt. He hides the secret and tells lies but his conscience is unable to bear the burden of the falsehood.

In the end, Mehra confesses to his crime in a court of law but not before exposing the irony of Indian society calling Dhanne Shah, who dupes people of their money, and Harbans Lal, a 60-year-old man who wishes to exploit a 20-year-old girl, good citizens. *Phir Subah Hogi* made a point in 1958 that *Lage Raho Munnabhai* reiterated in 2006 on the fearlessness truth inspires. When Munnabhai tells Lucky Singh, after confessing, to Jahnavi that he was no more afraid of him, he is basically repeating what Ram Mehra conveys to Rehman about Harbans Lal.

"Tell Bano she need not be afraid of Harbans Lal" expresses the end of Mehra's predicament. Harbans Lal had overheard Mehra telling Bano about Dhanne Shah's murder and was blackmailing Bano into marriage. Mehra's words "Paap ka bojh utar gaya" (the load of sin is off my chest) after he tells the truth to the court conveys the power of truth.

The film ends by replacing the lyrics “Wo subah kabhi tau ayegi” (That morning will rise someday) to the much more definitive “Wo Subah hamin tau layengeW (We will only bring that morning).

S M Abbas’ *Shriman Satyawadi* emphasizes truth in a much stronger way than *Phir Subah Hogi*. When Vijay (Raj Kapoor) says that truth will sustain even after his death, when he tells Gita (Shakila) that to die for the truth is life, and when he tells Champa Lal (Nasir Hussain) that he is not prepared to abandon his principles for anything, he is reiterating what Gandhi hammered on in his writings, speeches and interviews day in and day out. The father of the Indian nation proclaimed that he was always prepared to lay down his life for the truth.

I have been striving to be able to vanquish untruth with truth and anger by refusing to oppose it with anger, and I wish I should lay down my life in the effort. (CWMG, 1921)<sup>28</sup>

Trained to speak the truth by his father Mohan Lal, an honest shopkeeper, who dies after being falsely accused of trading in drugs, Vijay faces a litmus test when his company exaggerates the qualities of a face powder and beauty cream. He reports the truth to a journalist and leaves his job. A newspaper editor Chatterjee hires him as a reporter.

Vijay does not even waiver from the truth when Gita tries to make him choose between her love for him and the truth. He says to Gita, “You are my life. This (speaking truth) is my duty. Don’t make me choose between the two”. For him, an untruth is an untruth in every situation.

When it comes to establishing truth as a *raison d’être*, no film – not even *Shriman Satyawadi* or *Raja Harishchandra* – comes anywhere close to Hrishikesh Mukherjee’s *Satyakam*. The film opens with Mahatma Gandhi’s quote ‘To me, God is truth and love. God is conscience and God is fearlessness’.

The film narrates the story of Satyapriya Acharya (Dharmendra in his best role), a qualified engineer who cherishes the ideals of truthfulness and honesty prescribed by the leaders of India’s freedom movement and lays down his life to abide by them. He sets out his agenda in a conversation with his friend Narendra Sharma (Sanjeev Kumar) when he says he hopes that the days of hard work and honesty will flourish in an independent India.

Even the lines of the after-college revelry song ‘*Jindagi hai Sachai. Mitti ki murat jab sach boli aadmi tab kehlayi*’ (Life is the truth. The muck portrait was called a human being after it spoke the truth) emphasizes truthfulness.

Satyapriya also expresses his idealism when he tells Ranjona (Sharmila Tagore) that untouchable meant somebody who has not been touched.

Circumstances force him to marry Ranjona, the daughter of a prostitute. He tells the truth to his grandfather, who runs a gurukul and quotes extempore from Gita but objects to the alliance.

Satyapriya's statement to Narendra that had he hidden the truth from his grandfather, Dadaji (Ashok Kumar), he would have been a liar also expresses his love for the truth. He refuses to take bribes and allow corruption in his projects and so gets transferred frequently. He is prepared to suffer for the truth: "If truth gives the courage to bear the pain, it also gives power to dole out suffering".

Satyapriya's other lines – "Nowadays people are scared of speaking truth, I have never been afraid of speaking truth, how is truth spoken?" and "Do we not have any duty towards the nation?" – also stress his truthfulness and uprightness.

His decision to resign after revoking the suspension of subordinate he found to have taken bribes reminds one of what Mahatma Gandhi did after hearing about the "moral fall of two inmates" of his ashram in South Africa.

I felt that the only way the guilty parties could be made to realize my distress and the depth of their own fall would be for me to do some penance. So I imposed upon myself a fast for seven days and a vow to have only one meal a day for a period of four months and a half.... My penance pained everybody, but it cleared the atmosphere. Everyone came to realize what a terrible thing it was to be sinful, and the bond that bound me to the boys and girls became stronger and truer. (Gandhi, 2012)<sup>29</sup>

Satyapriya is diagnosed with cancer, a disease which claimed Ramkrishna Paramhans. His grandfather realizes his mistake when Satyapriya's adolescent son (Sarika) confronts him with the truth. He makes amends, saying that the untouchable he rejected has taught him a lesson.

Dadaji says what Gandhi always insisted on – a teacher must be truthful to teach boys to tell the truth.

A cowardly teacher would never succeed in making his boys valiant, and a stranger to self-restraint could never teach his pupils the value of self-restraint. (Gandhi, 1930)<sup>30</sup>

*Satyakam* raises truth to the status of religion and God. This is what Gandhi always emphasized.

The pursuit of truth is true bhakti, devotion. Such bhakti is "a bargain in which one risks one's life" It is the path that leads to God. There is no place in it for cowardice, no place for defeat. It is the talisman by which death itself becomes the portal to life eternal. (CWMG, 1930)<sup>31</sup>

Hari Narayan of *The Hindu* recently made a comparative study of nationalism as depicted through Satyapriya in *Satyakam* and Bhaarat Kumar in *Upkar* (March 30, 2016) after students in Jawaharlal Nehru University were accused of having raised seditious slogans. In Narayan's opinion, the sentiments and ideology represented in *Upkar* ring truer to what prominent culture critic Sadanand Menon refers to as "pulp patriotism" – patriotism stripped of introspection, infused with pride and defined in opposition to an "other".

Narayan writes that

*Satyakam*'s lead character Satyapriya best exemplifies the 'the Constitutional India'. As a scientist as well as a humanist, an engineer looking to take part in nation-building, he possesses a healthy scepticism of the idea of the nation-state while being a follower of the Constitution. He is someone whose scientific temper makes him question not just the system but also his own approach toward it.

Narayan quotes Menon to say that

Mukherjee was impressed by the Upanishadic tale of *Jabala Satyakam* – a child who doesn't know about his father is urged by his mother to follow the path of truth – and wanted to contemporaries it by creating the image of an idealist in the post-independence India.

It was Hrishi-da's way of asking Indians: where have all the ideals that inspired the freedom struggle gone? Why is there such a discontentment with the country so soon?

Narayan also quotes from Jai Arjun Singh's book *The World of Hrishikesh Mukherjee* in which *Satyakam* is called a "novelistic film".

While Mr. Bhaarat always comes across as an ideal – the sort of figure that the unquestioningly patriotic Indian must aspire to be, a Son of the Soil where the Soil is inherently pure – Satyapriya always seems painfully human, conflicted, self-questioning even in this noblest moments.

For Mahatma Gandhi, the word *Satyagraha* came into being several years after he initiated non-violent non-cooperation against British imperialism in South Africa. Before this, the non-cooperation movement was synonymized with "passive resistance", a term that originated in the western part of the world. Even Gandhi called his movement "passive resistance" to his friends and colleagues from Gujarat. But in a meeting with Europeans in Johannesburg, Gandhi learned that passive resistance was considered a weapon of the weak, and could involve violence and hatred for

the adversary. He asked readers of *Indian Opinion* to suggest a new name and even offered a nominal prize for it. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* says Maganlal Gandhi, a close associate of the Mahatma, coined the word *Sadagraha* (Sat=truth+Agraha=firmness). Gandhi changed it to *Satyagraha* to make it more appealing and clearer (Gandhi, 2012).<sup>32</sup>

Apparently, *Satyagraha* means devotion to truth, remaining firm and resisting untruth. Unlike passive resistance, Gandhi considered *Satyagraha* a “truth force” or “soul force” that proceeds on the active principle of love even for the enemy. It is founded on a bedrock of truth, non-violence, love for the enemy, and suffering for the satyagrahi. A satyagrahi tries to convert his adversary to his side by making him realise the unjustness of his actions. The Mahatma believed a *Satyagraha* was incomplete until it proposed a constructive programme. He was also of the view that a satyagrahi must be a non-possessor.

Gandhi prescribed the following basic assumptions underlying the doctrine of *Satyagraha*:

1. There must be common honesty among satyagrahis.
2. They (satyagrahis) must render heart discipline to their commander. There should be no mental reservation.
3. They must be prepared to lose all, not merely their personal liberty, their possessions, land, cash, etc., but also the liberty and possession of their families, and they must be ready to cheerfully face bullets, bayonets, or even slow death by torture.
4. They must not be violent in thought, word or deed towards the “enemy” or among themselves (CWMG, 1938)<sup>33</sup>.

Gandhi also believed that *Satyagraha* must be preceded by self-purification and this could be achieved through fasting and prayers.

“*Satyagraha* is a process of self-purification, and ours is a sacred fight, and it seems to me to be in the fitness of things that it should be commenced with an act of self-purification. Let all the people of India, therefore, suspend their business on that day and observe the day as one of fasting and prayer”, he wrote at the time of announcing a strike against Rowlatt Bill. (Gandhi, 2012)<sup>34</sup>

Before a people could be fit for offering civil disobedience, they should thoroughly understand its deeper implications. That being so, before restarting civil disobedience on a mass scale, it would be necessary to create a band of well-versed, pure-hearted volunteers who thoroughly understood the strict conditions of *Satyagraha*. They could explain these to the people, and by sleepless vigilance keep them on the right path. (Gandhi, 2012)<sup>35</sup>

The Mahatma also felt it was a prerequisite for a person who wished to undertake *Satyagraha* to be a law-abiding citizen.

It is only when a person has thus obeyed the laws of society scrupulously that he is in a position to judge as to which particular rules are and just and which unjust and iniquitous. Only then does the right accrue to him of the civil disobedience of certain laws in well-defined circumstances. (Gandhi, 2012)<sup>36</sup>

Prakash Jha, the producer and director of *Satyagraha*, claimed in press conferences during the pre-release promotion of his movie that it was not the story of Mahatma Gandhi or social activist Anna Hazare but its essence was the same.

“Middle-class people across the world protest if they are in a democracy. The film is not about Anna Hazare... there is no reflection of his protest. But the essence is with Nirbhaya (case), Mahatma Gandhi and Anna Hazare,” Jha was quoted as having told reporters on July 27, 2013, after releasing a song *Raghupati Raghav* from the film. (FPJ, 2013)<sup>37</sup>

*Satyagraha* is about Dwarkanath Anand alias Daduji (Amitabh Bachhan), a retired school principal's *Satyagraha* against the corrupt administration in Ambikapur after he is made to run from pillar to post for compensation, announced by Home Minister Balram Singh (Manoj Vajpayee), after the death of his son, Akhilesh Anand. Daduji is joined by Manav Raghvendra (Ajay Devgan), a businessman friend of Akhilesh; Arjun (Arjun Rampal), a college toughie who wishes to become a politician one day; Yasmin Ahmed (Kareena Kapoor), a television reporter; and Sumitra Anand (Amrita Rao), daughter-in-law of Dwarkanath Anand and a lawyer who borrows heavily from Prashant Bhushan's character.

Frustrated by efforts to get the compensation, Daduji slaps a collector and is sent to jail. Manav, Arjun and Sumitra launch a public campaign for his release. The campaign shakes the government and forces it to agree to the release of Daduji. He refuses to take the compensation and warns the government to pay the dues of every person in Ambikapur within a week. He sits on a dharna and announces a fast unto death after the government does not take action to root out corruption from the government offices in Ambikapur.

The film draws heavily from Mahatma Gandhi's *Satyagraha*, using even his favourite song, *Raghupati Raghav*. It also borrows from Anna Hazare's movement for the formation of anti-corruption ombudsman *Janlokpal* (2011) at the centre. As well, it models Akhilesh Anand's character on Satyendra Dubey, an engineer with the National Highway Authority of

India (NHAI), who was killed in Gaya for opposing corruption in the construction of the Golden Quadrilateral highway project.

The film is packed with symbolism from the past. Daduji's announcement of a fast unto death after a woman complains that his movement has deprived her children of food because the government officials taunted her to collect the compensation cheque from the masterji, his refusal to call off the fast, and using Sumitra and Yasmin as crutches to stand up and walk are reminiscent of Mahatma Gandhi. Manav Raghvendra's decision to distribute the profitable shares of his company to stakeholders is also inspired by Gandhi's advice to satyagrahis to be non-possessors.

A satyagrahi should be a non-possessor and he can defend others by being so. (CWMG, 1941)<sup>38</sup>

Daduji's decision not to question Arjun and Manav about their pasts and trust them during the *Satyagraha* draws from Mahatma Gandhi's doctrine on not questioning fellow satyagrahis' pledges.

I must take everyone at his or her word, and believe that those who have taken the pledge have done so in good faith. I have no right to question anybody's motive unless I have proof positive to the contrary. (CWMG, 1940)<sup>39</sup>

*Satyagraha* deviates from Gandhian values largely on three counts. Firstly, the satyagrahis – Daduji, Manav and Arjun – who campaign against the corrupt system only have contempt for politicians. There is no desire to appeal to the conscience of the corrupt politicians, and even their tone and tenor while negotiating their demands with the government lack civility. They behave more like dictators.

A satyagrahi always regards the enemy as a potential friend. During half a century of experience of non-violence, I have not come across a case of enmity persisting to the end in the face of absolute non-violence. (CWMG, 1938-39)<sup>40</sup>

A satyagrahi goes to prison, not to embarrass the authorities but to convert them by demonstrating to them his innocence. (CWMG, 1938-39)<sup>41</sup>

Secondly, the satyagrahis demanding the clean-up of the corrupt system in Ambikapur never abide by non-violence. In fact, violence (Daduji slapping the collector is violence) is what leads to the launching of the *Satyagraha*, and it ends with more violence (Manav Raghvendra beating Balram Singh before handing him over to police). In between, there is also



an attempt to provoke violence by taking out a funeral procession of the person who immolated himself for the cause.

The Mahatma believed that

complete success awaits complete assimilation of non-violence in thought, word and deed by the nation. An ocular demonstration of the success of nationwide *Satyagraha* must be a prelude to its worldwide acceptance and hence as a natural corollary to the admission of the futility of the armament. The only antidote to armament which is the visible symbol of violence is *Satyagraha* the visible symbol of non-violence. (CWMG, 1931)<sup>42</sup>

Lastly, the author believes that the *Satyagraha* in Ambikapur is only aimed at overthrowing the corrupt system but offers no constructive programme to replace it, something Gandhi always emphasized.

We cannot make *Satyagraha* complete without the constructive programme. An atmosphere of non-violence cannot be created without it. This is the only way of my working. (CWMG, 1945)<sup>43</sup>

*Satyagraha* combines Gandhian values with what Anna Hazare, Arvind Kejriwal, Prashant Bhushan, and other anti-corruption crusaders did in 2011, making it a dangerous cocktail. It lacks the “soul force” Gandhi stressed so much. The satyagrahis in the film throw their lives away to bring about change, something Gandhi was against. The author has a strong view that they behave at best like *Satyagraha* novices.

You don't throw away your lives when you take up the weapon of *Satyagraha*. But you prepare yourself to face without retaliating the gravest danger and provocation. It gives you a chance to surrender your life for the cause when the time comes. To be able to do so non-violently requires previous training. If you are a believer in the orthodox method, you go and train yourself as soldiers. It is the same with non-violence. You have to alter your whole mode of life and work for it in peacetime just as much as in the time of war. You have to put your whole soul in it. (CWMG, 1938-39)<sup>44</sup>

## b) Non-violence

In this part of the chapter, the author analyses films like V Shantaram's *Dr. Kotnis Ki Amar Kahani (DKAK)* (1946) and *Do Aankhen Barah Haath* (1957), Navketan's *Hum Dono* (1960), Vidhu Vinod Chopra's *Mission Kashmir* (2000), and Anupam Kher-starrer *Maine Gandhi Ko Nahin Mara* (2005) to see whether they promote Mahatma Gandhi's epistemology on ahimsa or non-violence.

The Mahatma proclaimed that non-violence was his religion and his God. He was of the view that ahimsa was a powerful emotion of the heart, and once combined with truth, love and non-cooperation, did wonders for him during his *Satyagrahas* first in South Africa and later in India. He believed that non-violent non-cooperation was not a weapon of the weak. On the contrary, it was a weapon of the brave and an active force.

Gandhi held that non-violent non-cooperation was the natural right of people and there was nothing immoral in it.

Non-violence is my absolute creed. I believe that civil disobedience is not only the natural right of people, especially when they have no effective voice in their own government, but that it also is an effective substitute for violence or armed rebellion. I can never, therefore, deny my creed. (CWMG, 1931-32)<sup>45</sup>

There is nothing immoral in non-violent non-cooperation. Violent resistance is itself non-cooperation, and it is immoral because of the violence. It becomes moral when it is non-violent. (CWMG, 1940-41)<sup>46</sup>

Gandhi considered non-violence to be much superior to violence. He used it as a means to achieve independence for India. Unlike an armed organization in which hierarchy matters most, in a non-violent organization, he maintained, the general is only a chief servant who claims no privileges or superiority to those in the rank.

The Mahatma prescribed non-violence against aggression, and compassion against the hatred and unjustness of an authority. He wanted non-violent satyagrahis to get military training in an army, like soldiers. His non-violence backed the weak against the strong and the defender against the aggressor.

Whilst all violence is bad and must be condemned in the abstract, it is permissible for, it is even the duty of, a believer in Ahimsa to distinguish between the aggressor and the defender. Having done so, he will side with the defender in a non-violent manner, i.e., give his life in saving him. (CWMG, 1939)<sup>47</sup>

Gandhi was of the opinion that non-violence must be practiced in thought, action and deed. His non-violence was different from pacifism and passive resistance; the first calculated the consequences and neither excluded violence and hatred.

In my opinion, non-violence is not passivity in any shape or form. Non-violence, as I understand it, is the activist force in the world...Non-violence is the supreme law. During my half a century of experience, I have not yet

come across a situation when I had to say that I was helpless, that I had no remedy in terms of non-violence. (CWMG, 1938-39)<sup>48</sup>

The Mahatma was of the firm belief that India was the most suited to non-violent campaigns in the world as her people were non-violent by nature. He did not want non-violence to fail in the country as that could deprive the world of a panacea. He wanted the Congress Party to adopt non-violence as a state policy and hoped that the world would accept non-violence after it succeeded in India.

With the loss of India to non-violence, the last hope of the world will be gone. I must live up to the creed I have professed for the last half a century and hope to the last breath that India will make non-violence her creed, preserve man's dignity, and prevent him from reverting to the type from which he is supposed to have raised himself. (CWMG, 1939)<sup>49</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi wanted Jews and Abyssinians to take to non-violence to humble Hitler and Mussolini, and rued that Congress only practiced non-violence against the British Empire and did not make use of it to check communal violence between Hindus and Muslims. He believed that non-violence in its entirety could render a lasting service to Islam.

He was strictly opposed to a government ban on non-cooperation on the grounds that it had been misused in certain cases.

Every powerful thing is liable to misuse. Opium and arsenic are the most potent and useful drugs and they lend themselves to great abuse. No one has for that reason suggested the stopping of their good use. If non-cooperation has lent itself to abuse in some cases, in many cases its wise use has proved absolutely efficacious. A thing has to be judged by its net effect. The net effect of non-violent non-cooperation has been of the greatest benefit to India. It has brought about an awakening among the masses which would probably have taken generations otherwise. It has prevented bloodshed and anarchy and on the whole improved the relations between the Britishers and ourselves. (CWMG, 1940)<sup>50</sup>

Gandhi was definitive on two counts. Firstly, he believed in the superiority of non-violence over violence in all circumstances. Secondly, he considered non-violence by the strong more effective than non-violence by the weak. He wanted all religions to adopt non-violence.

I have drawn a distinction between the passive resistance of the weak and active non-violent resistance of the strong. The latter can and does work in the teeth of the fiercest opposition. But it ends in invoking the widest public sympathy. (CWMG, 1938-39)<sup>51</sup>

Talking about his experience in a province bordering Afghanistan (currently in Pakistan), where Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan practiced non-violence, Gandhi reminisced,

A Pathan friend who met me during the journey, talking about violent deeds, said: "You know the government is strong enough to put down any violence, however organised it may be in our country, but your non-violence is uncanny. No government in the world can put down non-violence". ...In one sentence he presented the matchless beauty of non-violence. (CWMG, 1939)<sup>52</sup>

When asked once whether he was emasculating Pathan warriors by asking them to adhere to non-violence, Gandhi said,

By adopting the doctrine of non-violence in its entirety, you will be rendering a lasting service to India and to Islam, which, just now it seems to me, is in danger. (CWMG, 1938-39)<sup>53</sup>

Initially, he felt that the non-violence practiced by satyagrahis against British imperialism in South Africa was non-violence by the weak but he changed his views later. Gandhi pitched for non-violence even against animals and opposed the sacrifices made in goddess Kali's temple in Calcutta. At the same time, he considered it violence if a person feeds a monkey and the monkey attacks people.

If I feed the monkeys at a public place and thereby make life impossible for others, it is I who commit himsa (violence), and society will have no choice but to exterminate the pest that my himsa has created. (CWMG, 1938-39)<sup>54</sup>

*DKAK* tells the legend of Dwarkanath Kotnis (played by V Shantaram), also known as Ke Dihua, one of five doctors who opted to travel to China in September 1938 to treat the wounded Chinese soldiers after Japan attacked the country. Born in a middle-class family in Solapur, Maharashtra, on October 10, 1910, Kotnis graduated in medicine and surgery from Seth G S College of Bombay University. He was part of an Indian Mission Team sent from India after the Sino-Japanese war broke out. The team was headed by M Atal from Allahabad and comprised M. Cholkar from Nagpur, and B K Basu and Debesh Mukherjee from Calcutta. All except Dr. Kotnis returned to India later.

The movie, based on Khwaja Ahmad Abbas's story *And One Did Not Come Back*, depicts how Kotnis serves the defender (China) against the aggressor (Japan), one of the principles of non-violence. It shows how, like

Gandhi, he offered to serve the wounded without concern for his own health during a war and an epidemic.

Ironically, *DKAK*, of which Shantaram also made an English version, *The Journey of Dr. Kotnis*, in 1947, was a British/India war effort film. The film propagates propaganda against Japan, the prime adversary of the allies during World War II.

Gandhi offered his services to the army during the Boer War in 1899–1900, the Zulu Rebellion in 1906, his stay in London in 1914 at the time of the First World War, and in India in 1918 during the conclusion of the First World War. He termed such services as an offshoot of non-violence.

In its essence, ahimsa is a powerful emotion of the heart which finds expression in numerous forms of service. If it manifests itself in its perfection even in one human being, its light would be far more powerful than that of the sun. (CWMG, 1932)<sup>55</sup>

In the long, drawn out Sino-Japanese war, Kotnis performed operations for up to 72 hours, without sleep. He was believed to have treated more than 800 soldiers during the battle and also served as director of the Dr. Bethune International Peace Hospital, named after the famous Canadian surgeon Norman Bethune

In 1941, Kotnis married a Chinese girl, Ching Lan. The two had a son called Yinhua – Yin stands for India while Hua means China. Three months after the birth of his son, Dr. Kotnis died due to epileptic seizures. He epitomized Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy, which was based on sacrifice, non-violence, truth, and service.

Gandhi's faith in non-violence was reinforced during the Zulu Rebellion after white nurses refused to look after the wounded Zulus and Gandhi's stretcher-bearer corps was told to attend to them.

I shall never forget the lacerated backs of Zulus who had received stripes and were brought to us for nursing because no white nurse was prepared to look after them. (CWMG, 1938-39)<sup>56</sup>

Like a brave soldier of non-violence, Kotnis decides to inject a plague virus into his body in his quest to find an antidote. Along with his wife, he decides to nurse the nameless and diseased Chinese soldiers no matter the cost to their own health. According to Mahatma's autobiography, this is what he did first during the Boer War in 1899 and then the Zulu Rebellion in 1906. Gandhi had serious doubts about whether violence or wars could lead to peace or dispute resolution.

He said in a statement in 1938,

I have rejected once and for all the doctrine of the sword. The secret stabbing...I read in the papers are hardly the thing leading to peace or an honorable settlement. (CWMG, 1938)<sup>57</sup>

V Shantaram's *Do Aankhen Barah Haath* (DABH) makes a profound statement about the efficacy of non-violence. The film was inspired by an open prison experiment conducted by jail authorities at Swatantrapur in the princely state Aundh (Currently Swatantrapur is part of Atpadi Tehsil in the Sangli district of Maharashtra). It is considered one of the classics of Indian cinema and won many national and international awards.

The film connects many opposites.

It connects the law with the lawless, the progressive jailor with the hardened convicts he wishes to convert in an open jail. It connects the simple truths of a bygone era with the seeming complexity of modern India. It connects the colonial past with the nascent hope of an India emerging into freedom. It connects an India rooted in the past with a vision of the future. It connects the best of traditional values with the innate idealism that freedom does not just mean a new beginning for an ancient land but also an opportunity to redeem those who have lost out in the past. (Krishnan, 2003)<sup>58</sup>

The film is about how an idealistic jail warden Adinath (V Shantaram) reforms six convicted murderers – Shankar Passi, Kishan, Tamanna, Keshvgiri, Jalia Nai, and Beeru – into hard-working, non-violent, conscientious human beings in an open space through his moral leadership. Adinath leads by example and inspires the convicts to cultivate and grow crops on a barren piece of land. Azad Nagar, as he calls it, has no latches, no doors and no locks. The jailer tells the convicts that if they run away, it will be a blot on his life. He hands over the knife to an inmate who wishes to kill him. He teaches them to say a prayer before taking food.

Adinath gradually brings about a transformation in the convicts, converting them by demonstrating his truthfulness, non-violence and moral force. The problem arises when he allows Kishan's adolescent motherless sons to live in jail, and other inmates insist on bringing their families too. When refused permission, they run away. Kishan goes to jail superintendent Baburao Pendharkar to concede failure, but the convicts soon return to Azad Nagar, unable to resist the truth in Adinath's eyes.

A local vendor who controls the market and wants no competition turns against Adinath and the six convicts. Adinath extracts a pledge of non-violence from the convicts. He tells them not to hit the vendor and his men even if the latter attack them. He calls it his "last trial". The convicts are beaten up but do not retaliate and Adinath lauds their bravery. The vendor

lets his cattle loose on the Azad Nagar farm and Adinath is killed while saving the injured convicts from a bull.

Gandhian non-violence finds an echo in the scene where the criminals let themselves be beaten unconscious by the dalal's lathi-wielding thugs since they have promised the jailor that they will never resort to force even if they are attacked. And when the dalal unleashes rampaging bulls on to the open-jail farm in the dead of the night, it is the jailor who protects his wards at the cost of his life. (Krishnan, 2003)<sup>59</sup>

*DABH* propagates Gandhi's epistemology on non-violence not just through screenplay and dialogues but also through the lyrics of its songs. Bharat Vyas' lyrics in *Aye Maalik tere bande hum* (soulfully sung by Lata Mangeskar) pits what Gandhi called the "soul force" against the criminal past of the convicts, and the soul force emerges triumphant. The stanza "wo burai karein hum bhalai karein" (Let's do good to the one who is working against us) emphasizes Gandhi's non-violence message.

"If I hit my adversary, that is of course violence, but to be truly non-violent, I must love him and pray for him when he hits me. The Jews have not been actively non-violent". (CWMG, 1938-39)<sup>60</sup>

Gandhi said that they might be "weak and oppressed, but non-violence is not a weapon of the weak. It is a weapon of the strongest and bravest. Non-violence has greater power than Hitler's and Mussolini's force". (CWMG, 1938)<sup>61</sup>

Adinath commands respect from the convicts through his moral behaviour and humbleness. He not only works with them on the land but also cooks meals for them. He is the chief servant in the group and not the commander-in-chief appointed by an authority. The group of seven, along with Champa, the toy seller, and Kishan's two children, in every sense, resembles the non-violent organization Gandhi spoke about while delineating the difference between an ordinary army and a group of satyagrahis.

For Adinath, the non-violence recommended by Mahatma Gandhi is a force far superior to violence. He does not cooperate with the market controller and yet opts to suffer rather than cause the latter pain. Adinath refuses to withdraw from the market while the market controller sets his crops on fire and lets his cattle loose on his farm.

In a non-violent war, to mix poison in water or to burn grains, oil, etc. is forbidden, and should be so. It is one thing to non-cooperate with the enemy

and quite another to stop water, etc., to her or him. The non-cooperator accepts suffering for himself. (CWMG, 1941)<sup>62</sup>

The principles on which a non-violent organisation is based are different from and the reverse of what obtains in a violent organisation...In a non-violent army, the general is just the chief servant – first among equals. He claims no privileges over or superiority to the rank and file. (CWMG, 1938-39)<sup>63</sup>

*DABH* comes to the fore every time there is a discussion on Mahatma Gandhi or prison reforms. In 2011, prisoners in Maharashtra paid tribute to the apostle of non-violence by watching the classic on his birth anniversary.

The film's protagonist, Adinath, is the epitome of what Mahatma Gandhi prescribed for a votary of non-violence. He sacrifices his life to restore peace and order in society. This is what Gandhi called for.

Those who know how to die, also know how to live. (CWMG, 1946)<sup>64</sup>

Former Indian Police Service officer and now state governor Kiran Bedi, who introduced major reforms during her stint in Tihar jail, believes the film

is of perennial value and relevance. The soft skills expressed so naturally in the movie, are being currently taught in business schools at a huge cost to limited results. Hence the movie will continue to inspire and live long. (Banerjee, 2007)<sup>65</sup>

*Hum Dono*, starring Dev Anand, is an anti-war film set in World War II. The film proclaims that violence, war and hatred are bad but one has to fight for the sake of one's country, hunger and fame.

The film narrates the story of Anand, an unemployed youth who is in love with Meeta (Sadhna), the daughter of a rich man (Rehman). Rehman refuses to accept the match and taunts Anand to find a job, forcing the latter to join the army as a captain. He befriends his lookalike, Major Manohar Lal Verma (Dev Anand) during the war. Major Verma goes missing, but not before taking a pledge from Anand that he will take care of his mother (Lalita Pawar) and wife Roma (Nanda) as well with his own family if something goes wrong.

Verma's mother and wife Roma mistake him for the major. Anand keeps his pledge to Verma and yet his relationship with Roma is misunderstood by society, as well as by his fiancé Meeta. Verma returns, having lost his legs in the war, and is surprised to find Anand in his house. He clears the confusion in the climax and the two couples are reunited.



*Hum Dono*'s songs and dialogue drive home the message that war brings destruction, leads to bloodshed and death, and devalues human life. Its famous bhajan *Allah tero naam Ishwar tero naam* entreats the Almighty to bestow wisdom on the powerful so that wives do not lose their husbands, and mothers and sisters do not lose their hope (*Mangon ka sindoor na chhoote, maa behnon ki aas na toote, Balwano ko dede gyan*).

*Hum Dono* unequivocally and unambiguously promotes Mahatma Gandhi's epistemology on non-violence. It warns about the futility of war and pleads with God to grant wisdom to the powerful so they respect the freedom and the rights of the weak.

Gandhi was sure that

one of the obligations that non-violence places upon us is to respect the rights even of the weakest, even a child's. (CWMG, 1938-39)<sup>66</sup>

Like the Mahatma, the film is not sure whether a country can fight off an invasion non-violently. In fact, the father of the Indian nation was not confident that India, to which he had confined his experiments, would make non-violence its state policy after gaining independence from the British Empire. He was not even sure whether India had practiced the ahimsa of the brave.

During World War II, not only was Gandhi opposed to India taking part in the fight, he even appealed to British people through an open letter not to fight against Hitler, and asked Viceroy Lord Linlithgow to convey his appeal to the British government. Abul Kalam Azad, the then president of the Congress, reminisces in his autobiography,

He (Gandhiji) was convinced that India ought not to take part in the war in any circumstances. He met the Viceroy and expressed these views to him. He also wrote an open letter to the British people, appealing to them that they should not fight Hitler but oppose him by a spiritual force. It is not altogether surprising that Gandhiji's appeal found no response in British hearts, for by this time France had already fallen and German power stood at its zenith. (Banerjee, 2007)<sup>67</sup>

Unable to do anything, Gandhi even spoke to Azad about committing suicide on several occasions.

He told me if he was powerless to stop the suffering caused by the war, he could at least refuse to be witness to it by putting an end to his life. He pressed me, again and again, to lend support to his views. I thought over the matter deeply but I could not bring myself to agree. For me, non-violence was a matter of policy, not of creed. My view was that Indians had the right to take to the sword if they had no other alternative. (Azad, 2003)<sup>68</sup>

The entire Congress Working Committee was divided on the question of whether India should participate in the war. While Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Shri Rajagopalachari, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, and Abul Kalam Azad were not against it, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Acharya Kriplani and Shankar Rao Deo were with Gandhi.

They (Prasad, Kriplani, and Deo) agreed with him (Gandhi) that once it was accepted that free India could participate in war, the very basis of India's non-violent struggle for freedom would disappear. I, on the other hand, felt that there was a distinction between an internal struggle for freedom and external struggle against aggression. (Azad, 2003)<sup>69</sup>

Finally, a way out was found when the All India Congress Committee passed two resolutions in July 1940 at Poona. The first reiterated the Congress' commitment to non-violence in attaining India's freedom while the second declared that in the war between Nazism and Democracy, India's rightful place was in the last camp but she could not participate in the war until she herself was free (Azad, 2003).<sup>70</sup>

What has to be admitted is that in the changed conditions of today, the ahimsa of the weak has no place. The truth is that India has not so far had an opportunity to practice the ahimsa of the brave. (CWMG, 1947)<sup>71</sup>

While the Congress must continue to adhere strictly to the principle of non-violence in the struggle for independence, it was unable, in the present circumstances, to declare that the principle should be extended to India's national defence. (CWMG, 1940-41)<sup>72</sup>

If the Working Committee (of Congress) members ever thought non-violence should be and could be the ideal for internal affairs, then how much more it should be and could be the ideal for external affairs. (CWMG, 1940)<sup>73</sup>

Elsewhere, Gandhi wrote that

the Congress has to decide upon the course it would adopt in the event of an invasion of India. (CWMG, 1939)<sup>74</sup>

In answer to a question from an American journalist on whether non-violence could prevent an invasion of India, Gandhi replied that

in non-violent techniques, of course, there can be nothing like preventing an invasion. (CWMG, 1942)<sup>75</sup>

Vidhu Vinod Chopra's *Mission Kashmir* narrates the story of how love can transcend hatred and bring about the union of the worst of enemies in the most difficult circumstances. The film is dedicated to Kashmiriyat, the centuries-old tradition of harmony that once thrived in the violence-affected border state of Jammu & Kashmir. It points to the dangers violence poses to the children born and brought up in a conflict, and how fatwas are being misused to deny treatment of the wounded from the state force.

In an encounter with terrorist Malik, who killed a doctor's family after the latter attended to SSP Inayat Khan (Sanjay Dutt)'s ailing son, Khan accidentally kills the parents of a Muslim boy Altaf (Hrithik Roshan). Khan and his Hindu wife Nilima (Sonali Kulkarni) decide to adopt the orphaned Altaf, but when Altaf discovers that it was Khan who gunned down his parents, he breaks off with him and joins a dreaded terrorist, Hilal. Hilal is out to destabilize Kashmir while Altaf's primary objective is to avenge his parents' death by plotting the murder of his stepfather.

Khan and his wife continue to have a soft spot for Altaf even as the latter swears revenge. The police officer is able to bring Altaf around but not before losing his wife to a bomb planted by their adopted son. Though the movie is set against a backdrop of violence, it ultimately celebrates the triumph of love over hatred and the transformation of an enemy into a friend, the objective of Mahatma Gandhi's epistemology on non-violence.

Unlimited ahimsa will take time to be universalised. We will have ample cause to congratulate ourselves if we learn to substitute the law of love in society for that of the jungle, and if instead of harbouring ill will and enmity in our bosoms against those whom we regard as our enemies we learn to love them as actual and potential friends. (CWMG, 1940)<sup>76</sup>

With his deft handling of the situation, Inayat Khan averts a certain Hindu-Muslim clash. This is what Mahatma Gandhi expected his non-violent soldiers to achieve.

The other field is the exercise of ahimsa in internal disturbances – Hindu-Muslim riots and the like. We have been able to show visible success in the exercise of ahimsa in this field. (CWMG, 1940)<sup>77</sup>

The problem with *Mission Kashmir* is that it only partially abides by Gandhi's epistemology on non-violence. Its premise violates the basic rule of the Gandhian principle that the state must abide by non-violence.

It is blasphemy to say that non-violence can only be practiced by individuals and never by a nation which is composed of individuals. (CWMG, 1938-39)<sup>78</sup>

Jahnu Barua's *Maine Gandhi Ko Nahin Mara (MGNM)* (2005) is a satire on how India has turned away from the principles Mahatma Gandhi so dearly practiced and prescribed. The film tells the story of a Hindi professor, Uttam Chaudhary (Anupam Kher), who loses his memory to Alzheimer's and starts hallucinating that he has been accused of assassinating Mahatma Gandhi.

Chaudhary (64) believes that when he was an eight-year-old child, somebody loaded a real bullet into his toy gun and he accidentally fired at Gandhi on January 30, 1948. Chaudhary loses his sense of timing so much so that he imagines getting ready for college even after his retirement and his wife packing his bag even after her death.

It so happens that on January 30, 1948, as a child, during a game with his friends, Uttam shot an arrow at a balloon filled with red colour, which then splashed on Mahatma Gandhi's picture. Since Gandhi was assassinated on the same day, Uttam's father considered the incident a bad omen. He gave him a severe beating, repeatedly saying "Tune Gandhiji ko mara" (You killed Gandhiji), and decided not to talk to him for the rest of his life.

When as an adult, Uttam sees a report in a newspaper titled "Child kills Father", his memory jogs back to the childhood incident and he starts imagining that he is in jail, having been convicted of Gandhi's murder. A young psychiatrist Siddharth Kothari stages a court scene to assure Uttam that a higher court acquits him of the false charge.

In the climax, Professor Uttam, having been shown the end of his reverie, says that India has turned against Gandhi's principles. He refers to how Gandhi has been taken out of people's hearts and given space on walls in government offices, political parties, even courts, and printed on coins and currency notes. "We have all killed Gandhi.... I do not want such freedom. People talk of non-violence and have violence in heart for each other. What have they done to my country?!"

Like Jahnu Barua, *MGNM* firmly believes that Gandhian principles can resolve many of India's problems. Professor Uttam, a self-acclaimed devotee of Gandhi who does not lie, makes a forceful plea for the restoration of Gandhian ideals in society. He strongly advocates non-violence against the violence pervading the country and the world now.

*MGNM* is an argument to return to Gandhi, something Barua talked about in his interviews.

I also felt that the Gandhian ideology was missing from the entire country. I am not a great Gandhiji fan, but I like two of his ideologies – self-reliance and non-violence. My film was just a reminder that you need to bring back Gandhi – not as a holy person or god but in values. I believe a lot of problems

that we face today will be resolved if we can bring back these ideologies. (Chaudhary, 2016)<sup>79</sup>

Through Professor Uttam Chaudhary, the film points out how Indians have failed to live up to the ideals of truth, patriotism and non-violence. It

presents Gandhi as a concept that is lost on Indians today. It revolves around the failure of Indians to live up to his dreams of patriotism, secularism, integrity, and commitment today. It raises pertinent questions about an individual's responsibility as a citizen both for Gandhi's murder and for India's subsequent failure to disseminate his ideas and his legacy to contemporary India. (Chatterji, 2016)<sup>80</sup>

Barua's film,

with Anupam Kher in the lead role, which received lukewarm responses, is an oblique meditation of Gandhism". (Sharma, 2016)<sup>81</sup>

The protagonist of *MGNM* pleads that the entire society should take up non-violence, something Gandhi also spoke for.

It is my belief that non-violence is not an entirely personal quality. It is an easy way of spiritual as well as political action for all – individual, society and country. (CWMG, 1947)<sup>82</sup>

### c) *Swadeshi*

For the father of the nation, the *Swadeshi* was

a religious discipline to be undergone in utter disregard of the physical discomfort it may cause to individuals. Under its spell the deprivation of a pin or a needle, because these are not manufactured in India, need cause no terror. A *Swadeshist* will learn to do without hundreds of things which today he considers necessary. (Gandhi, 1933)<sup>83</sup>

Gandhi called for a boycott of foreign and mill-made goods to promote hand-spun khadi but his *Swadeshi* was not based on hatred. It rather promoted love and peace.

A true votary of *Swadeshi* will never harbour ill-will towards the foreigner, he will not be actuated by antagonism towards anybody on earth. *Swadeshim* is not a cult of hatred. It is a doctrine of selfless service that has its roots in the purest AHIMSA, i.e., love. (FYM, p. 66)<sup>84</sup>

The Mahatma looked at the spinning wheel and khadi as concrete symbols of *Swadeshi* theory. For him, these were elixirs that would provide employment to India's teeming millions and make them self-reliant. This, he believed, would help the country fight off hunger, famine and childhood malnourishment and attain prosperity.

He considered khadi synonymous with the spinning wheel and *swaraj*, and took a step-by-step approach to propagate hand-woven khadi in the country. First, he took *Swadeshi* to mean cloth produced in India. In the second stage, he believed that the cloth woven in Indian mills would do. The third stage was reached when Gandhi preferred cloth woven by hand though the yarn was spun in mills. In the last stage, *Swadeshi* meant khadi woven by hand from hand-spun yarn.

Khadi means spinning wheel. How can we ever have khadi without it? Like Swaraj, khadi is our birth-right, and it is our life-long duty to use that only. Anyone who does not fulfil that duty is totally ignorant of what swaraj is... Just as our people cannot afford to do away with the ovens in their homes even if someone offered to cook their food for them free of charge, so also they cannot afford to do away with the spinning wheel. (CWMG, 1922)<sup>85</sup>

Gandhi did not want silk, wool or jute to be passed off as khadi.

Khadi can and should have only one meaning, viz., hand-woven cloth made from hand-spun thread. Silk-thread, jute fibre and wool woven in this manner may be called, if we like, silk, jute, and woollen khadi, respectively. But it would be ridiculous for anyone dressed in khadi silk to claim that he was encouraging khadi. (CWMG, 1922)<sup>86</sup>

The Mahatma was of the view that in mills only, an infinitesimal number of India's millions could take part while the manufacture of *khaddar* could provide work for millions of hands within their homes.

With *khaddar*, in my opinion, is bound up the welfare of millions of human beings. *Khaddar*, is, therefore, the largest part of *Swadeshi* and it is the only true demonstration of it. All else follows from it. India can live even if we do not use brass buttons or tooth-picks made in India. But India cannot live if we refuse to manufacture and wear *khaddar*. (CWMG, 1926)<sup>87</sup>

His *Swadeshi* was inclusive and not exclusive as his service was not of a competitive or antagonistic nature. It did not involve any chauvinism. Gandhi did not call for the exclusion of all foreign-made articles but focused on the boycott of foreign-made cloth in particular.

I have never considered the exclusion of everything foreign under every conceivable circumstance as a part of *Swadeshi*. The broad definition of *Swadeshi* is the use of all home-made things to the exclusion of foreign things, in so far as such use is necessary for the protection of home industry, more especially those industries which exclude the use of everything foreign, no matter how beneficial it may be, and irrespective of the fact that it impoverishes nobody, is a narrow interpretation of *Swadeshi*. (YI, 1926)<sup>88</sup>

For Gandhi, *Swadeshi* in education meant that Indians should be educated in their vernacular languages and not in English. They should know their own history, have local icons and develop their own aspirations. The Mahatma felt the connection between the Indian leaders and the masses was poor because most of them were educated abroad – England in particular.

We want to represent the masses, but we fail. They recognize us not much more than they recognize the English officers. Their hearts are an open book to neither. Their aspirations are not ours. Hence there is a break. (Duncan, 1951)<sup>89</sup>

If during the last fifty years we had been educated through the vernaculars, our elders and our servants and our neighbours would have partaken of our knowledge: the discoveries of Bose or a Ray would have been household treasures as are the RAMAYAN and the MAHABHARAT. As it is, so far as the masses are concerned, those great discoveries might as well have been made by foreigners. Had instruction in all the branches of learning been given through the vernaculars, I make bold to say that they would have enriched wonderfully. (Duncan, 1951)<sup>90</sup>

Since Mahatma Gandhi practiced himself first what he propagated to the world, he insisted his four sons – Harilal, Manilal, Devdas, and Ramdas – converse in Gujarati at home, even when they lived in South Africa.

Gandhi's *Swadeshi* was inherent in Hinduism, a religion which, he maintained, was non-proselytizing and succeeded in absorbing Buddhism.

By reason of *Swadeshi* spirit, a Hindu refuses to change his religion, not necessarily because he considers it to be the best, but because he knows that he can complement it by introducing reforms. (Prabhu & Rao, 1967)<sup>91</sup>

In politics, Mahatma Gandhi wanted to make use of the indigenous institutions and serve them by curing them of their proved defects. In economics, he said, he would

use only things that are produced by my immediate neighbours and serve those industries by making them efficient and complete where they might be

found wanting. It is suggested that such *Swadeshi*, if reduced to practice, will lead to the millennium. (Prabhu & Rao, p. 946)<sup>92</sup>

*Swadeshi* for Mahatma Gandhi was an intrinsic part of his principles for non-cooperation in the fight against the British Empire. Along with non-violence, the removal of untouchability and Hindu-Muslim unity, *Swadeshi* was the pivot around which Gandhi's politics revolved.

“My politics are confined to the spinning wheel, the removal of untouchability and the prayers for Hindu-Muslim unity, etc.” is what the Mahatma wrote to C Vijayaraghavachariar, a former president of the Congress, on June 16, 1926. (CWMG, 1926)<sup>93</sup>

The father of the Indian nation considered it mandatory for all congressmen and his *Satyagraha* volunteers to abide by the four conditions in the fight for Swaraj. He once regretted that many congressmen and non-cooperation volunteers violated these conditions.

Swaraj cannot be won merely by people becoming volunteers. It will be won only by volunteers observing the conditions laid down for them...if some volunteers inclined to violence join those who observe the condition of non-violence, they can only do harm. When enlistment as volunteers is open only to those who wear nothing but hand-spun khadi at home and outside and on all occasions. How can persons who wear khadi containing mill-made warp, or who wear pure khadi only at the time of enrolment and while on duty as volunteers, help to win swaraj? These persons resort to deception right from the start.... The same about untouchability. Anyone who believes that untouchability is a part of Hinduism has no right to become a non-cooperator. (CWMG, 1921)<sup>94</sup>

Gandhi was of the opinion that much of India's poverty owed its existence to the ruinous departure from *Swadeshi* in economics and industry. He felt Britain exploited India to add to its wealth, and wished India could produce for itself what it produced for England.

If not an article of commerce had been brought from outside India, she would be today a land flowing with milk and honey. But that was not to be. We were greedy and so was England. The connection between England and India was based clearly upon an error. But she (England) does not remain in India in error. It is her declared policy that India is to be held in trust for her people. If this be true, Lancashire must stand aside. And if the *Swadeshi* doctrine is a sound doctrine, Lancashire can stand aside without hurt, though it may sustain a shock for the time being. I think of *Swadeshi* not as a boycott movement undertaken by way of revenge. I conceive it as a religious principle to be followed by all. I am no economist, but I have read some



treatises which show that England could easily become a self-sustained country, growing all the produce she needs. This may be an utterly ridiculous proposition, and perhaps the best proof that it cannot be true is that England is one of the largest importers in the world. But India cannot live for Lancashire or any other country before she is able to live for herself. (Duncan, 1951)<sup>95</sup>

Gandhi did not want machines at the cost of human labour. He had a firm conviction that handicrafts would sustain even after the end of the machine age.

When all these achievements of the machine age will have disappeared, these our handicrafts will remain; when all exploitation will have ceased, service and honest labour will remain. It is because this faith sustains me that I am going on with my work.... Indomitable faith in their work sustained men like Stephenson and Columbus. Faith in my work sustains me. (Harijan, 1935)<sup>96</sup>

Gandhi's *Swadeshi* was for the decentralization of production. He was of the view that localized production and consumption would prevent the accumulation of wealth in a few hands. He believed that machinery had enabled certain nations to exploit the other nations.

What is the cause of the present chaos? It is exploitation, I will not say of the weaker nations by the stronger, but of sister nations by sister nations. And my fundamental objection to machinery rests on the fact that it is machinery that has enabled these nations to exploit others. (YI, 1931)<sup>97</sup>

The Mahatma did not want Indians to make *Swadeshi* a fetish and practice it at the cost of damaging their own society. He did not oppose such foreign products that could not be manufactured in the country and at the same time opposed indigenous products that could ruin the health of the Indian people. He was against tea-drinking, brought to India by Lord Curzon, and also liquor brewed locally as well as imported, which, he maintained, ruined the lives of many Indians.

*Swadeshi* admits all foreign books containing pure literature, all foreign watches, foreign needles, foreign sewing machines, foreign pins. But *Swadeshi* excludes all intoxicating drinks and drugs even though they may be manufactured in India. (CWMG, 1926)<sup>98</sup>

He did not find a parallel between the colour bar bill in South Africa and Indian *Swadeshi* because the latter, he maintained, was based on non-violence and the principle of love.

The Colour Bar Bill is aimed at men, not at measures. *Swadeshi* is aimed at measures only. Colour Bar is indiscriminately against a man's race or colour. *Swadeshi* knows no such distinction. The upholders of the Colour Bar would carry out their purpose even violently, if necessary. *Swadeshi* eschews all form of violence, even mental. (CWMG, 1926)<sup>99</sup>

Gandhi was of the firm belief that to be self-reliant, India would have to ensure that each of her 750 thousand villages became self-reliant. He wanted the governments of free India to make the village the central unit of economic development. He drew an 18-point constructive programme which, he maintained, should be implemented after attaining Swaraj. The initial 13-points were – communal unity, removal of untouchability, prohibition, khadi, village industries, village sanitation, basic education, adult education, empowerment of women, knowledge of health and hygiene, promotion of provincial languages and national language, and removal of economic inequality, to which he added farmers, labour, tribes, lepers, and students later.

Gandhi always believed that India lived in her villages and would perish if the villages perished.

Rural development as outlined by Gandhiji contained self-sufficiency, inter-dependence for other wants and development of Village Industries. He wanted to bring about rural reconstruction with sound scientific and spiritual values. Through his 18-point Constructive Programme, Gandhiji successfully implemented his rural reconstruction activities in Sevagram Centre near Wardha in 1935. (Thankappan, 2010)<sup>100</sup>

He considered every village a self-sufficient republic in its own right and advocated that every villager has to be a scavenger, spinner, watchman, medicine man, and school-master all at once. An ideal village, according to Gandhi, should maintain cleanliness, grow its own vegetable, have a cooperative dairy, primary and secondary schools, and panchayat to settle disputes. He wanted every activity, including agriculture, to be conducted “on the co-operative basis” (Harijan, 1942)<sup>101</sup>

Khawaja Ahmad Abbas' *Dharti Ke Lal* (1946) is set against the backdrop of the Bengal famine of 1943, which claimed over a million lives and left farmers devastated in a large region. The film tells the story of Mukhiya, whose family is forced to migrate to the city along with other villagers after a severe drought destroys the area. It propagates cooperative farming as a possible solution to the frequent natural calamities.

Produced by Abbas and the Indian People's Theatre Association, *Dharti Ke Lal* shows how hard-working farmers are swindled by a money lender who buys their produce at lower rates and then sells its back to them at a

much higher price. The money lender not only charges hefty interest on the loan extended to illiterate farmers on pawned land but also forces them to sell their land to a landlord.

The villagers borrow money to buy seeds and then have hardly anything to eat when the rain gods turn against them or there is a flood. Yet they live in perfect harmony and are not afraid to share even their meagre resources with each other. Mukhiya gives half of the fistful rice his family of seven has to Dayal, another villager.

Mukhiya's elder son Niranjan (Balraj Sahni) refuses to sell his land, taunting his younger brother Ramu, "You want me to sell off what gave birth to us? The land belongs to none of us. It does not belong to me or father. It is our honour. The land is more precious than a temple figure". He even refuses the local landlord's offer, saying he "will eat grass but won't sell land".

The villagers are forced to migrate to the city in search of a livelihood. But they discover that the only two things available in the market are "women and rice". The money lender transfers his hoarded rice to the city as well and sells it at a price the villagers are unable to pay. Ramu's wife is forced to barter her body for a bottle of milk for her newborn baby.

Niranjan finally comes across Shambhu Dada, an educated youth, who tells him that the cure for hunger and starvation would emerge from unity and awareness among the villagers. Niranjan and other villagers decide to return to the village. They pool their resources and join hands for cooperative farming. They look at it as the only escape from the money lender and the landlord.

*Dharati Ke Lal* makes a profound statement on the self-sufficiency model Mahatma Gandhi prescribed for Indian villages, which hinged on cooperative farming. "In regard to agriculture, we must do our utmost to prevent further fragmentation of land, and to encourage people to take to co-operative farming" (Khadi, 1959).<sup>102</sup>

A village may grow cotton for itself in co-operation. If this is done, it is simple enough to see that no imported cloth can beat cloth thus produced locally, either in cost or durability. The process induces the greatest conservation of energy. (Harijan, 1935)<sup>103</sup>

Let us not also forget that it is man's social nature which distinguishes him from the brute creation. If it is his privilege to be independent, it is equally his duty to be interdependent. Only an arrogant man will claim to be independent of everybody else and be self-contained. ... It will be possible to reconstruct our villages so that the villages collectively, not the villagers individually, will become self-contained, so far as their clothing requirements are concerned. (YI, 1929)<sup>104</sup>

Cooperative farming was popular in several parts of India until recently. Farmers in many villages helped each other when it came to ploughing, harvesting and weeding, etc. Cooperative farming not only brings the per hectare cost of using tube well, tractor and harvesting machines down but also solves the problem of sub-division and fragmentation of land holdings.

*Dharati ke Lal* only reiterates Mahatma Gandhi's belief when the farmers in Mukhiya's village, led by Niranjana, announce after joining hands that without unity among farmers, "our country will not get deliverance from hunger".

Mahatma Gandhi emphasized honest management to make the most out of joint farming.

Co-operative farming or dairying is undoubtedly a good goal promoting national interests. Such instances can be multiplied. I wonder what these numerous ... societies are. Have they honest inspectors who know their work? It may be mentioned that such movements have often proved disastrous when management has been dishonest and the goal questionable. (Harijan, 1946)<sup>105</sup>

Thankappan quotes from Shashi Prabha Sharma's *Gandhian Holistic Economics* to stress the importance of decentralized cooperative units in development.

The decentralised economic units would thus facilitate the best possible use of local raw materials, talents, and manpower, promote occupational equilibrium, ecological balance and co-operative living. The village would be able to produce whatever is required, with the help of local resources and would be intended with whatever has been produced in closer surroundings. (Thankappan, 2010)<sup>106</sup>

Abbas and Mahatma Gandhi are on the same page when it comes to believing that unity among farmers can help them ward off zamindari evil.

The moment the cultivators of the soil realise their power, the Zamindari evil will be sterilized. What can the poor Zamindar do when they say that they will not simply work the land unless they are paid enough to feed and clothe and educate themselves and their children? In reality, the toiler is the owner of what he produces. If the toilers intelligently combine, they will become an irresistible power. (CWMG, 1936-37)<sup>107</sup>

The Mahatma also wanted the adoption of cooperative farming for the growing of fruits in orchards.

And now about collective farming. That human civilisation was due to agriculture is relative truth; in other words, a man advanced from the hunter's stage to the agricultural stage. The next stage, now, is not that of collective farming but of orchards. There will be even greater stability when we arrive at that stage. Our relations with the world will become purer than at present, and people will have to labour much less in growing fruit trees than they do in agriculture and they would have some peace too. (CWMG, 1926)<sup>108</sup>

B R Chopra's *Naya Daur* (1957), starring Dilip Kumar, makes a case against the introduction of heavy machinery in menial jobs. The film quotes Mahatma Gandhi

We are all leaves of a majestic tree whose trunk cannot be shaken off its roots which are deep down in bowels of the earth. In this, there is no room for machinery that would displace human labour and concentrate power in a few hands. Labour has its unique place in a cultured human family...Dead machinery must not be pitted against the millions of living machines represented by the villagers scattered in the seven hundred thousand villages of India. Machinery to be well used has to help and ease human efforts

in the very beginning to claim that machines lead to joblessness.

Shankar (Dilip Kumar) and Kishna (Ajit) live in a settlement. Shankar drives a *tonga* from the railway station to the settlement to earn a livelihood while Kishna fells trees for the wood company owned by Seth Maganlal (Nasir Hussain). After Sethji retires for a pilgrimage, his son Kundan (Jeevan) returns from the city to take over the factory. Kundan buys a machine and gets people from the city to run it, leading to the dismissal of many employees.

Shankar takes up the case of unemployed workers with Kundan but fails to convince him. He makes it clear that it is a clash between manual labour and machines and not a fight between rich and poor.

Kundan next decides to run a bus between the railway station and the settlement. This makes the tongawallas see red as passengers prefer the faster and cheaper bus to their mode of transport. Kundan calls it part of the country's progress: "India is progressing. One-hour drive can be completed in ten minutes". Shankar retorts that the settlement was also part of the same country.

Kundan refuses to withdraw the bus service, saying that "the country will not stop growing for 100 people" and challenges Shankar to a race between his *tonga* and the bus. Shankar picks up the gauntlet. The two decide that the loser of the race will leave for the city. After a pulsating race, the *tonga* wins the competition.

*Naya Daur*, the second-highest grosser in 1957 and re-released in 2007 in colour, argues against the displacement of human beings with machines. The film paints machines as the biggest evil and sounding the death knell for small villages in India. This is what Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi also believed.

Machinery is like a snake-hole which may contain from one to a hundred snakes. Where there is machinery, there are large cities; where there are large cities, there are tram-cars and railways. And there only does one see electric light. The honest physician will tell you that where means of artificial locomotion have increased, the health of the people has suffered. I remember that, when in a European town there was a scarcity of money, the receipts of the tramway company, of the lawyers and of the doctors went down, and the people were less unhealthy. I cannot recall a single good point in connection with machinery. (*Hind Swaraj*, p. 96)<sup>109</sup>

Gandhi felt machines filled the pockets of a few at the expense of many. He was of the view that it was out of greed and not love that factory owners bought machines.

What I object to is the craze for machinery, not machinery as such. The craze is for what they call labour-saving money. Men go on “saving labour” till thousands are without work and thrown on the open streets to die of starvation. I want to save time and labour, not for a fraction of mankind, but for all. The saving of labour of the individual should be the object, and not human greed the motive. Thus, for instance, I would welcome any day a machine to straighten crooked spindles. Not that blacksmiths will cease to make spindles; they will continue to provide spindles, but when the spindle goes wrong, every spinner will have a machine to get it straight. Therefore, replace greed by love and everything will be all right. (YI, 1924)<sup>110</sup>

I can have no consideration for machinery which is meant either to enrich the few at the expense of the many, or without cause to displace the useful labour of many. (H, 1935)<sup>111</sup>

*Naya Daur* celebrates the triumph of human labour over machinery. It warns the country against what Mahatma Gandhi called “mass production through power-driven machinery” (H, 1936). The film rejects what the Jawaharlal Nehru government introduced after independence, which Gandhi also advocated against.

Mechanization is good when hands are too few for the work intended to be accomplished. It is an evil where there are more hands than required for the work as is the case of India. The problem with us is not how to find leisure for the teeming millions inhabiting our villages. The problem is how to

utilize their idle hours, which are equal to the working days of six months in the year. (H, 1934)<sup>112</sup>

The Mahatma was sure that machinery was no good for an over-populated country like India.

But why not, it is asked, save the labours of millions, and give them more leisure for intellectual pursuits? Leisure is good and necessary up to a point only. God created man to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow, and I dread the prospect of our being able to produce all that we want, including our food-stuffs, out of a conjuror's hat. A factory employs a few hundreds and renders thousands unemployed. I may produce tons of oil from an oil-mill, but I also drive thousands of oil-men out of employment. I call this destructive energy, whereas production by the labour of millions of hands is constructive and conducive to the common good. Mass production through power-driven machinery, even when State-owned, will be of no avail. (H, 1936)<sup>113</sup>

Like Gandhi, *Naya Daur* is not against all types of machinery. In fact, the workers in Kundan's unit welcome the introduction of a machine, believing that it will only ease their burden. They turn against it only after hearing about their sacking.

My opposition to machinery is much misunderstood. I am not opposed to machinery as such. I am opposed to machinery which displaces labour and leaves it idle. (H, 1946)<sup>114</sup>

Gandhi's other problem with mass production was that it took no note of the real requirements of the consumer.

If mass production were in itself a virtue, it should be capable of indefinite multiplication. But it can be definitely shown that mass production carries within it its own limitations. If all countries adopted the system of mass production, there would not be a big enough market for their products. Mass production must then come to a stop. (H, 1934)<sup>115</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi's words on mass production sound like a prophecy when one looks at how China dumps its goods in different countries.

I would categorically state my conviction that the mania for mass-production is responsible for the world crises. Granting for the moment that machinery may supply all the needs of humanity, still it would concentrate production in particular areas, so that you would have to go in a roundabout way to regulate distribution, whereas, if there are production and distribution both

in the respective areas where things are required, it is automatically regulated and there is less chance for fraud, none for speculation. (H, 1934)<sup>116</sup>

*Naya Daur* stresses the need for unity among workers to fight off the menace of heavy machinery. Its bhajan *Saathi haath badhana...ek se ek mile tau insaan bas mein karle kismet* (Join hands, friends. United men can control their fate) reinforces the message.

The tonga in the film, like the spinning wheel in Mahatma Gandhi's scheme of things, is an organized attempt to displace machinery from that state of exclusiveness and exploitation and to place it in its proper state.

Shankar echoes Mahatma Gandhi when he accuses Kundan of only thinking of multiplying his profits: "You have come to expand your business but in the process forcing the residents of the settlement to migrate."<sup>117</sup>

Organization of machinery for the purpose of concentrating wealth and power in the hands of a few and for the exploitation of many I hold to be altogether wrong. Much of the organization of machinery of the present age is of that type. The movement of the spinning wheel is an organized attempt to displace machinery from that state of exclusiveness and exploitation and to place it in its proper state. Under my scheme, therefore, men in charge of machinery will think not of themselves or even of the nation to which they belong, but of the whole human race. (YI, 1925)<sup>118</sup>

The bus in *Naya Daur* is a tool to snatch employment from the group of tongawallas, a symbol of cottage industry. They would starve as a result. This is not where Gandhi wanted machinery.

Machinery has its place; it has come to stay. But it must not be allowed to displace necessary human labour.... An improved plough is a good thing. But if by some chance, one man who could plough up by some mechanical invention of his the whole of the land of India and control all the agricultural produce, and if the millions had no other occupation, they would starve, and being idle, they would become dunces, as many have already become. There is hourly danger of many more being reduced to that unenviable state.

I would welcome every improvement in the cottage machine, but I know that it is criminal to displace hand labour by the introduction of power-driven spindles unless one is, at the same time, ready to give millions of farmers some other occupation in their homes. (YI, 1925)<sup>119</sup>

Tongawallas are also machines, if one were to go by Gandhi's definition, which can neither be duplicated nor copied. But there is a limit to their



growth and evolution. Gandhi was opposed to machines even when he was in South Africa.

I have been opposed to it not from today, but even before 1908, when I was in South Africa, surrounded by machines. Their onward march had not only not impressed me but had repelled me. It then dawned on me that to suppress and exploit the millions, the machine is the devil par excellence. It had no place in man's economy if, as social units, all men were to be equal. It is my belief that the machine has not added to man's stature and it will not serve the world but disrupt it unless it is put in its proper place.

Gandhi believed machines flew in the face of what John Ruskin prescribed (same salary for all labour, without distinction of function, race or nationality) in his book *Unto This Last*.

If mankind was to progress and to realize the ideal of equality and brotherhood, it must adopt and act on the principle of *Unto This Last*. It must take along with it even the dumb, the halt and the lame. Did not Yudhishtira, the Prince of Righteousness, refuse to enter heaven without his faithful dog? (H, 1946)<sup>120</sup>

Apart from cooperative farming, primary and secondary schools, a common place for the grazing of cattle, a common meeting place, the resolution of disputes in the panchayats, and the growing of vegetables, fruits, grain and khadi, Mahatma Gandhi also wanted Indian villages to have their own cooperative dairies to be self-sufficient.

An ideal Indian village will be so constructed as to lend itself to perfect sanitation. It will have cottages with sufficient light and ventilation built of material obtainable within a radius of five miles of it...The village lanes and streets will be free of all avoidable dust. It will have wells according to its needs and accessible to all. It will have houses of worship for all; also a common meeting place, a village common for grazing its cattle, a cooperative dairy, primary and secondary schools in which industrial education will be the central fact, and it will have panchayats for settling disputes. It will produce its own grains, vegetables and fruit, and its own Khadi. This is roughly my idea of a model village. (Harijan, 1937)<sup>121</sup>

The problem with *Naya Daur* and Mahatma Gandhi's epistemology on machines is that both look out of place in the 21st century as we have embraced all that – tractors, pumping machines, trucks, etc. – Gandhi advocated against even in June 1947, less than two months before India gained independence from the British.

I do not know why but I cannot swallow the idea that mechanization should be stepped up in India and that the country should find happiness through it. Either I am in error or I am not able to make myself understood. Have you given thought to the possible consequences of using tractors and pumping machines to water the fields and trucks instead of carts for the transport of goods? How many farmers will become unemployed, how many bullocks will become idle? Moreover, I feel that in the long run, the land will lose its fertility if it is ploughed with machines and tractors. People will stop keeping cattle and we shall have to import fertilizers. Even the small children get work if a peasant has a plough in his own house and tills his land himself. For example, one person can work on the *kos* (leather bucket to draw water from the well), another channels the water to the fields, one can plough while another does the weeding. In this way, each will live on the labour of each. How natural and happy village life is, while life dependent on machinery is unhappy and brings unemployment. (CWMG, 1947)<sup>122</sup>

The Mahatma's prescription would have been in sync with an India where an overwhelming majority stayed in villages and the primary source of its sustenance was agriculture and cattle breeding. With the agricultural land having shrunk, urban and semi-urban conglomerates having expanded and a big chunk of the country being dependent on services for employment, *Naya Daur* and Gandhi look a tad irrelevant. In the face of the rapid advancements in technology in the country, Gandhi today would probably concede his mistake on mechanization. But it is equally true that the introduction of machinery has taken the fun out of agricultural labour and led to the abandonment of joint families. We no more hear the songs the women sang while weeding their farms, or the toll bells that rang during ploughing or transporting goods in a bullock cart. There is none of the camaraderie that was on show during ploughing and harvesting seasons.

Machines have undoubtedly concentrated power in a few hands. This is what Gandhi and *Naya Daur* feared.

There is no room for machines that would displace human labour and that would concentrate power in a few hands. Labour has its unique place in a cultured human family. Every machine that helps every individual has a place but I must confess I have never sat down to think out what that machine can be. I have thought of Singer's sewing machine. But even that is perfunctory. I do not need it to fill in my picture. (CWMG, 1946)<sup>123</sup>

Shyam Benegal's *Manthan* (1976) traces the journey of how Amul, the Kaira District Co-operative Milk Producers' Union Limited in Anand, came into being. Written jointly by the late Verghese Kurien and Vijay Tendulkar, *Manthan* stars Girish Karnad, who plays Manohar Rao, a character based on Kurien, the former chief of the National Dairy Development Board

(NDDB). It tells the story of how Rao, a veterinary doctor, and his colleagues, Deshmukh (Mohan Agashe) and Chandavarkar (Anant Nag), persuade people in a village in the Kheda district to start a milk cooperative.

Rao tells the villagers that a cooperative dairy, owned by the villagers, can get them a better price for their milk and ensure better care for their cattle. The rigid caste hierarchy in the village becomes a major hurdle for Dr Rao in forming the cooperative; a scheming private local milk dairy owner Mishraji (Amrish Puri) raises barriers at every point for Dr Rao and his team; and on top of it all, Chandavarkar's sexcapades with the young Harijan girl aggravate the case further.

The Harijans, led by Bhola (Naseeruddin Shah), do not want to join the cooperative as they fear it will be controlled by the village sarpanch (Kulbhushan Kharbanda) and his henchmen. Dr Rao, somehow, brings Bhola around but then Mishraji burns the houses of the Harijans to force them to line up at his dairy for the bare necessities of life. Dr Rao is transferred to another location, but Bhola and Bindu (Smita Patil) decide to revive the cooperative dairy.

Financed by 500,000 members of the Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation (each member contributed a token two rupees for the making of the film), *Manthan* enacts the story of Kurien, the "Father of the White Revolution in India", who joined hands with local Gandhian Tribhuvandas K Patel to set up the local milk cooperative in Anand. Patel, inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, was involved in civil disobedience, rural development and the drive against untouchability. He was the president of Harijan Sevak Samiti from 1948 to 1983 and the founder chairman of the Kaira District Co-operative Milk Producers' Union, Anand.

The title of Benegal's film literally means the churning of milk. Its title song *Mero gaam kaatha paarey* (My village Kaatha Paarey) sung beautifully by Preeti Sagar, goes *Jahan doodh ki nadiya baahe, Jahan koyal kooh kooh gaye, Mhare ghar angna na bhoolo na...doodh ka saagar behta jaaye, kangan sone ke khankaaye, suno dwar pe shehnai, mhare ghar jhanjhar Lakshmi ke baaje* (where rivers of milk flow, where koels sing, don't forget my home, my courtyard.... sea of milk flows, bangles of gold are chiming, hear the flute playing at the door and anklets of Lakshmi, goddess of wealth, are ringing in our home). The song, about how the milk cooperative brought prosperity to the village, subsequently became the mainstay of Amul's publicity in electronic and print media.

The Gujarat Milk Cooperative weeds out the middlemen and links directly between milk producers and consumers, something Gandhi insisted on. Here milk producers (read farmers) control procurement, processing, and marketing. Unlike the private dairies and milk vendors who buy milk in

quantity and then sell at a premium, the Anand model pays farmers on the basis of the fat content in their milk.

A District Cooperative Milk Producers' Union, owned by dairy cooperative societies, buys milk from the societies and then processes and markets milk and milk products. The Union also provides a range of inputs and services to village cooperative societies and their members, such as feed, veterinary care and artificial insemination to sustain the milk production.

The democratic election of the village society's office-bearers also brings down the caste and economic divisions in the society. Amul is truly a legacy of what Mahatma Gandhi dreamt for Indian villages. It promotes the idea of a "co-operative commonwealth" – an equitable division of labour – which Gandhi experimented with on his Tolstoy and Phoenix farms during his stay in South Africa.

Besides its commercial success and critical acclaim, *Manthan*

has been used by spearhead teams of the NDDB (National Dairy Development Board) for almost two-and-a half decades to persuade and encourage milk farmers to create milk co-operatives all over the country. Later, it was also used by the United Nation's Development Programme (UNDP) to promote the creation of milk co-operatives in various countries in South Africa, Latin America, and Asia. When Morarji Desai was prime minister, he gave prints of the film as gifts to the governments of China and the Soviet Union. I am told that the Institute of Rural Management, Anand, uses *Manthan* in its courses even today, thirty-five years later. (Amul's India, 2012)<sup>124</sup>

Over the years the Co-operative has become huge and markets, apart from milk, bread spreads, cheese, beverages, ice creams, paneer, dahi, ghee, mithai, chocolates, and milk powders. Gandhi even advocated for the municipalization of milk dairies in cities. In his municipal speech in Colombo, Gandhi said,

You have many dairies here. I want to throw out a suggestion here. You have inspectors, you have bye-laws, and you have some prosecutions. Why go through all this trouble and why not municipalize your dairies and take control of your milk supply, and, believe me, you will then conserve the health of your babies and you will conserve also the health of an old and dilapidated man like myself. I have no doubt that you have in Colombo very old men that they stand in need of milk, and there is a very great labouring population for whom milk should be cheap. It should be standardized like your stamps, and the people should be able to get their milk absolutely guaranteed. (CWMG, 1927)<sup>125</sup>

An irony is that Mahatma Gandhi also wanted tanneries along with milk cooperatives in the villages. He believed the two could contribute to the protection of cow.

Side by side with such dairy farms, tanneries should also be maintained and the income thus derived should be spent over the maintenance of cows. (CWMG, 1927)<sup>126</sup>

Ashutosh Gowariker's *Swades: We, the People* (2004) is an affirmation of Mahatma Gandhi's principle of proximity, where the neighbour is supposed to be the first responsibility of a *Swadeshist*. The film opens with a quote of Gandhi's, "Hesitating to act because the whole vision might not be achieved, or because others do not share it, is only an attitude that hinders progress". It was inspired by Rajni Bakshi's book *Bapu Kutii: Journey in the Rediscovering of Gandhi*, described as the story of "twelve individuals who search for the solutions to the many problems of modern India and these activists find themselves coming to the same conclusions as had Gandhi".

Bakshi explores the world and lives of these people who have turned their backs on lucrative professions to embark on a search for practical and humane ways of political and social transformation, rooted in the faith that a new India with prosperity for all can be built on the strengths of cooperation and community. In one of the scenes of the film, the book is found lying on the desk of Mohan (Shahrukh Khan), the protagonist of the film.

A wikipedia page on the film cites three sources to say that Gowariker was motivated to make *Swades* by the story of Arvinda Pillalamarri and Ravi Kuchimanchi, an NRI couple, who returned to India and developed a pedal power generator to bring light to remote, off-the-grid village schools in Bilgaon, a tribal village in the Narmada Valley. Gowariker spent time with Arvinda and Ravi in the village before he started the project. He got to know about the couple from Bakshi's book.

*Swades* is the story of Mohan (also the pet name of Mahatma Gandhi) Bhargava, a project manager at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in the United States of America, who is working on a rainfall monitoring satellite known as the Global Precipitation Measurement (GPM).

Just before the launch of the satellite, Mohan comes to India on a vacation to look for his foster mother, Kaveri Amma (Kishori Ballal). The search takes him to Charanpur, the village where Kaveri Amma lives with two orphans, Gita (Gayatri Joshi) and her younger brother Chikku (Master Smit Sheth). Gita runs a primary school – Navjivan (Gandhi had a publication by the same name) Prathmik Pathshala on Panchayat land. Her

ambition is to get more students for the school and get it upgraded to a high school.

Before she can leave for abroad with Mohan, Kaveri wants to get Gita more students, and she asks Mohan for help. During the work, Mohan discovers that the village is badly divided along caste lines, has no electricity, no connection with the outside world, and is afflicted by poverty and illiteracy.

He learns from Gita the importance of *swabhiman*, *azadi* and *atamnirbharata* (self-respect, freedom and self-reliance) in a person's life. He draws inspiration from her ideals and principles and sets out to unite the villagers. With a team of 100 volunteers from the village, he produces electricity for the village from a stream.

At the end of his vacation, he decides to leave for America, but soon realises that he is obligated to work for the country of his origin. A line spoken by Mela Ram (Daya Shankar Pandey) just before the climax of the film, "*Apne aangan ki bhed doosre ke ghar mein phale phoole tau ghar ke armaan maati mein mil jate hain. It's like Apni Chukhat ka diya*, giving light to a neighbour's house" (If the sheep of my courtyard flourishes in someone else's house, then the wishes of my home will get ruined. It's like my lamp lighting somebody else's house) when he refuses Mohan's offer to migrate to America; and Fatima Bi (Farrukh Jaffar)'s words "*Apne hi paani me mil jaana barf ka muqqadar hota hai*" (It is the fate of ice to melt in its own water) and "*Mere aasaon ka swad mere mann ka namak hi samajhta hai*" (Only I can recognize the taste of my tears) point to the efficacy of Gandhi's *Swadeshi* principle.

Man is not omnipotent. He, therefore, serves the world best by first serving his neighbour. This is *Swadeshi*, a principle which is broken when one professes to serve those who are more remote in preference to those who are near. Observance of *Swadeshi* makes for order in the world; the breach of it leads to chaos. Following this principle, one must as far as possible, purchase one's requirements locally and not buy things imported from foreign lands, which can be easily manufactured in the country. There is no place for self-interest in *Swadeshi*, which enjoins the sacrifice of oneself for the family, of the family for the village, of the village for the country and of the country for humanity. (CWMG, 1928)<sup>127</sup>

Like Gandhi, *Swadesh* too wants all castes and communities in Charanpur to unite and work towards achieving self-reliance, education and prosperity. It promotes an inclusive society where there are no divisions of caste and religion. Gandhi insisted on building such village societies for *Swadeshi*. Thus, you have Kaveri Amma, Nivaaran (Rajesh Vivek), Panch Gangadin (Raja Awasthi), and Fatima Bi working together in the film.

Gandhi wanted all Indians, regardless of what castes and religions they profess, to abide by *Swadeshi*. He wanted even Indian Christians to adopt the spinning wheel and khadi.

I hope that the resolution (passed by All India Christian Conference) will be followed up by corresponding action and that charkha and khadi will be as popular among the Indian Christians as they have become among Hindus and Mussalmans. (CWMG, 1921-22)<sup>128</sup>

Gowarikar's *Lagaan: Once Upon a Time* (2001) uses cricket as an analogy to build up national consciousness. Like *Swades*, *Lagaan* promotes the theme of inclusion and nationalism, the two legs on which the concept of Mahatma Gandhi's *Swadeshi* stood. The films employ various tropes – khadi, etc. (the majority of villagers in both the films flaunt khadi on all major occasions) – to drive home the message.

*Lagaan* is set in the Victorian period (1893), when India was under the British Empire. It tells the story of an imaginary village Champaner, where farmers reeling under successive droughts are put in an extraordinary situation when an arrogant British officer in the Champaner cantonment, Captain Andrew Russel (Paul Blackthorne), challenges them to a cricket match to get their land tax waived.

Bhuvan (Aamir Khan), a young farmer, takes up the challenge. He tries to sell it to the villagers by likening cricket to gulli-danda, an amateur sport they all played in their childhood. But the villagers, not knowing cricket, fear they will be no match for the British cantonment officers. Moreover, they are divided along caste and communal lines.

Repelled by her brother's unfairness, Russel's sister Elizabeth (Rachel Shelley) decides to coach the villagers. Once the villagers realize that Russel had given them a fait accompli and that their win would mean freedom from the land tax for three years, one by one they decide to join Bhuvan. With his honesty and courage (*Sach aur sahas jiske man mein, jeet ant mein usi ki* – Who has truth and courage will win ultimately), Bhuvan manages to dissolve the caste and religious differences among the villagers.

In three months, Bhuvan raises an eleven consisting of Bhura (Raghubir Yadav), the poultry farmer; Guran (seamer), the fortune teller; Ismail (Raj Jutsi), the potter; Deva (Pradeep Rawat), the Sikh sepoy; Arjan (Akhilendra Mishra), the blacksmith; Goli (Daya Shankar Pandey), the man with the largest piece of land; Ishwar (Shrivallabh Vyas), the Vaidya; Bagha (Amin Hajee), the mute drummer in the local temple; Lakha (Yashpal Sharma), the woodcutter; and Kachra (Aditya Lakhia), the untouchable.

The three-day match opens with Captain Russel's team sending Bhuvan's team to field. The English team wins day one but on day two,

Kachra with his spin bowling, wrests the initiative for his team. Bhuvan's team wins the match after losing nine wickets.

Like *Swades*, *Lagaan* is full of tropes that relate it to Gandhi's *Swadeshi* dream. For instance, the entire village turns up to watch the match in white khadi, and the lines like *Chulhe se roti nikale ke liye chimte ko apna munh jalahe padi* – to extract chapatti from the fire, the tong has to burn its face), *Pancho mili tau ban gayi muthi* – the five fingers together make a fist and *Jooto ki tali chahe jitni majboot ho ghisti zaroor hai* – the sole of the shoe always wears out howsoever strong it may be emphasize self-sacrifice and the *Swadeshi* spirit to protect one's honour.

So is the case with *Karm ka dhaaga pehene ke liye ... hum dharm ka dhaaga nahi todh sakte* – In order to wear the thread of my duty ... I cannot break the thread of my religion and *Taang se kapda hatte toh poore tann ki laaj jaave hai* – When the clothes don't cover the legs then the honour of the whole body goes away.

The film blends cricket and religion to whip up feelings of nationalism.

*Lagaan* makes religion and religiosity absolutely central to the narrative.... piety is essential to complete and fulfilling life in *Lagaan*, and Gowariker builds several central moments around religion and the quest for divine intervention. Raja Puran Singh, a potentially ambiguous character because of his closeness to the British, is definitively identified as being an enlightened ruler thanks to his devoutness. Even Elizabeth is positively characterized by her eagerness to do puja (Hindu religious offering). As mentioned earlier, Ismail's devoutness is represented as central to his character's moral and, hence, physical strength. In contrast, Captain Russell is ultimately punished for his hubris. Thus, it is not a specific religion, but rather religiosity, which is central in *Lagaan*. (Lichtner & Bandyopadhyay, 2008)<sup>129</sup>

Throughout the film, particularly in its second half, the sport runs concurrently with the spirit of independence. This is what happened in reality as well. The Congress party and cricket both came into being in India in 1885.

The founding of the Indian National Congress (INC) party in 1885 came about at the same time as the establishment of cricket as a popular sport in Bombay – the first Indian team to tour England was a Parsi team in 1888. These developments occurred at a time when in England writers such as John Ruskin were proposing new ideas regarding socialism and nationalism – Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi said that Ruskin had a huge influence on his life. These “English” ideas were being publicized while the English game of cricket was being promoted at the same time and some argue that the growth of both is linked. (Crick, 2007)<sup>130</sup>



Ultimately, the reel becomes real, with cricket burying into the theme of independence. The film advocates an inclusive society, which was the bedrock of Gandhi's *Swadeshi*.

First, Ismail, a Muslim villager, joins the team late despite hostility from other players, who warn him that Bhuvan will never accept a Muslim. However, the ecumenical Bhuvan embraces Ismail, whose contribution will be crucial to the team's success. It is interesting that while Ismail may be a

“token” Muslim, he is also a very pious man, rejecting the mainly western identification between religion and fanaticism. Secondly, Sikh fast bowler Ram Singh wanders in, seeking revenge against the British in whose army he had served and, implicitly, simultaneous rehabilitation for this very act of collaboration. Third, successfully defying the mutiny of his teammates and the condemnation of the village elders, Bhuvan recruits an unknowingly talented spin bowler, the Dalit Kachra. As these examples show, Lagaan argues strongly for an inclusive Indian society that embraces its minorities and breaks the limiting shackles of class and caste for its own collective good and well-being. (Lichtner & Bandyopadhyay, 2008)<sup>131</sup>

The film is a “reinterpretation of the origins and motivations of Indian nationalism and independence” (Lichtner & Bandyopadhyay, 2008).<sup>132</sup> It also discovers *Swadeshi* and non-violence in a historical period before Gandhi made them popular as instruments of popular protest in India.

This is demonstrated in the film by the crowds of people descending from the hills to watch the cricket match wearing white cotton garments clearly reminiscent of khadi — the white hand-spun cotton cloth that became the unofficial uniform for volunteers in Gandhi's non-violent movements several decades later. (Lichtner & Bandyopadhyay, 2008)<sup>133</sup>

*Lagaan* also suffers from inconsistencies, however, when it comes to portraying Mahatma Gandhi's principles. Gandhi, for example, would have never approved of Guran snarling, clenching his teeth and growling under his breath “*Aa firangi aa*” (Come on foreigner) or exhorting his team “*Dhajjiyan uda do firangiyan ki...Udda do dhajjiyan*” (Crush the foreigners.... Crush). These sentiments were obviously meant for the masses. No wonder they were hailed with claps, catcalls and whistles in theatres across the country.

#### d) Untouchability

Arguably, Mahatma Gandhi flogged no other subject in his life the way he flogged untouchability. Although he read Manu Samriti early in his life

and believed in the division of work recommended for different castes under the Varnashram dharma in a limited way, he found it revolting since childhood how caste Hindus treated the untouchables. When he was a child, a *mehtar* (sweeper) called Oka scavenged in his town. Every time Gandhi touched Uka, his mother Putlibai made him take a bath. Twelve-year-old Mohan was unconvinced about the practice and argued with his mother,

Uka serves us by cleaning dirt and filth, how can his touch pollute me? I shall not disobey you, but the Ramayana says that Rama embraced Guhaka, a *chandal* (a caste considered untouchable). The Ramayana cannot mislead us. (Navajivan, 1925)<sup>134</sup>

He said this was the beginning of his revolt against untouchability.

My mother said, “You must not touch this boy, he is an untouchable”. (Harijan, 1933)<sup>135</sup>

“Why not?” I questioned back, and from that day my revolt began. (CWMG, 1932)<sup>136</sup>

During his stay first in England and then in South Africa, Gandhi could never bring himself to accept the sordid practice of untouchability. Despite his Christian friends having tried to sell Christianity to him as a perfect religion, he was never convinced. But at the same time, he had grave doubts about Hinduism being the greatest religion on account of the practice of untouchability in it.

If I could not accept Christianity either as a perfect, or the greatest religion, neither was I then convinced of Hinduism being such. Hindu defects were pressingly visible to me. If untouchability could be a part of Hinduism, it could but be a rotten part or an excrescence. I could not understand the *raison d’etre* of a multitude of sects and castes. (Gandhi, 2012)<sup>137</sup>

Gandhi believed it was incumbent on caste Hindus to eradicate untouchability and suffer for what they had done to the oppressed community in the past, and there was no need for Christians to participate in the Vaikom *Satyagraha*. He believed untouchability was the “greatest blot on Hinduism” as it was “against the fundamentals of humanity” and declared “I would far rather that Hinduism died than that untouchability lived” (Harijan, 1933).<sup>138</sup>

The Mahatma was against the exclusive employment of untouchables in manual scavenging and insisted on everybody in his ashrams Tolstoy and Phoenix and later in Ahmedabad cleaning their own chamber pots. He even forced his wife Kasturba to clean the chamber pots of others in South Africa.

When I was practicing in Durban, my office clerks often stayed with me, and there were among them Hindus and Christians, or to describe them by their provinces, Gujaratis and Tamilians.... One of the clerks was a Christian, born of Panchama parents. The house was built after the Western model and the rooms rightly had no outlets for dirty water. Each room had therefore chamber pots. Rather than have these cleaned by a servant or a sweeper, my wife or I attended to them. The clerks who made themselves completely at home would naturally clean their own pots, but the Christian clerk was a newcomer, and it was our duty to attend to his bedroom. My wife managed the pots of the others, but to clean those used by one who had been a Panchama seemed to her to be the limit, and we fell out. She could not bear the pots being cleaned by me, neither did she like doing it herself. Even today I can recall the picture of her chiding me, her eyes red with anger, and pearl drops streaming down her cheeks, as she descended the ladder, pot in hand. But I was a cruelly kind husband. I regarded myself as her teacher, and so harassed her out of my blind love for her.

I was far from being satisfied by her merely carrying the pot. I would have her do it cheerfully. So I said, raising my voice: "I will not stand this nonsense in my house". The words pierced her like an arrow. She shouted back: "Keep your house to yourself and let me go". I forgot myself, and the spring of compassion dried up in me. I caught her by the hand, dragged the helpless woman to the gate, which was just opposite the ladder, and proceeded to open it with the intention of pushing her out. The tears were running down her cheeks in torrents, and she cried: "Have you no sense of shame? Must you so far forget yourself? Where am I to go? I have no parents or relatives here to harbour me. Being your wife, you think I must put up with your cuffs and kicks? For heaven's sake, behave yourself, and shut the gate. Let us not be found making scenes like this!" (Gandhi, 2012)<sup>139</sup>

Gandhi would have preferred to work for the eradication of untouchability than living with his wife if he were asked to make a choice between the two.

I was wedded to the work for the extinction of "untouchability" long before I was wedded to my wife. There were two occasions in our joint life when there was a choice between working for the untouchables and remaining with my wife and I would have preferred the first. But thanks to my good wife, the crisis was averted. (YI, 1931)<sup>140</sup>

Though a believer in Varnavyavastha (the caste system), Gandhi was not afraid of amending his views if he felt there was a need for it. He rejected the idea of people sticking to their vocations as prescribed under the caste system and supported the change of vocation.

“Although Gandhi accepted the *varna* was based on birth, he admitted that it was possible for people to find a new vocation, and to actually perform the duties of different *varna* from their own” (Jordan, 1998).<sup>141</sup> Jordan recalls in her book that in 1921, Gandhi congratulated two Brahmin brothers in Tanjore who took up agriculture after having been dissatisfied with their ‘lazy life’. After the brothers were excommunicated by their village and Shankaracharya of Kumbakonam rejected their offerings, Gandhi called this tyrannical and asked, “To say that a Brahmin should not touch the plough is a parody of *varnashrama* and prostitution of the meaning of the Bhagavad Gita. . . . Is bravery the prerogative only of the Kshatriya and restraint only of the Brahmin?” (CWMG, 1924-25)<sup>142</sup>

Likewise, Gandhi also toned down his opinion on inter-dining and inter-marriages after defending them initially. He explained that he never made a fetish of consistency.

I am a votary of Truth and I must say what I feel and think at a given moment on the question, without regard to what I may have said before on it. . . . As my vision gets clearer, my views must grow clearer with daily practice. Where I have deliberately altered an opinion, the change should be obvious, only, a careful eye would notice a gradual and imperceptible evolution. (Harijan, 1934)<sup>143</sup>

After his return to India from South Africa in January 1915, Gandhi launched a formal crusade for the eradication of untouchability. Henceforth, he spoke in almost every other meeting about the issue and made the deliverance of untouchables a precondition for Swaraj.

Swaraj is a meaningless term, if we desire to keep a fifth of India under perpetual subjection, and deliberately deny to them the fruits of national culture. We are seeking the aid of God in this great purifying movement, but we deny to the most deserving among his creatures the rights of humanity. Inhuman ourselves, we may not plead before the Throne for deliverance from the inhumanity of others. (YI, 1921)<sup>144</sup>

In May 1915, he allowed an untouchable family into his ashram and kept it there, disregarding protests from upper caste well-owners.

The so-called untouchables have an equal place in the ashram with other classes. The ashram does not believe in caste which, it considers, has injured Hinduism, because its implications of superior and inferior status, and of pollution by contact are contrary to the law of Love. (CWMG, 1928)<sup>145</sup>

He defended *varnashrama*, considered all castes equal and was of the view that untouchability was a product of the high and low distinction in the

caste system. He made it his mission to purify Hinduism of the scourge of untouchability.

For reforms of Hinduism and for its real protection, removal of untouchability is the greatest thing. (YI, 1927)<sup>146</sup>

He drew a parallel between the institution of war in Christianity and untouchability in Hinduism.

If the institution of war, in spite of its being contrary to the spirit of the Christian teaching, may be a blot upon Christianity because war is universal in Christendom, untouchability may safely be regarded as a blot upon Hinduism in spite of the contention of a growing number of Hindus that untouchability has no place in true Hinduism. If the expression pains some Hindus, it is not a healthy sign. When it pains the majority of Hindus and they repudiate the charge, there will be no occasion to repeat it. (YI, 1928)<sup>147</sup>

The term ‘Harijan’ (God’s chosen ones) for outcastes was suggested to Gandhi by an untouchable from the writings of Narasimha Mehta, a 14th-century Gujarati poet. Subsequently in 1933, the Mahatma renamed his weekly newspaper Young India, *Harijan*.

Gandhi called untouchability a sin and told Hindus to “non-cooperate with the devil of untouchability. I give you my assurance that that devil is created for our own destruction” (CWMG, 1927-28).<sup>148</sup> He did not flinch from chiding his fellow satyagrahis or followers who believed in following the caste rituals or believed that Gandhi did not preach purity for the untouchables.

On March 19, 1926, he wrote to Rameshwardas Poddar, one of his associates,

“It is very sinful to regard anyone as untouchable by birth. He who has faith in his heart and is pure in the body – what is the harm in his entering a temple? You should clear yourself of the blemish of untouchability. It is not proper for you to uphold untouchability” (CWMG, 1926)<sup>149</sup>. A fortnight later, he wrote to P Govindan Kutti Menon, another of his associates, “You are misinformed in thinking that purity amongst the untouchables and unapproachables is not preached. Not only is it preached but it is practiced”. (CWMG, 1926)<sup>150</sup>

Earlier he had told another of his colleagues not to confuse untouchability with the position of women in society.

I wish your pronouncement against untouchability was more precise and uncompromising. I am not concerned with its origin. I have no manner of

doubt that the higher orders are entirely responsible for perpetuating the sin. It is unfortunate, too, that you have likened the untouchability of women and others on certain occasions with the permanent untouchability under every circumstance of the suppressed classes and their descendants. Nor am I enamoured of the method you have suggested for the amelioration of the condition of these classes. (CWMG, 1922-24)<sup>151</sup>

In 1932 Gandhi began his first fast for the removal of untouchability in Yerwada Jail, Poona, demanding the entry of untouchables on public roads, public schools, public wells, temples, and other public institutions. He constantly visited and lived among castes like Dedhs, Bhangis, Chandals, and Ezhavas, ranked the lowest among the untouchables. He lived for several months in a bhangi (sweeper) colony in New Delhi.

Gandhi blamed caste Hindus for the spread of casteism in other religions like Christianity.

I knew nothing till Mr. Andrews told me that untouchability was practiced even by Syrian Christians of Malabar. As a Hindu, I hung my head in shame when I heard the news. For I realized that the evil was copied by them from Hindus. (CWMG, 1922-24)<sup>152</sup>

The Mahatma considered it penance for the caste Hindus to remove untouchability. Under his leadership, Congress passed a resolution at its Nagpur session in 1920 against untouchability. He believed Indians could not seek parity with the British and demand swaraj until they practiced untouchability and maintained hygiene and cleanliness.

The question of Dheds and Bhangis is intimately connected with this matter. If we continue to harass them and regard them as untouchables, with what face can we demand equality with British? It is necessary that we understand this before talking of equality. (CWMG, 1922-24)<sup>153</sup>

Gandhi called himself the lowest among the untouchables and even wished that he should be reborn in his next life as an untouchable.

If I have to be reborn, I should be born untouchable, so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings, and the affronts levelled at them, in order that I may endeavour to free myself and them from that miserable condition. I, therefore, prayed that, if I should be born again, I should do so not as a Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya or Shudra, but as an Atishudra. (YI, 1921)<sup>154</sup>

He was sure the Hindu society was on the verge of getting rid of the catastrophe called untouchability.

Untouchability is slowly but surely dying. (CWMG, 1926)<sup>155</sup>

An important stage of Mahatma Gandhi's campaign against untouchability was his participation in the Vaikom *Satyagraha* (1924–1925), which took place in Vaikom near Kottayam to gain the right of the untouchables to use the roads around the Shiva temple. The *Satyagraha* was successful to a great extent, firstly because many *swarana* Hindus, Christians, Muslims, and even Sikhs rallied behind the *avarnas* (untouchables) in their demand for the freedom to use roads, though Gandhi wanted the issue to be settled only amongst the Hindus. Secondly, Gandhi's Indian National Congress got the opportunity to register its presence in Kerala.

As to Vaikom, I think you shall let the Hindus do the work. It is they who have to purify themselves. You can help by your sympathy and your pen, but not by organizing the movement and certainly not be offering *Satyagraha*. If you refer to the Congress resolution of Nagpur, it calls upon the Hindu members to remove the curse of untouchability. Untouchability is the sin of the Hindus. They must suffer for it, they must pay the debt they owe to their suppressed brothers and sisters. Theirs is the shame and theirs must be the glory when they have purged themselves of the black sin.... The silent, loving suffering of one single pure Hindu as such will be enough to melt the hearts of millions of Hindus; but the sufferings of thousands of non-Hindus on behalf of the untouchables will leave the Hindus unmoved. (CWMG, 1922-24)<sup>156</sup>

There was also the issue of the *Antyaja* (untouchable) children's entry into public schools. The Mahatma faced the problem at the National School at Vile Parle after teachers of the school and many members of the school committee expressed a desire to admit *Antyaja* children. When the proposal still faced opposition within the school, Gandhi advised the formation of a separate school for such children but he was against the replication of the solution at other places as this could increase the gulf between the caste Hindus and the untouchables.

Managers of certain schools in Gujarat interpret it (Vile Parle suggestion) to mean that, whenever there are national schools, separate institutions should be opened for *Antyajas*. If their suggestion is acted upon, I believe both types of schools will be doomed, mainly because we cannot afford the necessary expenditure. Moreover, once we relax a principle, it will be undermined altogether the blot of untouchability will remain. The advice given in special circumstances in Vile Parle cannot be followed elsewhere. (CWMG, 1922-24)<sup>157</sup>

Gandhi published the names of Antyaja donors in *Navajivan* so the illiterate donors could be sure that their contributions had reached him. Also, he wanted to use the contributions received from Harijans for their welfare alone.

The direct objective of this activity (collection of funds) is to wipe out untouchability, which involves 50 million people. This is such a great corroding factor in Hinduism that it has penetrated into other fields as well and untouchability has become a widespread thing. (CWMG, 1934)<sup>158</sup>

The Mahatma was against untouchables converting to other religions to avoid the curse of untouchability in Hinduism. He also condemned evangelists from other religions luring untouchables in their fold.

It undoubtedly grieved me when some of the Depressed Classes felt in disgust towards Hinduism like going out of Hinduism and embracing some other faith. It was a matter of equal grief to me to hear of efforts made by people belonging to different faiths to catch, as it were, the Depressed Classes and remove them from the faith to which they have belonged for centuries. (CWMG, 1936–937)<sup>159</sup>

He objected to people from other religions talking approvingly about untouchability in Hinduism. When a group of Parsis met him and said that the distinctions of high and low had always existed and that he should not pursue the campaign against untouchability, he asked,

“Since when have you become such Vedantists?” He felt the Parsis’ approval was a sign that “the evil that is going on in the name of Hindu religion has penetrated all religions. The same religions prevailing outside India may not have even the slightest tinge of it; but it has definitely entered those religions as soon as they landed in India.” (CWMG, 1934)<sup>160</sup>

In this chapter, the author analyses films like *Achhut Kanya* (1936), *Sujata* (1959), *Ankur – The Seedling* (1973), *Jaag Utha Insaan* (1984), and *Shudra – The Rising* (2012), which deal with various aspects of untouchability.

*Achhut Kanya*, one of the early superhits from Bombay Talkies and Himanshu Rai, is the story of Kasturi (Devika Rani), who sacrifices her life to save her lover Pratap (Ashok Kumar) and husband Mannu (Anwar) from an oncoming train. Based on Niranjan Pal’s story *The Level Crossing*, *Achhut Kanya* impressed Congress leader Sarojini Naidu so much that she even brought Jawaharlal Nehru to the Roxy Cinema in Bombay to see it (Baghdadi & Rao, 1995).<sup>161</sup>



The film was one of the first social dramas Bollywood produced in the decade before independence yet Rai could not convince Gandhi, the biggest proponent against untouchability, to see it.

Himanshu Rai tried, unsuccessfully, to get Mahatma Gandhi to see it. Nehru saw it at a special screening in Bombay in the company of Sarojini Naidu, who, the story goes, slept through most of it. The film started a trend of making socially committed films. (Patel, 2016)<sup>162</sup>

Kasturi, an untouchable girl, is in love with Pratap, son of a Brahmin. Despite the parents of the two, Dukhiya and Mohan Lal, being very good friends and being aware of the feelings of their wards for each other, they cannot think of violating the caste firmament. Mohan Lal is even prepared to route the dowry received in Pratap's marriage with Meera (Manorama), a Brahmin girl, for Kasturi's wedding. The two friends suffer greatly when Babu Lal Sharma, a wily Vaid in the village, instigates an attack on Mohan Lal after the latter moves his ailing friend to his house. Sharma, in the company of a pandit and others, beat Mohan Lal and set his house and shop on fire. Dukhiya loses his job as a railway crossing guard when he redflags a train to seek medical help for the injured Mohan Lal.

Kasturi, trained by her father to keep in mind on her caste differences with Pratap, accepts her fate and extends the hand of friendship to Meera on the day of the wedding. Dukhiya marries her off to Mannu, a boy who gets the job at the railway crossing in his place. Mannu's first wife Kajari (Pramila), in league with Meera, conspires to pit Mannu against Pratap. They abandon Kasturi at a neighbouring village fair where Pratap has set up a shop, knowing fully well that she will have no option but to return in Pratap's bullock cart. They tell Mannu that Pratap and Kasturi, old lovers, were out to betray him. Mannu attacks Pratap at the railway crossing and Kasturi gets run over by a train when she tries to save them.

*Achhut Kanya's* story reflects the great influence of Gandhi. The Mahatma was a votary of friendship between the caste Hindus and untouchables, yet he found it hard to accept inter-caste marriages or inter-dining for a major part of his life, even his youngest son Devdas' marriage to a girl from another caste.

In 1927, when Devdas, his son, fell in love with Lakshmi, daughter of Rajgopalachari, Gandhi was in a fix, for how could the son of a Bania marry the daughter of a Brahmin? Gandhi bided for time and he, and Rajagopalachari, asked the couple to wait for five years before making up their minds finally. Then, after five years, on 4 November 1932, Gandhi wrote, "Restriction on inter-dining and inter-caste marriage is no part of the Hindu religion. It crept into Hinduism when perhaps it was in its decline...."

Today these two prohibitions are weakening Hindu society". So, the hurdle that stood in the way of the marriage of Devdas and Lakshmi was removed, and in June 1933 they were happily married at Poona in the presence of their distinguished father. (Ghose, 1991)<sup>163</sup>

Further evolution in Gandhi's views led him to write in an article titled "Caste has to go" in *Harijan* on 16 November 1935,

The present caste system is the very antithesis of Varnashram. The sooner public opinion abolishes it, the better. In Varnashram there was and there should be no prohibition of inter-marriage or inter-dining. (Ghose, 1991)<sup>164</sup>

However, earlier, in 1920, Gandhi had said,

Hinduism does most emphatically discourage inter-dining and inter-marriage.... Prohibition against inter-marriage and inter-dining is essential for the rapid development of the soul. (Ghose, 1991)<sup>165</sup>

In 1946, two years before his assassination, he further modified his position when he

informed the public that he has told boys and girls at Sevagram Ashram that they cannot be married.... unless one of the parties is a Harijan (Ghose, 1991).<sup>166</sup> A year and eight months later, he went out to say, "If untouchability lives, Hinduism must die". (H, 1947)<sup>167</sup>

Gandhi did the same on the issue of Varnashram. While initially he insisted on people following their hereditary occupations, there being no high and low among the occupations, later he did not oppose a change of vocations.

I consider the four divisions alone to be fundamental, natural and essential. The innumerable sub castes are sometimes a convenience, often a hindrance. The sooner there is fusion, the better. (YI, 1920)<sup>168</sup>

Then, over 15 years later, he said something to the contrary.

Today Brahmins and Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras are mere labels. There is utter confusion of varna as I understand it and I wish that all the Hindus will voluntarily call themselves Shudras. That is the only way to demonstrate the truth of Brahminism and to revive Varnadharma in its true state. (Harijan, 1933)<sup>169</sup>

The impact of Gandhi's transformation on inter-marriages is more than visible in Bimal Roy's film *Sujata* (1959). The film, based on the Bengali

short story of the same name by writer Subodh Ghosh (Chatterjee, 2003)<sup>170</sup>, tells the story of an untouchable orphan girl, *Sujata*, whose parents (Buddhan, a trolley puller, and his wife) succumb to typhoid when she is only a few months old. She is brought up by a Brahmin engineer Upendranath Choudhary (Tarun Bose) and his wife Charu Choudhary (Sulochana Latkar) along with their daughter Rama (Shashikala). Although Upen is quite fond of *Sujata*, his wife cannot fully accept her because she is an untouchable.

The couple made an attempt to get rid of her but the sight of the drunk untouchable who turned up to receive her repelled them. A strong bond develops between the two girls, but while Rama is recognized as a daughter, *Sujata* is always referred to by Charu as “daughter-like”. The couple looks at Adhir (Sunil Dutt), son of a Giribala, an aunt of the Brahmin couple, as their would-be son-in-law, but Adhir develops a liking for *Sujata*. When Charu falls from the stairs, she is rushed to hospital. She needs blood, and only *Sujata*’s blood matches her blood group. After *Sujata* saves her by donating blood, Charu realizes her mistake, accepts *Sujata* as her daughter and marries her off to Adhir.

The evolution of Charu is reminiscent of Mahatma Gandhi, whose views on Varnashram, inter-marriages and inter-dining went through a metamorphosis between 1926 and 1947. So much so that he once advised his followers to destroy all his writings with his body to avoid being misunderstood and mistaken by posterity. Mark Lindley, citing a couple of sources in his article published in Hacettepe University’s *Social Science Journal* (Vol. 1, 2002), states that

Toward the end of his life, Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) said that he had, many times, found himself in the wrong and therefore changed his mind (Gora, 1951)<sup>171</sup> and that his writings should be destroyed along with his body when it was cremated, because there was a risk that people would conform mistakenly to something he had written. (Harijan, 1937)<sup>172</sup>

Until the mid-1920s, Gandhi was a big supporter of the caste system, particularly the four varnas, and even attributed the integration of Hindu religion to this.

One of my correspondents suggests that we should abolish the caste but adopt the class system of Europe – meaning thereby I suppose that the idea of heredity in caste should be rejected. I am inclined to think that the law of heredity is an eternal law and any attempt to alter that law must lead, as it has before led, to utter confusion. I can see very great use in considering a Brahmin to be always a Brahmin throughout his life. If he does not behave himself like a Brahmin, he will naturally cease to command the respect that

is due to the real Brahmin. It is easy to imagine the innumerable difficulties if one were to set up a court of punishments and rewards, degradation and promotion. If Hindu believe, as they must believe in reincarnation, transmigration, they must know that nature will, without any possibility of mistake, adjust the balance by degrading a Brahmin, if he misbehaves himself, by reincarnating him in a lower division, and translating one who lives the life of a Brahmin in his present incarnation to Brahmin-hood in his next. (YI, Gandhi)<sup>173</sup>

The spirit behind caste is not one of arrogant superiority; it is the classification of different systems of self-culture. It is the best possible adjustment of social stability and progress. Just as the spirit of the family is inclusive of those who love each other and are wedded to each other by ties of blood and relation, caste also tries to include families of a particular way of purity of life (Not standard of life, meaning by this term economic standard of life). (YI, 1920)<sup>174</sup>

Hereditary principle is an eternal principle. To change it is to create disorder...It will be chaos if every Brahmin is to be changed into a Shudra and a Shudra is to be changed into a Brahmin. The caste system is a natural order of society.... I am opposed to all those who are out to destroy the caste system. (BAWS, 1991)<sup>175</sup>

Until the late 1920s, Gandhi advised anti-untouchability campaigners not to mix the issue up with inter-dining and inter-marriage. He believed this could obstruct the penance the Hindu castes had to go through to end the scourge.

The conduct of the person who objects to physical contact as such with another person or looks upon someone as untouchable, merely because he is born in a certain community, violates Nature's law, is repugnant to the spirit of compassion and to Shastra in the true sense of the word. To mix up the efforts being made to end this sinful practice with inter-dining and intermarriage is to obstruct the progress of the atonement which it is essential for us to go through. (CWMG, 1922-24)<sup>176</sup>

Gandhi prevented his son Manilal from marrying Fatima, a Muslim girl, when Manilal was in South Africa in 1926.

Gandhi at that time was opposed not only to inter-religious but even to inter-caste marriages. So, he objected and wrote to Manilal, "If you stick to Hinduism and Fatima to Islam it would be like putting two swords in one sheath. And, what would be your children's faith?" Manilal was dissuaded from marrying Fatima. A year later, in April 1927, Manilal, then thirty-five, married a Hindu girl in the presence of Gandhi. But later Gandhi changed his views and he approved of Humayun Kabir, a Muslim intellectual who

subsequently became a central minister, marrying a Hindu girl and B K Nehru marrying a Hungarian Jewess. (Ghose, 1991)<sup>177</sup>

Manilal returned to India, and in 1945 and 1946 stayed with his father. He also found his father changed, not just in his views but also in his behaviour towards young people. He told Gandhi, “Bapu.... You made us do laundry work and chop wood...made us take the pick and shovel in the bitterly cold mornings and dig in the garden, to cook and to walk miles. And I am surprised to see how you now pamper these people around you”. Bapu would laugh and say, “Well, children, are you listening to what Manilal is saying?”

K Viswanath’s *Jaag Utha Insaan* (1984), a remake of *Saptapadi* (1981), his film in Telugu, is the tragic love story of Hari Mohan (Mithun Chakraborty), an untouchable flute player, and Sandhya (Sridevi), the granddaughter of a village temple’s head priest. Sandhya goes to perform at the temple where her maternal grandfather is the head priest along with Hari Mohan. Here her grandfather marries her off to Nandu (Rakesh Roshan), his adopted grandson. Hari Mohan accepts the marriage and returns to his place.

On their wedding night, Nandu sees a goddess in Sandhya and decides to spend the night under a tree in the temple complex. When this continues for a few nights, people in the village start talking about it. Sandhya confronts Nandu and asks him to accept her as his wife. Nandu explains his predicament, saying that though the two were bound in marriage by the pandit’s chants, mantras and seven pheras, Sandhya had taken an eighth phera, the bond of hearts, with someone else. When his grandfather opposes Hari Mohan on the grounds that he was untouchable, Nandu tells him that everybody is born Shudra (untouchable) and becomes Brahmin only by Karma.

Nandu succeeds in convincing the head priest. Hari gets to know about the development and reaches the temple complex. The head priest’s son, Ram Narain Chaturvedi, and other villagers oppose the alliance. They attack Hari Mohan. Hari Mohan and Sandhya die.

The best thing about *Jaag Utha Insaan* is that it turns a traditional belief (people are born into castes) on its head to say that all men are born Shudras and one becomes a Brahmin only by *sanskar*. It also emphasizes the eighth phera, which stands for the union of two hearts. “Who is not untouchable? *Brahmin sanskar se bante hain* (karma makes a person Brahmin)”, asks Nandu, insisting on sending Sandhya to be with Hari Mohan (the untouchable)

Gandhi wanted all caste Hindus to become *Bhangis* to eradicate untouchability.

I have shown the easiest way to save Hinduism and that is we should all become *Bhangis* voluntarily. For a Bhangi can have knowledge, valour and business acumen, while the spirit of service will always be there. (CWMG, 1946)<sup>178</sup>

*Jaag Utha Insaan*, like other films by K Viswanath, also seeks to submerge caste and other orthodox practices into music and dance. After all, the anklet and flute, as Hari Mohan points out, have no caste. Like *Saptapadi*, *Jaag Utha Insaan*

aims to achieve two major outcomes; one is to tacitly bring out the meaning and uniqueness of the ancient traditions that are misunderstood/rubbished by the present generation of the youth guided by the advances of western societies and their lifestyles; second is to show the hurdles in pursuing the ancient line of thinking in changes times. (Murthy, 2014)<sup>179</sup>

Murthy claims Viswanath's films use the Gandhian model of using tradition to unite people and eliminate social barriers such as caste and economic disparities. Gandhi, he asserts, combined traditional symbols like mythology (Ramayana, Bhagavad Gita and Mahabharata), religion and bhajans, bhakti (devotion), and the spinning wheel with truth, non-violence and *Satyagraha* during the Indian freedom movement while Viswanath's "social model" involves art forms such as music, song and dance styles to remove

"deep-rooted economic and caste disparities in Indian society". The filmmaker uses the backdrop of religion to challenge the prevalent beliefs. Like Gandhi, for Viswanath too Indian spirituality/philosophy has been "central to his ideology and strategy in relation to the elimination of casteism". (Murthy, 2014)<sup>180</sup>

Gandhi preferred to ascribe "spiritual" value to the term "caste" and described the scheduled castes as "Harijans" (sons of God-Lord Vishnu) and tribes as "Girijans" (sons of Hills). (Murthy, 2014)<sup>181</sup>

*Jaag Utha Insaan* obliquely criticized Mahatma Gandhi too. Gandhi, it is to be noted, was against untouchables stealing the surnames and practices of caste Hindus the way Hari Mohan does in the film when he wears a thread across his chest to attend the music classes of a guru. When he was asked about the practice of Harijans adopting caste surnames like Nambudri, Nambiar, etc., Gandhi said,

I know the practice. It is not new. I dislike it. Harijans do not want to steal into the so-called *savarna* society. The latter has openly to admit them as blood-brothers and sisters. (CWMG, 1934). For him, the movement against untouchability was “one of self-purification, penance and the reparation by *savarna* Hindus”. (CWMG, 1934)<sup>182</sup>

Gandhi considered all castes equal.

I need say no more about caste beyond this that, in so far as abolition of distinctions of high and low are concerned, there is but one caste. We are all children of one and the same God and, therefore, absolutely equal. (CWMG, 1934)<sup>183</sup>

Shyam Benegal’s *Ankur-The Seedling* invokes various symbols to show how lower castes are rebelling against the oppression of landlords and the Brahmanical order. The film tells the story of Lakshmi (Shabana Azmi), a married lower-caste woman who, along with her deaf and dumb husband, Kishtaya, works on the farm of a landlord. The landlord’s son Surya (Anant Nag) traps her in a sexual relationship after Kishtaya absconds after being caught stealing toddy. The relationship is considered a breach of the caste system. When Surya’s wife, Saroj, who he had married in childhood, finds out, Surya turns her out of his farm. The pregnant Lakshmi refuses to abort her child, and then Kishtaya returns and accepts his wife’s pregnancy

One fine day he decides to approach Surya for work on the farm. When Surya sees Kishtaya approaching his farm with a staff, he suspects that he is coming to beat him up for exploiting his wife. He flogs Kishtaya severely. Lakshmi rescues her husband and, for first time, confronts and curses Surya, who rushes into his residence and cries behind the door after realizing his mistake. A young child, who was releasing thread for Surya’s kite a short while back, throws a stone at his window shattering the glass panes.

The last scene of the film is symbolic of the disquiet brewing against the caste structure. Benegal makes a statement against the oppression of women and lower castes by the high castes and landlords throughout it. People in the village are revolted when they find that Surya eats food cooked by Lakshmi, a lower caste. “He eats food cooked by her. Does caste have no meaning?” the villagers can be heard asking

Lakshmi too warns Surya about having tea brewed by her. “Will you have tea from my hands? We are potters. The priest (Surya’s father fetches food from his house) will get angry”. Another scene which points towards caste oppression is when Kishtaya is caught stealing toddy; his head is tansured and he is paraded through the village on a donkey.

The village panchayat, called to discuss the case of a lower-caste married woman who elopes with another man, feels it is the duty of

everybody in the household to take care of a woman. “A woman does not belong to her husband alone. She belongs to the family (her in-laws) and the caste as well”.

The film is a scathing commentary on the unjust social order that places all the lower castes at the disposal of an upper-caste landlord. Moreover, it gives voice to the discontent building up in the deprived sections. When landlord Surya asks Lakshmi to abort the child to escape shame, she retorts, “Must I alone feel the shame?”

On the surface, it is yet another landlord-mistress tale. However, the essence comes when one goes beyond the surface. Then it becomes an indictment of the socio-economic order. Without ever resorting to polemics, Benegal talks of social inequities, a world where the village landlord with nothing more than a high school certificate is “mai-baap”, a city boy who has the entire village at his service: masseur and maid, barber and priest all minister to his needs and whims. At one time the zamindar looked after his mistress, giving her some cash, some crops and a plot of land. Not so anymore. (Salam, 2012)<sup>184</sup>

Rachel Dwyer lauds the film for laying bare the caste inequities and not being reticent in naming the castes.

“Parallel” or “middle” cinema, a more realist form, mentions caste overtly in films such as Shyam Benegal’s *Ankur/The Seedling* (1974) ... . (Dwyer, 2014)<sup>185</sup>

Benegal got the idea of making *Ankur* from something he witnessed during his teenage years. In an interview, he said,

There was this little farmhouse not far from where we lived and it was the story of one of the chaps who was a friend of mine. He was sent off by his father to look after the farm with a certain amount of city education. And so I saw it as a very interesting situation, with the father very feudal, while the boy is more part of the middle class. (Cross, 2010)<sup>186</sup>

Cross says *Ankur*’s narrative

reveals Benegal’s life-long embrace of the liberal humanistic ideology of India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru’s grand project to create an independent India that would be secular, equal and modern included social reforms aimed at protecting the rights of untouchables and women, technological initiatives aimed at creating a modern infrastructure, and educational and cultural drives intended to nurture the rising generation. (Cross, 2010)<sup>187</sup>



Like Gandhi, Nehru was no fan of film *per se*; nevertheless, he was quick to perceive that the potential educational value of a “better” kind of cinema could be harnessed to his grand project of modernizing and unifying the young democracy. (Cross, 2010)<sup>188</sup>

Cross is of the view that the protagonist of *Ankur* is the untouchable peasant woman Lakshmi, and the story is the drama of her self-empowerment in the face of feudal patriarchal oppression.

Gandhi considered untouchables better than caste Hindus because the former did not retaliate to either atrocities by the latter or violence from the Muslims during communal riots. He lauded them for not responding to the communal violence perpetrated on Hindus by Muslims in Noakhali (Chittagong division of Bengal) less than a year before India’s partition.

The Harijans, the *Namashudras*, have been relatively better as far as courage and physical prowess is concerned. There are brave. But the other Hindus must shed utterly the caste distinctions. If this calamity (Noakhali riot) would open the eyes of the Hindus and result in eradicating untouchability root and branch, it will have served a good purpose. (CWMG, 1946–1947)<sup>189</sup>

*Shudra: The Rising (2012)* is an extremely disturbing film as it depicts the sordid practice of untouchables being made to carry spittoons around their necks and brooms behind their back to clean their footsteps. The despicable practice was in vogue in certain parts of Maharashtra during the rule of Peshwas, who ruled after Shivaji.

Directed by Sanjiv Jaiswal, the film faced stiff opposition from rigid Hindu groups. It claims that Aryans came from Western Asia and imprisoned the local residents. Subsequently, the imprisoned residents were called *Shudra*. They carried spittoons, tied brooms behind their backs and were denied entry into temples and ponds. The Hindu castes believed that seeing *Shudras* in the early morning brought bad luck.

Set in ancient times, when society was divided into four castes – *Shudras* being the lowest – the film depicts the exploitation and oppression of three *Shudra* youths at the hands of Brahmins and Kshatriyas. There is Charna (Pravin Baby), whose pregnant wife Sandhli (Kiran Sharad) is sexually assaulted by Thakur (Shaji Chaudhary) after he gets his cronies to kidnap her. The cronies beat Charna up so severely when he opposes the abduction that he passes away. There is Badri (Shridhar Dubey), who loses his ailing father to thirst because the upper castes do not let him draw water from their pond; and Bheru (Mahesh Balraj), whose son Channa’s tongue is cut out on the orders of the pandit because he did not like the child reciting *Om Namah Shivay*.

One day, the victims decide to rise in revolt and kill Thakur's son. In retaliation, Thakur sets the entire settlement of untouchables on fire, killing most of them. Thakur also loses some of his men in the counterattack by the *Shudras*. With the feel of a documentary due to its realistic settings, costumes and houses, etc., *Shudra: The Rising* makes a profound statement against untouchability by showing the most inhumane of practices prevalent in Hindu society in ancient times. It exposes the attitude of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas, who considered the Shudras dirty and impure. This is what Mahatma Gandhi fought against.

The argument that the untouchables are dirty in their ways and follow some unclean occupation is, to my mind, the result of ignorance. There are others dirtier than the untouchables, yet they draw water from the public wells. A nursing mother does unclean work, and so does a doctor, but we honour both. If it is said that they wash themselves after they have done their work, so do untouchables before they go to a well to fetch water.... It is our sacred duty to help them to shake off the defects which have grown upon them owing to our negligence and our tyranny. To refuse to do this and yet to hope for India's freedom is like turning one's back towards the sun and yet hoping to get a glimpse of it. (CWMG, 1922-24)<sup>190</sup>

Calling untouchability a hydra-headed monster, Gandhi asked Hindus not to follow their shastras blindly if they propagated it.

It is irrelevant for us to be told that Adi-Shankara avoided a Chandala. It is enough for us to know that a religion that teaches us to treat all that lives as we treat ourselves cannot possibly countenance the inhuman treatment of a single caste, let alone a whole class of perfectly innocent human beings. (CWMG, 1926)<sup>191</sup>

He found no reason to continue with a practice established by the Aryans, and even condemned the latter for initiating something patently wrong.

If the untouchables are the outcastes of the Aryan society, so much the worse for that society. And if the Aryans at some stage in their progress regarded a certain class of people as outcastes by way of punishment, there is no reason why that punishment should descend upon their progeny irrespective of the causes for which their ancestors were punished. (CWMG, 1926)<sup>192</sup>

Gandhi was also not convinced by the argument that it was all right to treat the lower castes as pariahs because they skinned animals, picked up night soil and smelt bad.

If the untouchables are so because they kill animals and because they have to do with flesh, blood, bones and night-soil, every nurse and every doctor should become an untouchable and so should Christians, Mussalmans and all so-called high-class Hindus who kill animals for food or sacrifice...the high-class men are not all sweet-smelling like musk, nor untouchables foul-smelling like onion. There are thousands of untouchables who are any day infinitely superior to the so-called high-class people. (CWMG, 1926)<sup>193</sup>

The Mahatma believed that the occupations (sweeping, working in slaughter-houses, toddy-shops, and skinning animals, etc.) of the untouchables were not only desirable but a necessity for the well-being of society. Gandhi was of the view that untouchability had “distorted and disfigured Hinduism out of recognition” (CWMG, 1934).<sup>194</sup> His mission was to cleanse it.

Where *Shudra: The Rising* deviates from the Gandhian principle is that it suggests a violent battle and the use of force to end the curse. Gandhi believed it was essential for an anti-untouchability crusader to win the caste Hindus with love, compassion and reason. During the Vaikom *Satyagraha*, he advised the organizers not to antagonize the upper castes or give them the impression that their religion was in danger.

It behoves the organizers, therefore, to set even the most orthodox and the most bigoted at ease and to assure them that they do not seek to bring about the reform by compulsion. The Vaikom satyagrahis must stoop to conquer. They must submit to insults and worse at the hands of the bigoted and yet love them, if they will change their hearts. (CWMG, 1934)<sup>195</sup>

Gandhi believed that lasting reform could only come from within the Hindu society and by winning the hearts of caste Hindus through love and reasoning. The Mahatma was aware that the practice of untouchability was no longer confined to castes alone and had taken in its grasp religions as well. Hindu castes, for instance, practiced and in some cases still practice, untouchability against Mussalmans.

Gandhi looked at the maltreatment of Indians by the British a result of their own crimes against the untouchables.

Has not just Nemesis overtaken us for the crime of untouchability? Have we not reaped as we have sown? Have we not practiced Dyerism and O'Dwyerism on our own kith and kin? We have segregated the pariah and we are in turn segregated in the British Colonies. (YI, Vol. III)<sup>196</sup>

Touch-me-notism has not been confined to Harijans, but it has affected caste against caste and religion against religion. I for one shall not be satisfied until, as the result of this movement, we have arrived at heart-unity amongst all the different races and communities inhabiting this land, and it is for that

reason that I have invited the co-operation of all the people living in India and outside. (Hindu, 1934)<sup>197</sup>

To instill a sense of empowerment in the untouchables, Mahatma Gandhi even suggested in one of his prayer speeches in June 1947 that a Harijan like Chakrayya (a young Harijan from Andhra Pradesh) or a Harijan girl should be made the Independent India's first president (CWMG, 1947).<sup>198</sup> Unfortunately, Chakrayya died a week before Gandhi could discuss the proposal with Rajendra Prasad, who ultimately became the first president. The young man, who had joined Gandhi's Sewagram in 1935 and soon became an expert spinner, died after being operated on for a brain tumour in Bombay (Gopalkrishna, 2012).<sup>199</sup> Gandhi was critical of caste Hindus' irrational beliefs. He said in a letter to Sanatani in 1933,

I have no felt no need for the sacred thread and no one should be asked to wear it. One who has lost the qualities of a Brahmin no longer deserves the prerogative of a Brahmin. Why should such nominal Brahmins be fed? Only the common simple mantras are essential in the wedding ceremony. They have been given in Navajivan. I have no faith in the custom of Shraddha as it is observed these days. (CWMG, 1933)<sup>200</sup>

The sad part is that Hindi cinema has hardly made any effort to expose the untouchability being practiced between the different religions in India. It has only paid lip service to the cause by portraying inter-religious love stories, but even there, the majority of the films have portrayed love stories between a Hindu boy and a Muslim girl. Only a handful of films, like *My Name is Khan* (2010), *Jodha Akbar* (2008) and *Pinjar* (2003), dared to show a Muslim hero falling in love with a Hindu girl.

### e) Equality of Religions

Mahatma Gandhi was a man of religion but his religion was an essence of morality, and truth and non-violence were at its core. He believed there was only one fundamental religion, and all organized religions in the world were its offshoots. The father of the Indian nation felt that all religions had truth and non-violence in common and there were no irreconcilable differences among them.

A non-sectarian Hindu, Gandhi read extensively about Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, and Judaism as well as his own religion and did not hesitate to adopt their good principles. He felt the same regard for all these faiths and never had "the slightest desire to criticize any of those religions merely because they were not my own", but read each sacred book in a spirit

of reverence and found the same fundamental morality in each (CWMG, 1930).<sup>201</sup>

He lived and worked with a large number of Christians and Muslims during his stay first in England and then in South Africa and that undoubtedly broadened his outlook. He coined the term “equality of religions” in September 1930 for his ashram because, he maintained, tolerance (*Sahishnuta*) “may imply a gratuitous assumption of the inferiority of other faiths to one’s own” and the name

“Respect for all religions” suggests a sense of patronizing whereas ahimsa teaches us to entertain the same respect for the religious faiths of others as we accord to our own, thus admitting the imperfection of the latter. (CWMG, 1930)<sup>202</sup>

In Gandhi’s doctrine of equality of religions, there was a clear distinction between religion and irreligion. He did not want to “cultivate tolerance for irreligion” but nor did he want people to “bear any hatred towards the irreligious brother” (CWMG, 1930).<sup>203</sup> The Mahatma strongly believed that no one organized religion in the world was superior to the others as they were all man-made and carried imperfections despite being divinely inspired.

“If all faiths outlined by men are imperfect, the question of comparative merit does not arise. All faiths constitute a revelation of Truth, but all are imperfect and liable to error.” He opined that “cultivation of tolerance for other faiths will impart to use a truer understanding of our own”. (CWMG, 1930)<sup>204</sup>

A devout Hindu, Gandhi invoked Hindu idioms to reach the masses in India. Prayer songs sung or written by Gujarati saints and poets were a permanent feature in his ashrams first in South Africa and later in India but he never pushed them down to the throats of his associates from other religions. In fact, the associates had the right to inject their own religious symbols or names of icons in place of the Hindu ones.

He himself disclosed this in 1930.

In Phoenix, we had our daily prayers in the same way as in Sabarmati, and Mussalmans, as well as Christians, attended them along with Hindus. The late Sheth (Parsee) Rustomji (his friend in South Africa) and his children too attended the prayer meetings. Rustomji Sheth very much like the Gujarati *bhajan*. “Dear, dear to me is the name of Rama.” If my memory serves me right, Maganlal or Kashi was once leading us in singing this hymn, when Rustomji Sheth exclaimed joyously “Say the name of Hormazd instead of the name of Rama”. His suggestion was readily taken up, and after that

whenever the Sheth was present, and sometimes even when he was not, we put in the name of Hormazd in place of Rama. The late Husain, son of Daud Sheth (Sheth Daud Mahomed, President of Natal Indian Congress), often stayed at the Phoenix Ashram and enthusiastically joined our prayers. To the accompaniment of an organ, he used to sing in a very sweet voice the song *Hai bahare bagh*, “The garden of this world has only a momentary bloom”. He taught us all this song, which we also sang at prayers. Its inclusion in our *bhajanavali* (collection of spiritual songs) is a tribute to truth-loving Husain’s memory.... (Similarly) Joseph Royeppen often came to Phoenix. He was a Christian, and his favourite hymn was *Vaishnava Jana*. He loved music and once sang this hymn, saying “Christian” in place of “Vaishnava”. (CWMG, 1930)<sup>205</sup>

Despite being a religious man, Gandhi did not wish to surrender his rationality to religion. He was of the view that scriptural text could not override his reason because the former suffered “from a process of double distillation”. In a discussion with Basil Mathews and others on November 24, 1936, when he was asked where his seat of authority was, he pointed towards his chest and said,

I exercise my judgement about every scripture.... Firstly, they (scriptures) come through a human prophet, and then through the commentaries of interpreters. Nothing in them comes from God directly. Mathew may give one version of one text and John may give another. I cannot surrender my reason whilst I subscribe to Divine revelation. (CWMG, 1936–1937)<sup>206</sup>

He never flinched from criticizing the irrational and wrong practices prevalent in all religions, and particularly Hinduism. On the journey by train from Calcutta to Haridwar for Kumbh mela in 1915, Gandhi noticed that orthodox Hindus, despite being extremely thirsty, were not accepting *Musalmani* water.

“These very Hindus, let it be noted, do not so much as hesitate or inquire when during illness the doctor administers them wine or prescribes beef tea or a *Musalman* or Christian compounder gives them water,” he writes in *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. (Gandhi, 2012)<sup>207</sup>

Gandhi is scathing about the Kumbh pilgrims’ “absent mindedness, hypocrisy and slovenliness” in his autobiography.

The swarm of sadhus, who had descended there, seemed to have been born but to enjoy the good things of life. Here I saw a cow with five feet! I was astonished, but knowing men soon disillusioned me. The poor five-footed cow was a sacrifice to the greed of the wicked. I learnt that the fifth foot was nothing else but a foot cut off from a live calf and grafted upon the shoulder

of the cow! The result of this double cruelty was exploited to fleece the ignorant of their money. There was no Hindu but would be attracted by a five-footed cow, and no Hindu but would lavish his charity on such a miraculous cow. (Gandhi, 2012)<sup>208</sup>

Gandhi had serious doubts whether the kind of faith on display could uplift the soul.

I have never thought of frequenting places of pilgrimage in search of piety. But the seventeen lakhs of men that were reported to be there could not all be hypocrites or mere sight-seers. I had no doubt that countless people amongst them had gone there to earn merit and for self-purification. It is difficult, if not impossible, to say to what extent this kind of faith uplifts the soul. (Gandhi, 2012)<sup>209</sup>

The Mahatma was a staunch opponent of conversions, and time and again accused Christian missionaries of luring untouchable Hindus to their fold.

I hold that proselytizing under the cloak of humanitarian work is, to say the least, unhealthy. It is most certainly resented by the people here. Religion after is a deeply personal matter; it touches the heart. Why should I change my religion because a doctor who professes Christianity as his religion has cured me of some disease or why should the doctor expect or suggest such change whilst I am under his influence?

Is not medical relief its own reward and satisfaction? Or why should I whilst I am in a missionary educational institution have Christian teaching thrust upon me? In my opinion, these practices are not uplifting and give rise to suspicion if not even secret hostility. The methods of conversion must be like Caesar's wife, above suspicion. Faith is not imparted like secular subjects. It is given through the language of the heart. If a man has a living faith in him, it spreads its aroma like the rose its scent. Because of its invisibility, the extent of its influence is far wider than that of the visible beauty of the colour of the petals. (YI, 1931)<sup>210</sup>

Gandhi refused to accept the missionaries' argument that Christ was the only son of God and Christianity was the only religion which could lead a person to salvation. Condemning the modern methods of conversion, Gandhi wrote,

Conversion nowadays has become a matter of business, like any other. I remember having read a missionary report saying how much it cost per head to convert and then presenting a budget for the next 'harvest'. (YI, 1931)<sup>211</sup>

The Mahatma believed India had adequate religions for her people and did not need “converting spiritually” (CWMG, 1931).<sup>212</sup>

India’s great faiths are all-sufficing for her. Apart from Christianity and Judaism, Hinduism and its offshoots, Islam and Zoroastrianism are living faiths. No one faith is perfect. All faiths are equally dear to their respective votaries. What is wanted therefore is living friendly contact among the followers of the great religions of the world and not a clash among them in the fruitless attempt on the part of each community to show the superiority of its faith over the rest. (CWMG, 1931)<sup>213</sup>

He criticized people who looked at Hinduism as a “body of hideous usages and superstitions” and a “fraud upon humanity”. He argued in a public meeting at Kottayam in 1937 that

a religion which has produced Ramakrishna, Chaitanya, Shankara and Vivekanand cannot be a body of superstitions. As you know, and if you do not know it I want to declare, that I personally hold all principal religions of the world to be not only true but also to be equal. (CWMG, 1936–1937)<sup>214</sup>

He was of the view that the majority of Christianity converts did not grasp the teaching of Jesus and “imbibed the superficialities of European civilization”. This, he added, was a direct contribution of the Christian missionaries. He appealed to Indian Christians not to look down upon the country’s ancient civilization as a relic of barbarism and

identify themselves with Indian ideals and Indian nationalist aspirations. (CWMG, 1925–1926)<sup>215</sup>

Gandhi’s politics pivoted around religion. He strongly opposed the Muslim League’s demand for a separate Pakistan, and kept arguing that India belonged as much to Hindus as to Muslims, Christians, Jews, Parsis, and others.

If Hindus believe that India should be peopled only by Hindus, they are living dreamland. The Mahomedans also live in dreamland if they believe that there should be only Muslims in India. The Hindus, the Mahomedans, the Parsis, and the Christians who have made India their country are fellow countrymen, and they will have to live in unity, if only for their own interest. In no part of the world are one nationality and one religion synonymous terms; nor has it ever been so in India. (CWMG, 1909–1911)<sup>216</sup>



He was aware that the wrong teaching and practice of religions can cause conflicts, and insisted on schoolteachers living up to the tenets of truth and justice to teach the common truths of all religions to school children.

The truth that all religions are the same in essentials, that we must love and respect others' faiths as we respect our own, is a very simple truth, and can easily be understood and practiced by children of seven. But, of course, the essential is that the teacher must have this faith himself. (CWMG, 1938)<sup>217</sup>

Gandhi left no stone unturned to achieve Hindu-Muslim unity and did not even give up on Jinnah until 1938.

I count some of the noblest of Muslims as my friends. I have a devout daughter of Islam as more than a daughter to me. She lives for that unity and would cheerfully die for it. I had the son (Abdul Kadir Bawazeer) of the late Muazzin of the Jama Masjid of Bombay as a staunch inmate of the Ashram. I have not met a nobler man. His morning azan in the Ashram rings in my ears as I write these lines during midnight. It is for such reasons that I wait on Shri Jinnah. (CWMG, 1938)<sup>218</sup>

When asked why he continued to be a Hindu if he believed all religions were equally true and equally demanding of his respect, Gandhi said,

Latterly I have been endeavouring to describe to vast assemblages of men and women I have addressed what I regard as the essence of Hinduism, and I have been suggesting to them one incredibly simple mantra of the Ishopanishad and, as you know, it is one of the Upanishads that enjoy the sanctity of the Vedas. The very first verse of the Ishopanishad means simply this: God pervades everything that is to be found in this universe down to the tiniest atom. The mantra describes God as the Creator, the Ruler, and the Lord. (CWMG, 1936–1937)<sup>219</sup>

Gandhi regarded the cow “as our mother as she, like the mother, gives us milk” and insisted on its protection.

The cow provides us with bullocks and even after death gives us leather, manure, fat for carts, etc., and such other things. Hence, we should never kill a cow. (CWMG, 1936–1937)<sup>220</sup>

Yet the Mahatma did not want cow protection zealots to cause friction between Hindus and other meat-and-beef-eating communities, particularly Muslims.

The only method I know of protecting the cow is that I should approach my Mahomedan brother and urge him for the sake of the country to join me in

protecting her. If he would not listen to me, I should let the cow go for the simple reason that the matter is beyond my ability. If I were overfull of pity for the cow, I should sacrifice my life to save her but not take my brother's life. This, I hold, is the law of our religion. (CWMG, 1909–1911)<sup>221</sup>

Gandhi was opposed to cow vigilantism and believed that this led to an increase in cow killing. He said,

In my opinion, cow protection societies may be considered cow-killing societies. It is a disgrace to us that we should need such societies. When we forgot how to protect cows, I suppose we needed such societies. (CWMG, 1909–1911)<sup>222</sup>

An inherent feature of Gandhi's doctrine on the equality of religions was that he considered all religions and their books inspired. When a Muslim newspaper asked him to declare his belief in Muhammad as the Prophet of God and Islam as an inspired religion for achieving Hindu-Muslim unity, he said,

"I certainly regard Islam as one of the inspired religions, and therefore the Holy Koran as an inspired book and Muhammad as one of the prophets. But even so I regard Hinduism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism as inspired religions" (CWMG, 1940). He wrote something on similar lines for Jesus Christ in "My Jail Experiences XI": "I do not accept the orthodox teaching that Jesus was or is God incarnate in the accepted sense or that he was or is the only son of God. I do not believe in the doctrine of appropriation of another's merit. His sacrifice is a type and example for us. Every one of us has to be 'crucified' for salvation. I do not take the words 'Son', 'Father' and 'the Holy Ghost' liberally. They are all figurative expressions. (CWMG, 1924–1925)<sup>223</sup>

He publicly disagreed that any religion was the exclusive domain of only its followers or the message of its principal God was delivered only for its supporters, and launched a blistering attack on the leaders of the Muslim League for propagating this lie.

Religion binds man to God and man to man. Does Islam bind Muslim only to Muslim and antagonize the Hindu? Was the message of the Prophet peace only for and between Muslims and war against Hindus or non-Muslims? Are eight crores of Muslims to be fed with this which I can only describe as poison? Those who are instilling this poison into the Muslim mind are rendering the greatest disservice to Islam. (CWMG, 1940)<sup>224</sup>

In this chapter, the author analyses *Padosi* (1941), *Hum Ek Hain* (1946), *Train to Pakistan* (1999), *Hey Ram!* (2000), and *Road to Sangam* (2009) to

see whether and how much they conform to Mahatma Gandhi's epistemology on the equality of religions and the principle of unity in diversity he prescribed for India.

Prabhat Film Company's *Padosi* tells the story of two friends, Thakur (Mazhar Khan) and Mirza (Gajanan Jagirdar), who are neighbours in a village. The two rarely miss their daily prayers and games of chess. They are tolerant to a fault. Thakur asks his wife to be silent when Mirza kneels down for his *namaz* in his courtyard. An industrialist, Onkar, arrives in the village to increase the height of the dam that is next to the village. For this he wants the village to be shifted elsewhere. He offers compensation for the houses but Thakur and Mirza refuse to vacate their homes. "This is not a village; this is our pilgrimage. This is our mother", Thakur declares.

Onkar and his man Jayaram create a rift between the two neighbours. Thakur is sacked by Onkar and his son Gokul is framed for setting Jayaram's house on fire. Mirza, who is also Sarpanch of the Village Panchayat, asks Gokul to compensate Jayaram for the house and pay a penalty. He orders the young man's excommunication from the village until he pays the penalty of Rs. 100. Mirza decides to shift his residence after Thakur refuses to converse with him. Gokul conspires to blow up the dam to make sure that Onkar is in the position to raise its height. Finally, the dam breaks and Thakur and Mirza sacrifice their lives to save others.

*Padosi*, filmed when Hindu-Muslim hostilities in the country were increasing, conveys the message of Mahatma Gandhi on Hindu-Muslim unity. The devout Thakur and Mirza are prototypes of Gandhi's belief that all religions produce good, true and god-fearing men and women. Gandhi said in a question-answer session on Islamic culture in 1938,

I regard Muslims, like other Indians, as blood brothers entitled to the same rights and privileges as any other Indian.... I believe Islam and other great religions to be as true as my own. India is the richer for the cultures that Islam and Christianity brought with them. I regard the present antagonism as a passing phase. (CWMG, 1938–1939)<sup>225</sup>

When asked whether he aimed to fuse all religions into one the way the Mughal emperor Akbar did during his reign, Gandhi replied,

I do not aim at any fusion. Each religion has its own contribution to make to human evolution. I regard the great faiths of the world as so many branches of a tree, each distinct from the other though having the same sources. (CWMG, 1938–1939)<sup>226</sup>

Gandhi believed in the truth of all religions. He felt truth and non-violence bound them into one.

I have come to the conclusion that, if it is proper and necessary to discover an underlying unity among all religions, a master-key is needed. That master-key is that of truth and non-violence. When I unlock the chest of religion with this master-key, I do not find it difficult to discover its likeness with other religions. (CWMG, 1940)<sup>227</sup>

Time and again he drew the analogy of a tree to say that the tree was the one religion while the different religions prevalent in the world were its branches.

“Just as a tree has many branches but one root, similarly the various religions are the leaves and the branches of the same tree. Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Zoroastrianism are the main branches but as for varieties of religion, they are as numerous as mankind.” For him, what is essential is that a person should pray from the heart and not which God he addressed in his prayer. “If you take the name of God in the prayer gathering and forget all about it on going out, it is not prayer but blasphemy. Religion has to be lived every moment of one’s life”. (CWMG, 1946)<sup>228</sup>

Padosi captures the essence of Mahatma Gandhi’s message when it comes to portraying equality of religions. Not only do Thakur and Mirza offer their prayers at the same spot but they encourage each other to follow their respective religions. Gandhi wanted recitations from Koran in Hindu temples and Gita in mosques.

“Hinduism and Islam are both great religions and there is no difference between them. I fail to understand why any two religions should be at loggerheads”, he said in 1947 after a man objected to his reciting passages from the Koran during a prayer meeting in a temple at New Delhi. He added,

I even believe that God has as many names as there are human beings in the world. *Ishwara, Bhagwan, Khuda*, God, or Ormuzd – whatever name you prefer to say – these are all his names. How can anyone ever talk of stopping people from reciting the name of God who is so great that none can know him? Such an act is sheer impudence, it is barbarism, it is violence. (CWMG, 1947)<sup>229</sup>

At another prayer meeting three days later, Gandhi asked,

Would it be an irreligious act if someone recited the Gita in its Arabic translation? If there is anyone who says so, he is an ignoramus. (CWMG, 1947)<sup>230</sup>

*Padosi* is a parable of Hindu-Muslim unity. Like Gandhi, it shows unshakeable optimism that the two communities will stay united under all

circumstances. The Mahatma carried this hope through the partition of the country.

Yesterday I had told you that even if the Congress and the Muslim League failed to come to an agreement, it would not necessarily mean that all was over. After all, Hindus and Muslims are brothers. Someday they are certainly going to unite. (CWMG, 1946)<sup>231</sup>

The Prabhat Film Company's *Hum Ek Hain* tells the story of India's unity in diversity in a nutshell. Set against the backdrop of famine in a village, the film is about a landlady, Vidya Devi (Durga Khote), who adopts four children – a Hindu, a Muslim, a Christian boy, and an untouchable girl – who have lost their parents to hunger. She brings the quartet up under the same roof. She teaches her sons Shankar (Dev Anand), Yusuf (Rehman), and John and daughter Durga to stay united in all circumstances but the vile son of a landlord, Chhote Babu, conspires and pits John against Shankar.

When Yusuf and John decide to leave, Chhote Babu sets their farms on fire. The brothers get to know about the conspiracy and reunite to defeat the villain. The dialogues and songs in *Hum Ek Hain*, the first film starring Dev Anand and his friend Guru Dutt an assistant director and choreographer, pivot around the subject of national unity.

“Your house is a pilgrimage where temple, mosque and a church co-exist” (Durga to her mother), “These petty differences will sink us” (Vidya to Shankar) and “This has always been a blot on Hindustan's forehead that brothers here cannot stay together” (Chhote Babu to Vidya Devi) all further the cause of national integration. The lyrics of the songs – *Harijan, Muslim, Hindu sabki ek pehchan, ek hamara jhanda kabhi jhuke naa* (there is one identity of Harijan, Muslim and Hindu. Our flag is one. It should never bow), *Hum jaag uthe hain sokar, humne haari baazi jeeti ek hokar* (We have woken up. We have won the lost game by getting united) do the same.

Directed by P L Santoshi, *Hum Ek Hain* emphasizes the equality of religions and promotes Gandhi's belief that the country has room for all religions. At the same time, it makes a statement against the evangelization practiced by certain religions.

Gandhi said in 1946,

I have, of course, always believed in the principle of religious tolerance. But I have gone further. I have advanced from tolerance to equal respect for all religions. All religions are branches of the same mighty tree but I must not change over from one branch to another for the sake of expediency. By doing so, I cut the branch on which I am sitting. (CWMG, 1946–1947)<sup>232</sup>

Over a month later, the *Hindustan Standard* stressed that

Gandhiji believed in equal regard for all religions. More tolerance was not of much value. No religion worth the name stood in need of patronage. It should command respect. (CWMG, 1946–1947)<sup>233</sup>

Over three months before this, the father of the Indian nation had asserted in a letter,

I feel our country, and indeed the world, should have room for all religion. I consider no one high and no one low. (CWMG, 1946)<sup>234</sup>

Vidya Devi illustrates Mahatma Gandhi's belief in the oneness of religion by raising children from three different religions and an untouchable under her roof. Her bungalow, thus, becomes a microcosm of India. This is what the Mahatma practiced and preached during his lifetime.

*Anand Bazar Patrika* reported his speech at a prayer meeting in Orissa, about three weeks before his assassination.

He called himself not merely a Hindu but a Christian, a Muslim, a Jew, Sikh, a Parsee, a Jain or a man of any other sect, meaning thereby that he had absorbed all that was commendable in all other religions and sub-religions. (CWMG, 1947)<sup>235</sup>

Earlier, the Mahatma said in New Delhi,

Just as God, in spite of the many names that describe him, is but one, dharma, although known by several names, is but one; because all religions have come from God. They would be worthless if they had not come to God. Any religion which is not the religion of God is the religion of the Devil, and cannot but be worthless. (CWMG, 1947–1948)<sup>236</sup>

Vidya Devi, a Hindu, not only absorbs Islam and Christianity but also sets an example against untouchability. Gandhi too wanted the majority Hindu religion to absorb all the good points of Christianity and Islam, which came to its shores from outside.

It cannot be said that Sikhism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism are separate religions. All these four faiths and their offshoots are one. Hinduism is an ocean into which all the rivers run. It can absorb Islam and Christianity and all other religions, and only then can it become an ocean. Otherwise, it remains merely a stream along which large ship cannot ply. (CWMG, 1947–1948)<sup>237</sup>

Vidya not only upholds her own religion, Hinduism, but also Islam and Christianity by adopting John and Yusuf as her sons. This is what Gandhi propagated days before his assassination.

Let us uphold another's religion as we uphold our own. A good thing remains a good thing in whatever language it may be written. (CWMG, 1946)<sup>238</sup>

The village depicted in *Hum Ek Hain* is an ideal village republic where all religions are equal. Gandhi hoped to set up such village republics in independent India.

If there ever is to be a republic of every village in India, then I claim verity for my picture in which the last is equal to the first or, in other words, no one is to be the first and none the last. In this picture, every religion has its full and equal place...The mightiest wind cannot move it. (Harijan, 1946)<sup>239</sup>

Based on Khushwant Singh's 1956 classic by the same name, Pamela Rooks' *Train to Pakistan* (1999) portrays the story of Mano Majra, a village in Punjab near the India-Pakistan border, where the railway line crosses the Sutlej River. It tells the tale of Jagat Singh, alias Jagga (Nirmal Pandey), a dacoit, who becomes a hero by sacrificing himself to save the lives of Muslim migrants.

There are also sub-plots about Hukum Chand (Mohan Agashe), a second-class magistrate in charge of Mano Majra, who sleeps with a Muslim nautch girl (Divya Dutta) in the government guest house, and Iqbal (Rajit Kapoor), a communist Sikh, whose name leads the local inspector to associate him with the Muslim League. Ironically, the consciences of Hukum Chand and the nautch girl remain unpolluted by the immorality they indulge in. Hukum Chand does, however, feel disturbed by the sight of dead bodies and fears that he will never get over the stench. He regrets that he did not stop the nautch girl from boarding the Pakistan-bound train and reminisces about the times the train whistle sounded nice. When questioned about her religion by Hukum Chand, the nautch girl too replies innocently, "Performers do not belong to Hindu or Muslim distinctions. Everybody comes to hear our songs".

The film shows how the communal frenzy that led to the murders of thousands of innocent people built up in parts of India and Pakistan. It exposes how the trains plying between the two countries became the carriers of dead bodies, with Sikhs in Punjab massacring Muslims migrating to Pakistan in retaliation for the killing of migrating Hindus by Muslims.

Mano Majra is a place where people take care of each other and Sikhs promise to protect their Musalman brothers. It primarily houses Sikh landlords, a handful of Muslims and even an atheist called Jagga, who tells his Muslim paramour, Noora (Smriti Mishra), daughter of weaver Imam

Baksh, during one of their rendezvous that “I am neither a Sikh nor a Musalman, not a Hindu. I am a dacoit. I have nothing to do with any God”.

Hukum Chand is proud of the place, which maintains calm even during the riots. “Thousands of people are being killed in all of Hindustan. Musalmans are killing Hindus and Sikhs and Sikhs are killing Muslims. This is madness”, he tells the local inspector. He also claims that “my district is peaceful. Here no Sikh is being killed by a Muslim and no Muslim is being killed by a Hindu”.

But the scene changes when a train carrying the dead bodies of innocent Hindus arrives from Pakistan. Hukum Chand holds a mass cremation of the bodies. This makes the division between the Sikhs and Muslims very visible. Malli, a rival of Jagga’s, conspires to attack the train crossing the river bridge at night and carrying Muslim migrants. Jagga, released on the orders of Hukum Chand, argues with him, saying that killing innocents is no bravery. Jagga is shot dead while cutting the rope tied across the bridge to topple any Muslim migrants travelling on the roof of the train.

*Train to Pakistan* portrays how Jagga is able to preserve his humanity and his religion even during the turmoil around him. This is what Mahatma Gandhi insisted on during his travels to different places during the Hindu-Muslim riots after the announcement of the partition.

Muslims will not serve Islam if they annihilate the Hindus; rather they would thereby destroy Islam. And if the Hindus believe that they would be able to annihilate Islam, it means that they would be annihilating Hindu dharma”, he said in Patna after anti-Hindu violence at Noakhali. (CWMG, 1947)<sup>240</sup>

When Bibi Amtus Salaam, one of his disciples, who was like a daughter to him, fasted for 21 days at Noakhali to restore peace there, the Mahatma made a group of Muslims in Sirandi take a pledge that said,

We solemnly declare that we bear no antagonism towards the Hindus or members of any other community. (CWMG, 1946–1947)<sup>241</sup>

Gandhi appealed to people not to associate the killers with religion and still adapt good points from other religions. He said in New Delhi a few months before India’s independence,

The fault does not lie with any religion. If the fault lies anywhere, it is with the people who follow these religions. It is not as if any particular religion has a monopoly of producing evil men. Hence it is our duty to see the good points in every religion rather than those evil men. Let us pick up the gem-like qualities from every religion and thus enrich our own. (CWMG, 1947)<sup>242</sup>



Jagga follows the one religion Gandhi promoted for people across India and even abroad. Knowingly or unknowingly, Hukum Chand and the nautch girl also believe in this religion. Gandhi told Negro soldiers in 1946 in Madras,

There are many religions, but religion is only one. You should follow that one religion. Foreigners might bring you Christianity. Christianity, as exemplified in Europe and America today, is a travesty of the teaching of Jesus. Then there are Hinduism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, and so on. You should absorb the best that is in each without fettering your choice from your own religion. (CWMG, 1946)<sup>243</sup>

*Train to Pakistan* depicts the communal frenzy the Mahatma was greatly troubled by years before his assassination. He asked Indians to guard against it.

Today we find ourselves in a mess and have created poison for ourselves. This is what happened in Ajmer. If you want to safeguard Hinduism, you cannot do so by treating as enemies the Muslims who have stayed on in India. My days in this world are numbered. Soon I shall be gone; you will then realise that what I said was right. The same rule applies to Muslims. Islam will be dead if Muslims can tolerate only Muslims. The same goes for Christians and Christianity. All the religions of the world are good, for they teach righteousness and friendship. Those that teach enmity between men, I do not consider religions. (CWMG, 1947–1948)<sup>244</sup>

Jagga understands that all human beings are one, and exhibits exemplary bravery when he lays down his life to save the lives of other human beings. Gandhi wrote in a letter in 1947,

Realizing truth means realizing that all human beings are one, that all religions are one, just as our limbs are members of the same body. (CWMG, 1947)<sup>245</sup>

Kamal Hassan's *Hey Ram!* is a critique of the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by Hindu Mahasabha activist Nathu Ram Godse and others. Through flashbacks, periodical sets and interesting use of light (colour for flashbacks and present in black and white), *Hey Ram!*'s story is told by the grandson (Abbas) of Saket Ram (Kamal Hassan, 89) who is lying on his death bed, to the latter's doctor.

The story starts in 1946, when Saket Ram, an archaeologist, is excavating at Mohenjo-Daro, the site of the Harappan civilization, with his colleagues and friends, Amjad Ali Khan (Shahrukh Khan) and Manohar Lalwani (Saurabh Shukla). One fine day the trio and their team are told to

return to their homes as India was to be divided into India and Pakistan. Ram returns to Calcutta to his wife Aparna (Rani Mukherjee) to find the city has turned into a communal cauldron on account of the “Direct Action” day declaration call given by Muslim League leader Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

Ram rescues a Sikh girl from a Muslim mob but the mob later attacks his apartment. It gang rapes and murders Aparna after tying Ram to a piano. Ram picks up a gun and shoots the rapists, which include his tailor, Altaaf (Shadaab Khan). A Hindu youth, Sriram Abhyankar (Atul Kulkarni), tells Ram that Mahatma Gandhi is responsible for the violence against the Hindus. Abhyankar, whose character seems to be patterned on Veer Savarkar, informs Ram that Gandhi cultivated the Muslim community. Abhyankar also gives Saket Ram a banned book (was it Savarkar’s *Hindutva*?) and informs him that a civil war has broken out between Hindus and Muslims and the law has taken leave.

Ram marries a girl Mythili (Vasundhra Das) in Chennai and later embarks on a mission to assassinate Gandhi in Delhi. For this, arms are provided by a maharaja (Vikram Gokhale). Incidentally, Gokhale was given arms by the maharaja of Gwalior. In Delhi, Ram bumps into his old friend Amjad, who saves him from a Muslim mob. When Ram asks Amjad why he did not leave for Pakistan, the latter says, “I am Gandhi’s son and will live here”. He apologizes for Aparna’s murder and forgives the killing of his father by Hindu mobs. Subsequently, when they are confronted by a Hindu mob, Ram introduces Amjad as his brother Bharat. When Amjad corrects him and discloses his real name, Amjad is killed. Ram realizes his mistake and seeks Mahatma Gandhi’s pardon but before he can confess his crime, the Mahatma is gunned down by Nathu Ram Godse.

The story returns to the present. Saket Ram, hidden in a pit by security forces during a riot on the anniversary of the demolition of Babri Mosque, breathes his last. Among the other mourners, his wife Mythili and the wife of Amjad, Nafisa (Iravati Harshe), are shown sitting together.

Ram’s grandson, also named Saket Ram, a Hindi novelist, gives Mahatma Gandhi’s spectacles and slippers, brought by his grandfather after the assassination, to Tushar Gandhi, Gandhi’s great grandson.

*Hey Ram!* was met with major country-wide protests by different groups before and after its release. Some Congress leaders denounced it as an “anti-Gandhi film” while the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party sought a ban on it, calling it an “anti-Hindutva” film. A few leftist intellectuals, on the other hand, regretted the film’s refusal to demonize Hindu communalists and that its “seductive” use of imagery entirely subverted any progressive ideological agenda. Many film distributors, always jittery about cinematic subjects that are too controversial or too smart for the audience, pulled it

from theatres within days of its release. The film portrays Gandhi in a humanized form – as a cranky, humorous man who is not always sure of himself – in contrast to the flat and pontificating Mahatma of Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi*, whose every utterance appeared to be set in granite (UoL, 2000).<sup>246</sup>

Muslim leaders also charged Hassan with portraying the community in a negative light. The latter said he made the film for himself, a journey into his past.

Some people don't want him to be Mahatma. They don't like the word Mahatma because it makes him god-like. I wanted to show him for the man he is, you strip him off everything, you put all criticism to him and still he comes out as a better man, that's what was surprising. (Pandey, 2000)<sup>247</sup>

As well as portraying Gandhi in flesh and blood and its principles of non-violence and equality of religions, *Hey Ram!* replays Gandhi's favourite bhajan – *Vaishnav jan te tene kahiye je peed parai jaane re* (call them noble who understand other's pain). It also plays an anthem strongly critical of communalism – *Ram Ram, he he Ram Ram, Ram Ram asalaam Ram Ram* – in the climax.

Hassan has also said that his idea behind making the movie was to demystify the Mahatma side of Gandhi to himself and others.

Even though I have become a fan of Gandhi over the years, he will never be a Mahatma for me. Calling him a Mahatma is like putting a halo over his head and giving him angelic wings. It takes away from him what he managed to achieve as a common man. Instead of raising him to sainthood, I'd much rather give him his due as a regular man with an extraordinary mind, great education and immense dedication. It may seem like it talks ill of the man, but it is an accurate view of what he really was like. (Baksi, 2013)<sup>248</sup>

On the whole *Hey Ram!*, which did not do well in North India, in particular, ended up antagonizing both the Hindu and the Muslim community. This is also what has Mahatma Gandhi's supposedly last words, "*He Ram*" has done. Politically speaking, with "*He Ram*", Gandhi managed to

confound, as he does so down to the present day, both the Hindu militants who falsely declared him a traitor to his faith and so showed only their own miserable conception of Hinduism, as well as the secularists whose conception of both religion and politics is much too narrow to accommodate the creative ecumenism of true dissenters like Gandhi. (Lal, 2001)<sup>249</sup>

*Hey Ram!* is as much about Mahatma Gandhi as it is about Rama, the legend of Ramayana and Gandhi's favourite god. Ironically, in the film, Ram, for a large part, is pitted against the Mahatma. There is symbolism in abundance as the muscular Saket Ram is filmed waving a gun in his right hand.

There are multiple Rams in the movie. The first Ram is Saket Ram, the loving, compassionate archaeologist, the friend of Amjad, who returns to Calcutta and saves a Sikh woman from a rapacious Muslim mob. The second Ram is the manly Ram who wears a thread across his chest and a large tilak on his forehead, who makes love with his wife before embarking on his mission to assassinate Gandhi. This Ram is a militant, a creation of aggressive Hindu organizations. The next Ram returns to his senses, introduces Amjad as his brother Bharat and seeks Gandhi's pardon.

The fourth Ram is Sriram Abhyankar, again a product of the revenge-seeking militant Hindutva. There is also the Ram of Gandhi, the omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, and compassionate Ram who is invoked through the bhajan *Ram Ram, he he Ram Ram, Ram Ram asalaam Ram Ram* in the last few minutes of the film. Ironically, the stories of both Gandhi and Saket Ram (grandfather) end with their death. Or is the film suggesting an awakening by having Saket, the grandson, open the windows and ventilators on his wall where Gandhi is painted? The name Saket, incidentally, is the other name of Ayodhya, the birthplace of Ram, while Mythili is an alias for Sita.

Apparently, the most important Ram in the film is Saket Ram. For leftist intellectuals, this Ram is meant to connote two very Hindu truths,

one is the truth of the current personal tug of war being experienced by at least some believing Hindus in the face of the militant upsurge within its ranks, which Saket Ram's response represents. The second truth is that this response is meant to lead us back to the Ram Janmabhoomi masculinisation of Ram, which not only changed the traditional, time-honoured greeting of "Jai Siya Ram" to "Jai Shri Ram" but also began to depict Ram without Sita, in the threatening attitude of a warrior. For both Rams are identical in this aspect – that a certain masculinisation is seen as essential in the fight against the enemy. (Ramesh, 2000)<sup>250</sup>

Supported by the Gandhi Peace Foundation, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, the Indian Islamic Centre and Films Division, *Road to Sangam* (2010) is about how the ideas, principles and precepts practiced and propagated by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi continue to inspire people. Directed by Amit Rai, the film depicts how an ordinary Muslim mechanic in Allahabad invokes the philosophy of Gandhi on the equality of religions,

control on animalistic brutality (Deshmukh, 2015),<sup>251</sup> and non-violent *Satyagraha* to fight hatred and win over an entire community to his side.

The film begins with two quotes of the Mahatma: “You must be the change you want to see in the world”, a quote India Post released on a stamp to pay tribute to the father of the nation, and “If my faith turns bright as it will even if I stand alone, I shall be alive in the grave and what more speaking from it”.

It claims to be inspired by real events, probably a reference to how a copper urn containing Mahatma Gandhi’s ashes (the father of the Indian nation made a wish that his ashes be immersed in all the major rivers of India. His ashes were put into 20 vessels and sent to various corners of the country) was kept in a vault of the State Bank of India branch in Cuttack and forgotten. The urn was accidentally discovered in 1995.

Tushar Gandhi, a great grandson of the Mahatma, who plays himself in the film, got the urn released through an order of the Supreme Court and then made a much-publicized 600-mile journey in a special railway van all the way to Allahabad on January 30, 1997, the 40th anniversary of the death of Gandhi, to immerse the ashes in Sangam.

The film tells the story of Hashmatullah (Paresh Rawal), an extraordinary motor mechanic who runs a small shop called Hindustan Engineering Works in Allahabad. One day, Hashmat is asked by a government official to repair a very old Ford V8 engine but immediately after he gets the order, a couple of bombs explode in the city. Two Muslim youths are arrested as the culprits.

The Muslim community in the city suspects that it is unfairly targeted every time there is a terrorist attack in the country. When the community members demonstrate outside the State High Court, they have a confrontation with the police. The nephew of Nawab Kasoori (Om Puri), an influential Muslim leader, is killed in the confrontation. Kasoori and Moulvi Inayat of the main mosque in the city release a *fatwa* (decree) asking all Muslim shopkeepers to close their shops for 14 days to press for the release of all the arrested Muslim youths. Hashmat is the general secretary of the committee which passes the decree.

When Hashmat visits Circuit House to express his inability to repair the Ford V8 engine, he learns that the vehicle was being repaired to transport Mahatma Gandhi’s ashes to Sangam. A walk through the Gandhi museum in the complex stirs his conscience. He decides to repair the engine and approaches the committee for approval. The committee turns down his request, saying that he was seeking the permission of the one whose house he wanted to set on fire. Hashmatullah pleads that Gandhi gave his life for the community.

A chance encounter with a rickshaw puller who is driving despite the decree firms Hashmat's resolve. He tells his wife Ara that working for your livelihood is also worship. When a young Muslim Inayat snatches the shop keys from him, he decides to begin a fast. After the committee members accuse him of turning against Allah (the decree from the mosque is a decree from God), he retorts he would not need a third person to explain his case to the Almighty.

Through fasting, truthfulness, love, non-violence, and religious tolerance, Hashmatullah successfully brings all his opponents around, so much so that when the vehicle carrying Gandhi's ashes passes through the Muslim settlement, many people from the community, including Nawab Kasoori, join the procession. Hashmatullah makes a strong case for introspection and change in the Muslim community by invoking the Gandhian principles on tolerance and respect for all religions. Ultimately he succeeds in turning Mahatma's last journey into a voyage of all communities.

The songs in *Road to Sangam* have nice lyrics that complement the film's main themes of tolerance and equality of religions. *Jise poojta hoon wo mukhko samajh kyon nahin aya* (Why do I not understand the one I worship?), *Dharam khatre mein usko bachane nikle hain, nasamajh log apna ghar jalane nikle hain* (Religion is in danger, they have come out to save it, goofy people have come out to put their houses on fire), *Ek noor te sab jag upja kaun bhale kaun gande* (The entire world is born of one God. How can people be good and bad?) and *Allah Ishwar naam tero* (Your name is Ishwar and Allah). *Road to Sangam* argues strongly for the oneness and equality of religions. Gandhi spoke about the same in his speech to Congress workers in Madras in 1946,

Gandhiji said it was part of the law of his life that he should pray to God, be it Krishna, Rama, Allah or Christ. They were all one to him. All religions to him appeared to be like branches of one and the same tree. In his view, there was no conflict between different religions. He did not pray in the manner he did with any ulterior motive of preaching Hinduism or any particular religion. He merely prayed to God. If people misunderstood that, he was not to blame. People were welcome to join him in the prayer, if it pleased them. Otherwise they might keep away and leave him alone. (CWMG, 1946)<sup>252</sup>

The Mahatma wanted the congressmen to "place God in their hearts and act as their conscience dictated" if they wanted everything to be all right.

If they observe distinctions such as Hindu, Muslim, Parsi, untouchables, and so on, the nation would go to ruin. (CWMG, 1946)<sup>253</sup>

He repeatedly advised all Indians to get over religious hatred. Hindustan quoted him saying at a prayer meeting in New Delhi in 1946,

According to him, there is only one God or Allah in every religion. We should thus not hate followers of other religions. (CWMG, 1946)<sup>254</sup>

Gandhi greatly believed in Hindu-Muslim unity, and even after the partition hoped that the two communities would reunite. He was of the view that Islam was being misinterpreted and also felt that it was wrong to single out the religion for violence.

No religion today was without blemish. Islam had given rise to the noblest of characters and he counted among his friends men who stood tall and high over their neighbours. But unwanted accretions had gathered in the practice of Islam, which ran counter to the fundamental teachings of that religion. (CWMG, 1946–1947)<sup>255</sup>

He wondered in a speech in New Delhi on May 1947,

What is beyond my comprehension is the contention that because a reader of the Koran happens to be a sinner, the Koran itself is sinful. That way, the Gita, the Upanishads, the Vedas, in fact, all religious books can be proved to be sinful. (CWMG, 1947)<sup>256</sup>

The Mahatma cited his own example to argue how a person exposed to multi-ethnicities and multi-religions can develop a broad outlook. He had numerous friends and associates from Christianity, Islam and other religions during his stay in England and South Africa. He blamed people's bigoted behaviour to children being taught the wrong religious principles at home.

The notion that our religion alone is true and all others are false is instilled in children right from their infancy. So they develop the attitude that what they believe alone is true. (CWMG, 1947–1948)<sup>257</sup>

Like the song *Allah Ishwar tero naam*, Gandhi saw God in every religion. Quoting from the Gita, he once said,

The Gita says he who sees Me everywhere never vanishes from Me nor I from him. For instance, there is Rama in the Koran, the Zend Avesta and the Bible as well and God as worshipped by the Christians, Ormuzd as worshipped by the Parsis and Khuda as invoked by Muslims are but different names of Ishwara. And, because I am a true Hindu, believing in Hindu dharma, I am also a Christian and a Muslim. This is no mere fancy or empty talk. (CWMG, 1947)<sup>258</sup>

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> M K Gandhi's letter to Sharda C. Shah, June 18, 1932, cited in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 50 (June 1, 1932-August 31, 1932), p. 67
- <sup>2</sup> M K Gandhi's letter to Narandas Gandhi, July 28/31, cited in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 44 (July 1, 1930- December 15, 1930), p. 59
- <sup>3</sup> M K Gandhi's speech at Workers School, Bogra, May 22, 1925, *Young India*, June 4, 1925, cited in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 27 (May 1, 1925 – July 31, 1925), p. 144
- <sup>4</sup> *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 59 (September 1934–December 1934), God or No God, p. 43
- <sup>5</sup> Gandhi's interview by Nirmal Kumar Bose, *Hindustan Times*, 17 October 1935, cited in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 59 (September 1934–December 1934), p. 320
- <sup>6</sup> M K Gandhi's letter to Hanuman Prasad Poddar, July 21, 1932 *Navajivan*, August 24, 1924, *My Notes*, cited in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 26 (January 16, 1925 – April 30, 1925), p. 374
- <sup>7</sup> M K Gandhi's letter to A W Baker on September 21, 1926, cited in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 50 (June 1, 1932 – August 31, 1932), p. 271, Publications Division, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Govt. of India, 1972
- <sup>8</sup> M K Gandhi to Jamnadas Dwarkadas, a member of the Home Rule League, August 17, 1918, cited in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 31 (June 15, 1926 – November 4, 1926), p. 433
- <sup>9</sup> M K Gandhi's speech at Madras Service League, February 16, 1916, *The Hindu*, 17 Feb. 1916, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 15 (August 1, 1918- on or after July 30, 1919), p. 23
- <sup>10</sup> M K Gandhi's speech at Arya Samaj Function, Surat, January 3, 1916, cited in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 15 (August 1, 1918- on or after July 30, 1919), p. 35
- <sup>11</sup> Gandhi said it during *Satyagraha* in South Africa, *Women in Jail*, sometime between November 1925–February 1926, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 13 (January 9, 1915- October 4, 1917), p. 236
- <sup>12</sup> M K Gandhi's letter to Devdas on February 16, 1918, from Sabarmati, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 13 (JANUARY 9, 1915- OCTOBER 4, 1917), p. 193
- <sup>13</sup> M K Gandhi's letter to Narandas Gandhi, July 28/31, 1930, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 29 (November 22, 1925- February 10, 1926), p. 228
- <sup>14</sup> *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 16 (Before August 2, 1919- January 31, 1920), p.264
- <sup>15</sup> *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 44 (July 1, 1930-December 15, 1930), p.57
- <sup>16</sup> *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Mahatma Gandhi, GBD Books, 2012, Part III, Chapter XVIII, p. 265
- <sup>17</sup> *Young India*, 25 Feb. 1926, cited in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 30 (February 11, 1926- June 14, 1926), p. 16



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- <sup>18</sup> *The Story of My Experiments with Truth or Autobiography*, Mahatma Gandhi, GBD Books, 2012, Part IV, p. 273
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, Part V, p. 345
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, Part V, p. 348
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, Part V, p. 337
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, Part IV, p. 311
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, part IV, p. 306
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, Part I, p. 7
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid*
- <sup>26</sup> *Formative Influences in Gandhi's Life*, *Satyagraha Foundation for Nonviolence Studies*, William J Jackson, October 10, 2013
- <sup>27</sup> Gautam Kaul, *Cinema and the Indian Freedom Struggle*, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1998, p.175
- <sup>28</sup> M K Gandhi's reply to Welcome Address by Surat Municipality, April 19, 1921, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 20 (April 15, 1921- August 19, 1921), p. 8
- <sup>29</sup> *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Mahatma Gandhi, 1927, GBD Books, Part IV, p. 304
- <sup>30</sup> M K Gandhi's letter to Narandas Gandhi, July 18/22, 1930
- <sup>31</sup> *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Mahatma Gandhi, 1927, cited in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 44 (July 1, 1930- December 15, 1930), p. 41
- <sup>32</sup> *Harijan*, 22 October, 1938, cited in *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Mahatma Gandhi, GBD Books, Part IV, Chapter XXVI, p. 283
- <sup>33</sup> *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 67 (April 1, 1938 – October 14, 1938), p. 437
- <sup>34</sup> *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Mahatma Gandhi, GBD Books, 2012, Part V, Chapter XXX, p. 408
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, Part V, Chapter XXXII, p. 418
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter XXXIII, p. 418
- <sup>37</sup> *Satyagraha* has essence of Gandhi and Hazare, *Free Press Journal Bureau*, July 27, 2013
- <sup>38</sup> M K Gandhi's letter to Rameshwari Nehru, July 14/16, 1941, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 74 (April 16, 1941- October 10, 1941), p. 164–165
- <sup>39</sup> M K Gandhi's answer to an American, *Harijan*, 18 May, 1940, cited in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 72 (April 16, 1940-September 11, 1940) p. 61
- <sup>40</sup> Speech at Public Meeting, Haripur, *Harijan*, 26 November, 1938, cited in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 68 (October 15, 1938 – February 28, 1939), p. 99
- <sup>41</sup> Speech at Swabi, *Harijan*, 5 November, 1938, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 68 (October 15, 1938 – February 28, 1939), p. 20
- <sup>42</sup> *Young India*, 2 July, 1931, cited in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 47, p. 89
- <sup>43</sup> *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 79 (January 1, 1945 to April 24, 1945), p. 217

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- <sup>44</sup> Interview with American teachers, *Harijan*, 7 January, 1939, cited in The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 68, p. 251
- <sup>45</sup> *Young India*, 7 January, 1932, The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 48, p. 476
- <sup>46</sup> On the Way to Shimla, *Harijan*, 29 September, 1940, The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 73, p. 54
- <sup>47</sup> Gandhi in Segaoon, *Harijan*, 21 October, 1939, cited in The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 70, p. 257
- <sup>48</sup> Discussion with Christian Missionaries, *Harijan* on 24-12-1938, The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 68, p. 202
- <sup>49</sup> Gandhi in Segaoon, *Harijan*, 14 October, 1939, cited in The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 70, p. 245
- <sup>50</sup> Gandhi in Sevagram, *Harijan*, 18 May, 1940, cited in The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 72, pp. 64–65
- <sup>51</sup> Gandhi in Segaoon, *Harijan*, 17 December, 1938, cited in The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 68, p. 192
- <sup>52</sup> *Harijan*, 7 October, 1939, cited in The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 70, p. 215
- <sup>53</sup> Talk to Khudai Khidmatgars, On or before October 15, 1938, The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 68, p. 2
- <sup>54</sup> Gandhi in Segaoon, *Harijan*, 18 February, 1939, cited in The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 68, p. 342
- <sup>55</sup> Letter to Purushottam Gandhi, May 12, 1932, cited in The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 49, pp. 431–432
- <sup>56</sup> Interview of M K Gandhi, *Harijan*, 18 February, 1939, cited in The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 68, pp. 273–274
- <sup>57</sup> Statement to the Press, April 22, 1938, cited in The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 67, p. 37
- <sup>58</sup> Raghu Krishnan, *Economic Times*, “The eyes have it”, May 25, 2003
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid*
- <sup>60</sup> Discussion with Christian Missionaries, *Harijan*, 24 December, 1938, cited in The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 68, p. 202
- <sup>61</sup> Letter to Rameshwari Nehru, July 14/16, 1941, cited in The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 67, p. 66–67
- <sup>62</sup> Talk to Khudai Khidmatgars, *Harijan*, 19 November, 1938, cited in The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 68, pp. 164–165
- <sup>63</sup> *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 83, p. 392
- <sup>64</sup> Speech at Prayer Meeting, New Delhi, April 9, 1946, *Hindustan*, April 10, 1946, cited in The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 83
- <sup>65</sup> Classic half-century, Arnab Banerjee, *Hindustan Times*, Sep 25, 2007
- <sup>66</sup> Speech at Public Meeting, Haripur, *Harijan* on 26 November, 1938, cited in The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 68 (October 15, 1938 – February 28, 1939), p. 99
- <sup>67</sup> Classic half-century, Arnab Banerjee, *Hindustan Times*, Sep 25, 2007
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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p. 46

<sup>70</sup> Ibid

<sup>71</sup> Speech at prayer meeting in New Delhi on June 15, 1947, cited in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 88, p. 160

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<sup>74</sup> Segaoon, *Harijan* on 14 October, 1939, cited in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 70, p. 243

<sup>75</sup> Interview with American journalists, *Harijan* on 14 June, 1942, cited in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 76, p. 193

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## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

Sir Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi* is the only feature film that covers the longest part of Gandhi's life. Opening with the assassination scene (January 30, 1948) at Birla House in New Delhi, the film then goes into a flashback and shows the Mahatma being thrown off a train at Pietermaritzburg railway station in South Africa for travelling first class. The film basically covers 49 years of Mahatma Gandhi's life, ranging from 1898 to 1947.

Attenborough rightly admits in one of the very first shots that it would be impossible to cover a life of over 70 years in three hours. Since it leaves out the crucial first 29 years of Gandhi's life, the author is of the view it might not be correct to call it a complete biopic.

At the most, it can be called a political biopic because it mainly deals with the period when Gandhi led a public life and fought against the British, first in South Africa and later in India. The film introduces Gandhian principles to the world through the large screen but gives little play to how these principles were shaped. However, it does capture the metamorphosis Gandhi goes through from being a proud Britain-educated attorney to a politician in a loincloth who converted the struggle for social reform into the struggle for independence (Byrne, 1984).<sup>1</sup>

The film deals with how Gandhi invokes truth, non-violence and civil disobedience or *Satyagraha* to fight against the injustice symbolized by the British Empire in South Africa and India. The primary objective of this fight is to achieve peace and equality. In India, besides British imperialism, the caste system is also a symbol of tyranny and oppression. The author partly agrees with Pragati Shukla, who claims in her research paper that the three important themes *Gandhi* deals with are "fight for justice", "desire for peace" and "commitment to a cause". We could call them *Satyagraha*: non-violence, truthfulness and equality (Shukla, 2013).<sup>2</sup>

The first and foremost theme of the film *Gandhi* is the fight for justice. Gandhi appeals to others to help the fight for justice. He realizes that there is power in the masses. When many people band together to fight for a cause

as a community, then true change can occur. Although all of Gandhi goals are not achieved, he does make a dramatic difference in his world.

The second important theme of the film is the desire for peace. Gandhi desires true peace over everything else. Although he realizes that true peace can only come through some strife, he does his best to bring peace to his country and the world.

The third and the last important theme of the film is dedication to a cause. When people think about commitment to a cause, Gandhi is one of the first people they think about. He refuses to let anything stand in his way as he seeks freedom and equality for everyone, both when he lives in South Africa and in his home country of India. Gandhi's unbelievable commitment to his goals inspires nations and changes the world.

The author believes that Attenborough chose the years he portrayed on the big screen quite carefully. Firstly, these are the years the conflict was at its peak. Secondly, this is the period when Gandhi launched the fight against the oppressive British regime and the exploitative Hindu caste system.

Obviously, unlike the formative three decades when Gandhi experimented with non-vegetarianism and fasts, learned about not stealing, and explored Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and other religions of the world as well as obtained a law degree would not have made interesting cinema. This would not have provided the linear theme Attenborough was looking for in his plot.

The author also believes that the British filmmaker took a number of liberties with history to turn Mahatma Gandhi, his protagonist, into a superhuman being. To begin with, the film flashes the statement by Albert Einstein "Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth", insinuating this was a tribute paid after the assassination of the Mahatma. The fact is this was written by Einstein in 1944 on the occasion of Gandhi's 75th birthday (Dhiman, 2016).<sup>3</sup>

Mark Lindley, a historian of modern India and an American teacher of economics, confirms in his research paper "Mahatma Gandhi vs Attenborough's 'Gandhi'" that "Einstein's remark was made three years earlier in his preface to a book published on the occasion of Gandhi's 75th birthday" (Lindley, 2009).<sup>4</sup>

The assassination scene shows V D Savarkar sitting in a carriage when Nathuram Godse walks into Birla House to assassinate the Mahatma. The fact is Savarkar did not accompany Godse to the scene of the murder. Another glaring anomaly is that the film portrays Mahatma Gandhi, from the second scene (Pietermaritzburg station) until the end of his life, as a

super confident person who spoke with consummate ease and authority. This is far from true.

Gandhi's charisma had a cultural referent. His effectiveness as a peripatetic teacher was related less to his oratorical or theatrical skills – he never became a great speaker – than to the reputation that preceded him and the ideal that he embodied. (Rudolph, 1983)<sup>5</sup>

Gandhi himself confessed this in his autobiography.

This shyness I retained throughout my stay in England. Even when I paid a social call, the presence of half a dozen or more people would strike me dumb.... It was only in South Africa that I got over this shyness, though I never completely overcame it. It was impossible for me to speak impromptu. I hesitated whenever I had to face strange audiences and avoided making a speech whenever I could. Even today I do not think I could or would be inclined to keep a meeting of friends engaged in the idle talk. (Gandhi, 2012)<sup>6</sup>

Besides the factual inaccuracies, Attenborough also fails to explain Gandhi's charisma. No doubt his film made the Mahatma immensely popular worldwide but it takes for granted what writer Bidyut Chakrabarty calls his “renouncer” or “sanyasi” status, which drove hordes of Indians to him.

By playing upon a very varied symbolic register, Gandhi was able to establish with the Indian public a rapport of profound complicity which often escaped the eyes of the British, who were not very sensitive to the nuances of Gandhian symbolism. To the Indian masses, he was a renouncer, a sanyasi who adopted a lifestyle entirely different from those of the Anglicized politicians until then controlling the anti-British campaign in India. (Chakrabarty, 2006)<sup>7</sup>

The film even romanticizes Gandhi's train journey through parts of India after arriving from South Africa. It never touches upon his experience of travelling in third class, packed like “sardines”.

Like Lord Reading, who was British governor general and Viceroy in India from 1921 to 1925, Attenborough's film makes no attempt to explore the reasons behind Gandhi's unprecedented popularity. It makes no effort to scratch the surface and find what lay beyond his simplicity. Lord Reading expressed surprise about Gandhi's popularity after his first meeting with him in India, writing after the meeting,

There is nothing striking about his appearance. He came to visit me in a white dhoti and cap, woven on a spinning-wheel, with bare feet and legs, and my first impression on seeing him ushered into my room was there was nothing to arrest attention in his appearance, and that I should have passed him by in the street without a second look at him. When he talks, the impression is different. (Chakrabarty, 2006)<sup>8</sup>

Reading further added that “Mr. Gandhi’s religious and moral views are, I believe, admirable, but I confess that I find it difficult to understand the practice of them in politics” (Mishra, 2002).<sup>9</sup> Attenborough, through western associates of Gandhi, creates the impression that Gandhi’s spirituality and morality came from Jesus Christ. This is why many Western writers, after the release of the film, drew parallels between the Mahatma’s non-violent non-cooperation and Christ’s sacrifices, including his crucifixion.

Writing about Gandhi’s salt *Satyagraha*, where hundreds of his followers – men and women – gave themselves up to the armed police for beating, Jan Peter Schouten, in his book *Jesus as Guru: The Image of Christ Among Hindus and Christians in India*, questions their voluntary submission.

The bloody scenes of non-violent demonstration raise questions: Is the price justified? Is this the right way to achieve an ideal? And does the Gospel of Jesus Christ point to this type of activity? In any case, Mahatma Gandhi was convinced that the result of Christ’s preaching could not be anything but acceptance of such a sacrifice. In his view the Gospel shows that there is no other way to achieve justice. (Schouten, 2008)<sup>10</sup>

Contrary to what writers like Schouten, Johan Gunther (*An Incredible Combination of Jesus Christ, Tammany Hall and Your Father*) and Terrence J Rynne (*Gandhi and Jesus*) claim, the fact is that Gandhi learned the lesson of non-violence and *Satyagraha* not from one or two religions or from one or two individuals but rather an assimilation of what he read and interpreted from *Gita*, the Gujarati saints of lore, and writers like John Ruskin (*Unto this Last*), Henry David Thoreau, Leo Tolstoy (*The Kingdom of God is Within You*), and many others.

No doubt Gandhi was a big fan of the Sermon on the Mount, so much so that he called himself the “Sermon on the Mount Christian” and regarded Jesus as the best teacher.

The Sermon on the Mount went straight to my heart. When I read in the Sermon on the Mount such passages as....”whoever smiteth thee on thy cheek turn to the other also”, I was simply overjoyed. (Wofford, 1949)<sup>11</sup>

But to infer that only Jesus inspired his passive resistance would not be entirely correct. Gandhi, in fact, time and again refused to accept Jesus as the only son of God and called the Christianity being practiced in Europe and America a “travesty” of Jesus’ teachings. What must be born in mind is that the Mahatma read the Bible as a Hindu and did not believe it literally.

As a Bible interpreter, Gandhi differed from the Christians who took the Bible literally. Second, Gandhi not only read it critically but also read it in the Hindu context. Gandhi has often claimed to have gained a better understanding of the Bhagavad Gita after reading scriptures as The Holy Bible, and has also said that he could relate to it better and therefore felt that he became a better Hindu. (Kumar, 2014)<sup>12</sup>

The movie makes no reference to the *Gujarati poets* or Ruskin when explaining Gandhi’s non-violence. It does, however, make a reference to Leo Tolstoy (Gandhi is holding *The Kingdom of God is Within You* in the train at Pietermaritzburg station. Benegal’s *Making of the Mahatma* says he was reading the Koran) and the New Testament when Gandhi asks Charlie, “Doesn’t the New Testament say, ‘If your enemy strikes you on the right cheek, offer him the left’?”

The problem with Attenborough’s film is that it looks at and draws a picture of Gandhi through the eyes of his foreign associates, mainly Christians – Charlie, Walker, Andrews, Madeleine Slade, Kallenbach. It completely ignores the thousands of Indian freedom fighters who not only fought with Gandhi for the country’s freedom from British rule but also added to his persona through their actions. The only Indian characters to make a fleeting appearance in the film are Nehru, Patel and Gokhale. There is no Ambedkar and no Subhas Chandra Bose, with whom Gandhi had major differences.

No wonder then for Rachel Dwyer, a British professor of Indian cinema, *Gandhi* will always remain an outsider’s view of the father of the Indian nation. The author has no disagreement with Dwyer on this.

Another example of why Attenborough’s film is an outsider’s perspective is that it hardly gives any space to *Swadeshi* and untouchability, the two major principles Mahatma Gandhi chose to speak about in almost every other forum, along with Hindu-Muslim unity. Tripathi calls the Gandhi portrayed in Attenborough’s movie “the multinational Gandhi” (Tripathi, 2015).<sup>13</sup>

Untouchability is heard about half a dozen times in the dialogues. Firstly, when Gandhi asks Kasturba to clean the chamber pots, saying that since there are no untouchables in South Africa, everyone, including her, will have to rake and cover the latrine. At another place, Gandhi is heard

telling the crowd in the presence of Nehru and Patel that untouchability must be removed.

Third instance is when Kasturba is heard explaining to Slade and Bourke-White that Gandhi has always fought two kinds of slavery in India – one of women and one of the untouchables. The film does not show Gandhi living in settlements of Bhangis or fasting for Namashudras, Nadiyas and other untouchables. He is also not shown expounding his views on inter-dining or inter-caste and inter-religious marriages, or even *varnashrama*, which greatly evolved and added to the aura he later acquired even among the lower castes.

*Swadeshi*, an article of faith with Gandhi, is completely missing from the film *Gandhi*, except for a few symbolic shots of charkha where the Mahatma or Kasturba are shown spinning cotton. So is cow protection the Mahatma's "poem of pity" (YI, 1921),<sup>14</sup> "mother to millions of mankind" (YI, 1921)<sup>15</sup> and "better than the mother who gave us birth" (Harijan, 1940),<sup>16</sup> and Gandhi pledged to "defend its worship against the whole world".

The film emphasizes the equality of religions when Gandhi tells a Hindu youth waving the black flag at him, "What do you want me not to do? Not to meet with Mr. Jinnah? (Fiercely) I am a Muslim! And a Hindu and a Christian and a Jew – and so are all of you. When you wave those flags and shout you send fear into the hearts of your brothers" and when he tells Charlie in his farm in Johannesburg, "You could call it a 'communal farm,' I suppose. But we've all come to the same conclusion – Our Gita, the Muslim's Koran or your Bible – it's always the simple things that catch your breath – 'Love thy neighbour as thyself'".

But nowhere does the film show Gandhi criticizing a religion. The fact is Gandhi was a bitter critic of Hinduism and even wished its death if it failed to weed out the untouchability within its fold. Similarly, he severely condemned Christianity for converting lower-caste Hindus in India through allurements and false propaganda, and accused Christian missionaries of working with an ulterior motive.

"I hold that proselytization under the cloak of humanitarian work is unhealthy to say the least. It is most resented by people here. Religion after all is a deeply personal. It touches the heart." (CWMG, 1931). He also said, "To those who would convert India (Hindus), might it not be said, 'Physician, heal thyself?'" (CWMG, 1931). He even went to the extent of calling missionaries to withdraw from India and let "the methods of conversion" to be like "Caesar's wife, above suspicion" (CWMG, 1931).<sup>17</sup>

Gandhi charged Europe and the United States with representing the spirit of Satan when it came to Christianity. He called for a law to ban conversions.

“If I had the power and could legislate, I should stop all proselytizing. In Hindu households, the advent of a missionary has meant the disruption of the family coming in the wake of change of dress, manners, language, food, and drink” (Harijan, 1940). On this count, he did not even spare Islam. “Gandhiji said that he was not going to be satisfied without a heart understanding between the two communities and this was not possible unless the Hindus and Muslims were prepared to respect each other’s religion, leaving the process of conversion absolutely free and voluntary” (ABP, 1947).<sup>18</sup>

Attenborough, perhaps, felt that showing criticism of Christianity might put his European viewers off. Also, it could not have been easy for him to explain Gandhi’s social and economic model to his foreign audience. Physical labour and untouchability are more Indian products.

The European audience of the movie might not have appreciated Gandhi’s opposition to modernity and machines. Similarly, Gandhi’s fight against untouchability, which primarily afflicts Hinduism and to a much lesser extent other religions in India, might not have any relevance for European cinema-goers. Or maybe Attenborough did not wish to create opposition to his film by touching upon the simmering social differences in Indian society. Besides, this might have also brought into focus Christianity’s role in conversions in India during the pre-independence era.

Chakrabarty quotes from *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* to say,

The Gandhian social utopia as outlined in the *Hind Swaraj* and *Harijan* may appear to be “unrealistic” or “obscurantist” as a model for social and economic reconstruction. (Sarkar, 1983).<sup>19</sup> But it was undoubtedly a firm response to the “alienating effects of modernisation” under colonialism... Critical of “the madness of modernity”, Gandhi articulated his alternative vision through the programmes of khadi and charkha, village reconstruction and Harijan welfare. (Chakrabarty, 2006)<sup>20</sup>

Narwekar accuses Attenborough of scaring Hindi filmmakers from attempting a biopic of Mahatma Gandhi by making a straight, uncontroversial and reverential film on the father of Indian nation. This is also the view Gyan Prakash, Professor of History at Princeton University, holds.

Prakash writes that the tone in the historical films in India, including *Gandhi*, was so high-minded that it appeared like we were watching God rather than a human being with complex motives, desires and ideas. Why is



it that no Indian film-maker tries to even break with the straightforward linear story and experiment with jagged time lines? (Prakash, 2005)<sup>21</sup>

Charging Attenborough with “using the time-worn view of history as a chronicle of a great man”, Prakash calls *Gandhi* “an account of India’s coming into being as a nation”.

The Mahatma appeared as an embodiment of India, a towering force who gathered in his personality all the strengths of the good to triumph over evil. The film was enormously successful, though it greatly simplified and distorted both Gandhi and India’s history. (Prakash, 2005).<sup>22</sup>

The author is in agreement with Narwekar and Prakash on this.

To give credit where it is due, it is also a fact that Attenborough’s film does succeed in contrasting Mahatma Gandhi’s simplicity and steadfastness with those of the people around him – Mohammad Ali Jinnah and others. While Jinnah and others change their outlook – physical as well as mental – towards India and its traditions as the film progresses (compare what Jinnah wears initially and later in the film), the Mahatma remains firm on his simplicity and true to the principles of truth, non-violence and Hindu-Muslim unity he practiced and preached.

The authenticity with which he sought virtue and the highest religious goals through self-control, truth, and non-violence re-enacted a familiar but rarely realized cultural model, that of the saintly man. By communicating in a fresh and historically relevant manner the idea that those who could master themselves could achieve serenity, religious merit, and mastery of their environment, he evoked a response that his authority as a consummate and skilled politician could not alone have commanded. (Rudolph, 1983)<sup>23</sup>

Shyam Benegal’s *Making of the Mahatma* covers over the little over two decades Gandhi spent in South Africa before returning to India in January 1915. In this period, not only did the father of the Indian nation continue his intense engagement with non-conformist Christianity but he also substantially learnt about jurisprudence.

This was the period he read John Ruskin’s *Unto This Last*, Henry David Thoreau’s essay on living with nature and Leo Tolstoy’s *The Kingdom of God is Within You*. He experimented on what he learned by setting up institutional structures like the Phoenix settlement and Tolstoy farm, where there was equal respect for all kinds of labour.

In South Africa, Gandhi learnt how to organize mass movements and form political groups to fight for people’s rights. It was here that he set up the Natal Indian Congress. In South Africa, he learnt how to fight for truth through *Satyagraha*, though the word actually was coined in 1917 during

the peasant movement in the Kheda district of Gujarat. In South Africa, it was known as passive resistance.

During the South Africa period, his opposition to untouchability first came to the fore. Also, it was there that he wrote *Hind Swaraj*, a treatise that seeks to understand modern civilization. Furthermore, it was in South Africa that Gandhi learnt how to mobilize the mass media to deliver his message to both the common man and the foreign governments.

Let us take the virtues first. The biggest virtue of *Making of the Mahatma* is that it is much truer to historical facts than Attenborough's grandiose production. It clearly avoids deifying the father of the Indian nation. Rajit Kapur's Gandhi is a much more humane and flesh-and-blood character than Ben Kingsley's. Narwekar finds it a much more "incisive and penetrating exploration of what made M K Gandhi the man India learned to revere" (Narwekar, HCFS).<sup>24</sup>

But then this also becomes the undoing of Benegal's movie. Gyan Prakash writes,

As an Indian response to Hollywood's Gandhi, Shyam Benegal's *Making of the Mahatma* was historically more accurate, more balanced in giving due to other leaders. But the effort at achieving accuracy, while remaining within the genre of history as the nation's biography, produced a flat film that struggled for narrative coherence and dramatic flourish. (Prakash, 2005)<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, *Making of the Mahatma*, produced by India and South Africa, never got the kind of epic scale publicity Gandhi received. Yet it is much truer to Gandhian precepts – truth, non-violence, and the equality of religions – delivering them with all of Gandhi's "faults and foibles", which make the young Gandhi much "more accessible as a role model" (Forbes, Block, Schuster, 1990).<sup>26</sup>

Though Feroz Abbas Khan's *Gandhi My Father* (2007) is supposed to explore the relationship between the Mahatma and his eldest son, Hari Lal, it ends up emphasizing Gandhi's philosophy that the larger public good must prevail over the interests of an individual, and each individual should make sacrifices for his country.

The film establishes Gandhi as a towering leader of the Indian freedom struggle, who overlooked his family life and children's good to set an example of morality for the future India. At the same time, it exposes the fragility of Mahatma Gandhi the father as it points out why and how even his son found it difficult to carry the burden of his expectations and principles – truthfulness, non-violence, celibacy, *Swadeshi*, equality of religions, non-stealing, and untouchability.

The film showcases not only the greatest leader of the Indian freedom struggle but also a troubled father who failed to inspire his son to lead a moral life. It juxtaposes the ideal father who wants his sons to fight for the country (Harilal went to jail seven times for participation in protests led by his father (Manzoor, 2007)) and to be “the ideal symbols of the new India he was trying to create” (Manzoor, 2007)<sup>27</sup> against Harilal, a son, who forever longs to lead a life of luxury, privileges and pleasures but fails to earn it even with dishonest means.

Gandhi disregards Harilal’s desire to go abroad for higher studies and sends a more deserving person in his place. He practices and preaches non-violence while his son is out to make a profit from the Second World War and anticipates a loss in the eventuality of the return of peace.

Gandhi leads the life of a renunciant while his son first wants to marry against his wishes and then wants to remarry after the death of his first wife Gulab, alias Chanchal. As expected, his anguish finds an expression in the retort

How can I who has always advocated renunciation of sex encourage you to gratify it? (Manzoor, 2007)

He practices and propagates the precept of Asteya (non-stealing) while his son steals Rs. 30,000 from a merchant, who did not prosecute him because he was a friend of Gandhi’s (Manzoor, 2007). For Harilal, says Feroz Abbas Khan,

Gandhi is an inconvenient truth and his principles were hard to live by. (Manzoor, 2007)<sup>28</sup>

Gandhi believes in experimenting everything on himself and his family before promoting it for the public while Harilal is of the view that his father is responsible for not just their (his sons) suffering but also his mother Kasturba’s (note the scene where Mahatma Gandhi forces Kasturba to clean a chamber pot).

Gandhi wears homespun khadi, prescribes *Swadeshi* among one of his four principles and calls for a boycott of foreign goods; his son trades in imported British clothes.

The story of Harilal remained under wraps for very long. Even Tushar Gandhi, the great grandson of the Mahatma, only learned about it from the film.

I don’t remember a phase in my life when I didn’t know who I was. And while the tragedy of Harilal has had repercussions for my family, it was not

until I saw this film that I could see for myself how it must have happened. (Manzoor, 2007)<sup>29</sup>

Surprisingly, *Gandhi My Father*, which was supposed to have analysed the relations between a great father and his unworthy son, ends up adding to the halo around Mahatma Gandhi. The message from the film is

The story of Gandhi is not only the story of India: it is also the story of a father with high expectations and four sons who found it hard to measure up. (Manzoor, 2007)<sup>30</sup>

Rajmohan Gandhi, a historian and grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, whose books *Gandhi: The Man, His People, and the Empire* and *Mohandas: True Story of a Man, His People* were released around the time *Gandhi My Father* was being filmed or released in theatres, informs Manzoor, “The hallmark of any leader is that they expand the notion of a family to include the entire nation and so do not do anything special for their children” (Manzoor, 2007).<sup>31</sup> The author feels that *Gandhi My Father* succeeds in delineating Gandhian principles it did not set out to do in the first place.

For Raju Hirani, the director of *Lage Raho Munnabhai*, the hero in his film is Mahatma Gandhi (Hirani, 2006),<sup>32</sup> whose epistemology the Munnabhai (Sanjay Dutt), Circuit (Arshad Warsi) and other character artists like Simran (Dia Mirza), Victor D’Souza (Jimmy Shergil), the retired teacher (Hemu Adhikari), the girl (Priya Bapat), who calls Munna to inquire about how to understand the reality of her prospective groom, and the man who is advised to clean the spit of his neighbour and smile while doing so invoke to do *Gandhigiri*, something the Mahatma did successfully in his *Satyagraha* ashram in 1915. Gandhi refused to throw an untouchable couple (Dudabhai, Danibehn and their daughter Lakshmi) out despite pressure from the upper castes who owned the wells in his ashram.

The only difference is in those days the act was known as a Gandhian principle or Gandhism, and not *Gandhigiri*. Apparently, the biggest contribution of the LRM (2006) is that it simplified the Gandhian principles of truth and non-violence and resurrected them among the common people in India. The blockbuster movie also established topicality and relevance of the Gandhian precepts.

No wonder Hirani is sure about the validity of Gandhism. “Gandhian philosophy was valid when conditions were much more tough. We were slaves to the British. I am sure it is valid today” (Hirani, 2006). Hirani and Vidhu Vinod Chopra, the producer of the film, kept Dilip Prabhavalkar who played Gandhi, or rather his image, in the film in hiding for two weeks after the release of the film (Hirani, 2006). He, after all, not only played the

Mahatma but also represented Munna alias Murali Prasad Sharma's conscience.

LRM, like Mahatma Gandhi, who never lost faith in his principles and the goodness of all human beings, exudes hope. The film uses tapori language to popularize the Gandhian precepts of truth and non-violence among the common people. Remember, only matriculate Munnabhai and his sidekick Circuit converse in the tapori language. The rest either speak Hindi or a mix of Hindi and Punjabi.

Filmmaker Sanjit Narwekar lauds *Lage Raho Munnabhai* for his interpretation of the philosophy of the Mahatma. He calls the film a flawed but brave work which demands attention (Narwekar, HCFS).<sup>33</sup> What is important is not the tapori language but the messages being delivered through it. Gandhi in the film is Munnabhai's conscience. He says what Munnabhai's inner self wants him to hear.

Hirani said the same during his live chat with the readers on rediff.com when asked why Gandhi did not answer the three questions Munnabhai asked him in the presence of the psychiatrist and Lucky Singh (Boman Irani).

Whatever Gandhiji speaks is what Munna has read about him. Munna didn't know Babu's mother's name or his ashram's name in South Africa. When the psychiatrist hands him a paper with these answers, Munna reads it and HIS BAPU answers. Babu was a creation of his own mind from whatever he read about him. (Hirani, 2006)<sup>34</sup>

Shreya N, who did research on the film for his master's degree, says that in *Lage Raho Munnabhai* Mahatma Gandhi "becomes the locus of bringing about a change – a solution to these new urban problems. With a strong reflective and retrospective gaze, the film makes people look into themselves for solutions rather than outside" (Shreya, 2016).<sup>35</sup>

Gandhi is the locus in making Munnabhai fearless after the latter tells truth to Jahnvi about his forged professorship. He is also the locus in getting the pension released for the retired schoolteacher. It is no wonder that the scene where the schoolteacher, instructed by Munnabhai via radio waves, offers his purse, spectacles, hearing aid, shirt, vest, belt, shoes, and trousers as a bribe to an office clerk in exchange for the pension file is also the favourite scene of the film's director Raju Hirani. The two scenes are the best illustrations of the efficacy of Gandhian methods.

The Mahatma Gandhi in the film, claims Dev N Pathak, "is not someone who is distant, archaic but someone with whom we the contemporary masses can relate with". The cameo appearance has made him "popular

among all ages and cultures in India”, putting an end to the very long period of time in which he was almost forgotten (Pathak, 2013).<sup>36</sup>

The author believes the Gandhi in *Lage Raho Munnabhai* is embodied in you, me, and all of us. We can discover him provided we start believing in truth, non-violence and *Satyagraha*, the weapons the father of the Indian nation invoked to challenge the British imperialists.

Munna’s transformation in the film, Makarand Paranjape says,

is not from gangster to bourgeois, law-abiding citizen; but it is from a violent thug to a viable satyagrahi, who also questions and struggles against bourgeois complacency and reaction. It is this demonstration of the viability of *Satyagraha* in contemporary India that gives the film its more serious underpinning. Gandhism vs. Gandhigiri is actually doxa vs. praxis, therefore going to the very heart of the Gandhian project (Paranjape, 2015).<sup>37</sup>

Like all other films, *Lage Raho Munnabhai* too has its flaws in the form of inconsistency on violence and non-violence. There are scenes where violence appears to prevail over ahimsa.

The author agrees with Makarand R Paranjape when he concludes that

while the film does engage with Gandhian thoughts seriously, it cannot be pigeonholed as a traditionalist or purist exposition either. The film, it seems to me, shows a great deal of ambivalence towards violence in its scheme of things, repeatedly showing the efficacy of violence and the defeat, at least partial, of non-violence. Instead of fetishizing non-violence, Munna Bhai looks at it as part of a larger arsenal that needs to be employed to combat social evils and corruption. To that extent, the film’s take on non-violence is less Gandhian and more in keeping with the traditional Sanatani practise. (Paranjape, 2015)<sup>38</sup>

The scenes where Circuit points a gun at Batuk Maharaj at Munnabhai’s bidding, Munnabhai hits back at the goons sent by Lucky Singh, and Munna slaps sense into the son of Second Innings’ resident Hari Desai exemplify the film’s ambivalence on violence.

However, the author certainly does not agree with intellectuals who accuse LRM of trivializing Mahatma Gandhi’s message.

On the contrary, it is a serious engagement with the Mahatma in the form of not so much a resurrection, but his afterlife. The very familiar Mahatma becomes more than just a “familiar”, that is the friendly neighbourhood ghost, but an enduring, challenging and even vexing presence in the national consciousness. (Paranjape, 2015)<sup>39</sup>

The author would rather endorse Sarojini Naidu, who said in a broadcast something similar to what Munnabhai calls “chemical locha” (chemical imbalance) in the film. In her broadcast, “My Father, Do Not Rest’ on All India Radio on February 1, 1948, Naidu said,

Like Christ of old, on the third day he has risen again in answer to the cry of his people and the call of the world for the continuance of his guidance, his love, his service, and inspiration. And while we all mourn, those who loved him, knew him personally, and those to whom his name was but a miracle and a legend, though we are all full of tears and though we are full of sorrow on this third day when he has risen from his own ashes, I feel that sorrow is out of place and tears to become a blasphemy. How can he die, who through his life and conduct and sacrifice, who through his love and courage and faith has taught the world that the spirit matters, not the flesh, that the spirit has the power greater than the powers of the combined armies of the earth, combined armies of the ages?

Naidu noted that

he was small, frail, without money, without even the full complement of garment to cover his body, not owning even as much earth as might be held on the point of a needle, how was he so much stronger than the forces of violence, the might of empires and the grandeur of embattled forces in the world? Why was it that this little man, this tiny man, this man with a child's body, this man so ascetic, living on the verge of starvation by choice so as to be more in harmony with the life of the poor, how was it that he exercised over the entire world, of those who revered him and those who hated him, such power as emperors could never wield?

It was because he did not care for applause; he did not care for censure. He only cared for the path of righteousness. He cared only for the ideals that he preached and practised. And in the midst of the most terrible disasters caused by violence and greed of men, when the abuse of the world was heaped up like dead leaves, dead flowers on battlefields, his faith never swerved in his ideal of non-violence. He believed that though the whole world slaughter itself and the whole world's blood be shed, still his non-violence would be the authentic foundation of the new civilisation of the world and he believed that he who seeks his life shall lose it and he who loses his life shall find it. (Naidu, 1948)<sup>40</sup>

From among the 33 films that the author has taken up for research, *The Legend of Bhagat Singh* and Jabbar Patel's *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: The Untold Truth* are the only ones where the character of Mahatma Gandhi appears to have definite grey shades. *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: The Untold Truth*, the bilingual film – also dubbed in Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali, etc. –

was to be made on the scale of Attenborough's *Gandhi* but it was nowhere near a match for that film's commercial success.

In fact, considering that its main set in Film City, Mumbai, alone cost over Rs. 2 crores 9 (Nandy, 2000), it was a flop at the box office. Its first week fetched only Rs. 16, 57, 858 (Nandy, 2000).<sup>41</sup> It, however, did earn Malayalam superstar Mammooty a national award for best actor for his portrayal of Ambedkar.

Ambedkar first wanted a joint electorate and then argued for a separate electorate for dalits and demanded that they be treated as a minority, not a part of Hindu religion. On August 16, 1932, the British government announced Ramsay MacDonald's Communal Award, which gave separate electorates to the Muslims, the Sikhs, the Christians, and the Depressed Classes. Gandhi opposed this very strongly and declared a fast unto death in Yerwada Jail to call for its withdrawal. Ambedkar felt Gandhi did not play fair and forced him to retreat.

Bhim was angered by the fast. He felt that Gandhi was using emotional blackmail to get his own way. Sure, there was a tremendous outpouring of emotion from all over India, and a furious campaign was launched against Bhim, labelling him a monster and a traitor. Bhim stood firm and adamant in the face of all this opposition. "To save Gandhi's life, I would not be a party to any proposals that would be against the interest of my community". (Kapadia, 2014)<sup>42</sup>

Ultimately, on September 24, 1932, after Gandhi's health started deteriorating very quickly, Ambedkar signed the Poona Pact, establishing a system of reserved seats for the untouchables in place of a separate electorate. Under the Pact, the Depressed Classes were awarded 148 reserved seats, almost double of what they were promised in the Communal Award.

Three days after breaking the fast, Gandhi constituted the All India Anti-Untouchability League (later rechristened *Harijan Sewak Sangh*), which would spearhead the campaign against untouchability. Joseph Lelyveld, author of *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle with India*, believes the Poona Pact brought about "several months of cohesion between Dr. Ambedkar and Gandhiji" (Iqbal, 2012)<sup>43</sup> but it ruptured on two points. First, Ambedkar wanted more representation of dalit leaders in the League, to which Gandhi did not agree. Second, the League "focused its efforts on fostering values like temperance and cooperation among untouchables and fighting for their right to enter temples" while Ambedkar felt getting Dalits the rights to access water, attend school and use other village amenities was more important than entry in temples (Kapadia, 2014).<sup>44</sup>



The Yerwada confrontation between Ambedkar and Gandhi had lessons for both of them. Ambedkar had to ease back on the demand for separate electorates while Gandhi realized that the launch of an aggressive and long-drawn anti-untouchability campaign was the only way to stop the changeover of Dalit leadership from the Congress to Ambedkar.

Ironically, despite being a bitter critic of Gandhi and his methods, Ambedkar's *Bahiskrat Hitkarini Sabha* resorted to *Satyagraha* to get Dalits access to a public water tank in March 1927 in Mahad (Konkan division of Maharashtra). The upper castes went to court, saying that the tank was private property. Over ten years later, in December 1937, the Bombay High Court ruled in the favour of the Dalits.

Jabbar Patel believes the cunning and selfish Gandhi tried to outwit Ambedkar on untouchability. He is convinced that the Mahatma did not play straight with the Dalit icon and was even responsible for pushing the latter to Buddhism.

He (Ambedkar) tried his best to explain his point of view but Gandhi was not ready to listen. He did not want the Dalits to walk out of the Hindu fold...Dr. Ambedkar did not want that (either). But he had no choice. Gandhi pushed him to the edge by refusing to listen to him. The Congress, too, was adamant. That comes out clearly if you look at the historical evidence. (Nandy, 2000)<sup>45</sup>

*Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar* depicts confrontations and dialogues that do not paint a flattering picture of Gandhi vis-à-vis the Dalit icon. They leave the impression that the Mahatma was not serious about eradicating untouchability and in fact, backed the caste system.

Gandhi was more concerned about getting the untouchables entry into temples and other public places. Ambedkar felt political rights were more important. The Mahatma was against formulating laws to bring about the change in the status of the Dalits; something Ambedkar insisted on. Gandhi would rather work to change the hearts of caste Hindus to build a society where there are no firsts and lasts and all equal. Gandhi defended *Manusmriti* while Ambedkar burnt copies of it. Gandhi said the British did not show a change of heart; Ambedkar retorted caste Hindus did not show any change of heart either.

Gandhi believed he represented the vast masses of untouchables in India and did not wish to concede the leadership to Bhimrao Ambedkar. Gandhi was a Hindu not merely by birth but “by conviction and choice” and believed the four caste system was integral to the Hindu religion.

Jabbar justifies the film's stance against Mahatma Gandhi.

You must remember that this was the early Gandhi. He became a saint later. He was much more intolerant, much more difficult during this phase and that is why he made things so difficult for Dr. Ambedkar. (Nandy, 2000)

*Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar* also backs the Dalit leader's disinterest and non-participation in India's freedom movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. He attended the Simon Commission meeting, boycotted by the Congress. When it is pointed out that historians like Arun Shourie have questioned Ambedkar's role in the freedom struggle, calling him "unreliable", "obstreperous" and "a hindrance to Swaraj", Jabbar Patel shoots back,

But he was doing his duty by his people, the Dalits. (Nandy, 2000)<sup>46</sup>

Jabbar Patel's film only shows one part of Mahatma Gandhi's life, when he supported the four caste system and the vocations prescribed under it. It portrays a Gandhi (Ambedkar called this Gandhi Tory) who felt *Varnashram* was integral to Hinduism and said that its removal could bring chaos and disorder. This Gandhi opposed inter-dining and inter-caste and inter-religious marriage.

Ambedkar rightly played the rival to this Gandhi at every step.

The term coined by Mohandas K. Gandhi, 'Harijan' or people of God, was resented by Ambedkar as patronizing, and the two also clashed over the idea of separate electorates for untouchables; Gandhi's win is still resented by some as depriving Dalits of their chosen leaders. (Zelliot, 2008)<sup>47</sup>

The problem is the film gives no play to the later Gandhi who spoke against *Varnashram*, rigorously campaigned against untouchability and for a change of vocations, inter-dining and inter-marriages. It glosses over the fact that Mahatma Gandhi and Bhimrao Ambedkar, despite being at loggerheads most of the time except from 1932 to 1936, complimented each other on achieving their main goal, which was the eradication of untouchability.

B R Ambedkar's contributions toward the uplift of the untouchables spanning over a period of decades achieved certain decisive milestones. But it would not have been so if Gandhi had not done the other complementary part of enlightening the Harijans and also educating the caste Hindus. His insistence on caste Hindus doing penance and adopting a Harijan girl and also establishing his Harijan Sevak Sangh all helped the work of B R Ambedkar. Between the two, their approaches and values provided the frame for the social political uplift of the depressed classes. Gandhi and B R Ambedkar provided the basic premises for the legal framework aimed at uplifting the downtrodden. (Sampathkumar, 2015)<sup>48</sup>

These are reasons why historian Ramchandra Guha finds *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar* “inexplicably hostile to Gandhi” (Guha, 2004); he believes both Gandhi and Ambedkar greatly contributed to reforming the Hindu religion.

Gandhi and Ambedkar, working by contrasting methods and in opposition to one another, made Hindus recognise the evils and horrors of the system of untouchability, (Guha, 2004)<sup>49</sup>

The film makes no attempt to understand that

to Gandhi untouchability was one of the many problems confronted by Indian society, but to B R Ambedkar it was the only problem that captured his sole attention, (Sampathkumar, 2015)

Sampathkumar hits the nail on the head when he quotes Dhananjay Keer to say,

The two great Indians of our age utilized every moment of their life as life’s greatest treasure. They were Gandhi and Ambedkar. They knew the meaning of a moment. To them time was a precious gold mine. (Sampathkumar, 2015)<sup>50</sup>

The author feels strongly that despite being unfair to Mahatma Gandhi, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar* is a great exposition on how the different target groups of Ambedkar and Gandhi converged at certain points and led to a paradigm shift in the social and legal frames for the downtrodden.

Like *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar*, Rajkumar Santoshi’s *The Legend of Bhagat Singh* (2002) runs Mahatma Gandhi down to prop up the image of the young member of the Hindustan Socialist Revolutionary Party from Punjab. It adds to the common perception that the father of the Indian nation did not make a sincere effort to save the revolutionaries from the gallows and that Gandhi’s Congress did a gross injustice to Singh by portraying him as a terrorist.

The film scoffs at Gandhi’s non-violent fight when an English officer in the film is overheard telling a service mate of his that Gandhi was an “ideal enemy” because he “doesn’t fight back”. By doing this, the film clearly approves of that bunch of writers, jurists and historians who believe that Gandhi’s non-violence did not lead to India’s freedom from the British imperialism but rather the violent battles of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Bhagat Singh, Lala Lajpat Rai, and his ilk.

A real freedom struggle can never be non-violent. Was the American War of Independence against the British (from 1775 to 1781) non-violent? Did George Washington fight with the British by presenting them flowers and

*Satyagraha*, or with bullets? It is common sense that no one gives up a huge empire because of hunger strikes, salt marches, and other such Gandhian dramas. (Katju, 2015)<sup>51</sup>

The films on Bhagat Singh portray him as a man with what Karthik Venkatesh (Venkatesh, 2016) calls “a gun and a bomb”, which is far from the truth. Singh was a deep thinker, fashioned by his study of Carl Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Bertrand Russel, Thomas Paine, Upton Sinclair, Rabindra Nath Tagore, William Wordsworth, and Lord Tennyson. It is agreed that he and his comrades in the Hindustan Revolutionary Socialist Party (HRSP) had serious differences with Mahatma Gandhi’s non-violent *Satyagraha*, called it a failure and accused him of not understanding revolutionary psychology, but they were definitely more brain than brawn. They knew bombs and guns alone could not make a revolution. Violence, they believed, was forced upon them by Britain, which committed all crimes and bled the Indians white.

Leaflets distributed by the HRSP after the murder of Saunders said,

We are sorry for shedding the blood of a man but it is necessary to shed blood on the altar of revolution. We aim at such a revolution which would end the exploitation of man by man. (Venkatesh, 2016)<sup>52</sup>

It is also true that Gandhi disapproved of the cult of violence promoted and perpetrated by the revolutionaries and believed that the great awakening of the Indian masses during the days of non-cooperation was a result of the preaching of the non-violence. But to pit Gandhi’s non-violence against the aggression of Bhagat Singh and revolutionary accomplices, exploit the gory scenes, rebel rousing songs and dialogues involving the latter, and blame Gandhi for the hanging of Singh and others is certainly not the complete story. It gives no play to the various shades of opinion which exist on the death sentence and Gandhi’s role in it. *The Legend of Bhagat Singh* makes no attempt to understand Mahatma’s antipathy towards revolutionary activities and reticence for open advocacy of pardon for Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru.

V N Datta, in his book *Gandhi and Bhagat Singh*, talks about the diverse opinions that have prevailed in the country for over seven decades on Mahatma Gandhi’s attitude to the trial and execution of young revolutionaries.

Some writers allege that Gandhi was not emotionally involved in saving Bhagat Singh’s life from the gallows because of his obsession with his creed of non-violence and his repudiation of violent means, which Bhagat Singh adopted for the fulfilment of his plans to wreck British power in India. Other

writers argue that Gandhi did make desperate efforts to save Bhagat Singh's life till the end; he failed, not for want of efforts on his part, but because the power to commute Bhagat Singh's death sentence lay not in his hands, but in the Viceroy Irwin's. (Datta, 2008)

Datta argues that Bhagat Singh and his associates were as much the victims of Congress politics as of the British Imperial system. He believes that

though Bhagat Singh had challenged the Gandhian political morality, Gandhi, despite his disapproval of Bhagat Singh's action, regarded his sacrifice a patriotic one, and Gandhi would not mind many Bhagat Singhs dying for the freedom of the country and sacrificing themselves. Didn't the Mahatma too sacrifice all he had for the freedom of the country? A sacrifice never goes in vain! There is a great lesson to be learnt from "constructive destruction". A flower must die to yield its place to the fruit, and flower must perish the seeds to sprout again. The cycle of history carries on. (Datta, 2008)<sup>53</sup>

The Congress Party resolution adopted after the hanging of Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru exemplifies Mahatma Gandhi's views on revolutionaries. While hailing the sacrifice of the revolutionaries, the resolution also criticized their "murderous deeds".

The author is of the view that *The Legend of Bhagat Singh* and other films on revolutionaries ignore the fact that their sacrifices fanned the anti-British mood in India and helped Mahatma Gandhi harness it to build his non-violent movement. The author believes the Hindi filmmakers, instead of looking at the violent and the non-violent streams as two separate movements against the foreign rule, should see them as one.

This is what Kama Maclean advocates in her book, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India: Violence, Image, Voice, and Text*, when she asks historians to "see violence as rival forms of political action". She writes,

It is far more productive to see all of these movements as part of a single formation of anti-colonial nationalism, linked to each other by complex discursive and organisational connections. (Maclean, 2016)<sup>54</sup>

*The Legend of Bhagat Singh*, therefore, by treating violent and non-violent streams of the Indian freedom struggle as two separate compartments, does justice neither to the revolutionaries nor to Mahatma Gandhi's epistemology on non-violence.

To its credit, *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: The Forgotten Hero* does not treat Mahatma Gandhi and Bose as adversaries throughout its length and breadth. It rather hints at their differences, which led to the exit of Bose

from the Congress Party, and then goes on to tell the story of the latter's battle against the British with the aid of Germany and Japan.

Benegal's film shows how Bose raised the *Azad Hind Fauj* (Indian National Army) out of the Indian Prisoners of War (PoWs) brought to Germany from various European and Middle East war theatres and the PoWs captured by Japan in the Malaysian campaign and at Singapore, travelled to Russia, South East Asia and Japan and then attacked the British in India's northeast.

Gandhi had differences with Bose over non-violence, nature, the scope of Swaraj to be demanded and formed in India, and the economic model India should follow. But the immediate reason for their fall out in 1939 was the constitution and composition of the Congress Working Committee (CWC) and the launch of the movement to overthrow the British. Gandhi wanted the Bose brothers – Sharat Chandra and Subhas Chandra – to apologize for their lack of discipline.

Unlike Gandhi, who wanted Bose, then president of the Congress, to pick members for the CWC, Bose wanted the committee to be homogenous and have equal representation from his group and Gandhians who were opposed to him. In the case of an anti-British stir, he wanted Gandhi to take advantage of the war situation and issue an ultimatum to the British to quit India. While Gandhi treated non-violence as his creed, Bose had doubts whether it would be an ideal option in a war-like situation. The former worked for a spiritual swaraj and believed in politics based on religious morality while the latter wanted rationality and modernization to be at the base of politics.

The author is of the opinion that despite having drifted apart over their differences on non-violence, industrialization and Swaraj, Gandhi and Bose never lost sight of each other's sterling qualities. Bose admitted the efficacy of fasts when he began a fast unto death in Presidency Jail, Calcutta, in September 1940. He always conceded that the father of the nation was by far the tallest leader and the prime mover of India's struggle for freedom. The Mahatma, on the other hand, admired Netaji for the way he escaped from India and gathered international support against the British Empire. It is no coincidence that Gandhi launched the Quit India Movement on August 8, 1942, after the failure of Cripps Mission, around the same time Subhas Chandra Bose announced the formation of the INA.

In his book *India Wins Freedom: The Complete Version*, Abul Kalam Azad writes that he saw unmistakable signs of change in Gandhi's attitude towards Subhas Chandra Bose after the latter's historic escape and collaboration with the Axis powers.

Gandhiji did not express the opinion about the outcome of the war in clear terms but in discussion with him, I felt that he was becoming more and more doubtful about an allied victory. I also saw that Subhas Bose's escape to Germany had made a great impression on Gandhiji. He had not formerly approved many of his actions, but now I found a change in his outlook. Many of his remarks convinced me that he admired the courage and resourcefulness Subhas Bose had displayed in making his escape from India. His admiration for Subhas Bose unconsciously coloured his view about the whole war situation. This admiration was also one of the factors which clouded the discussions during the Cripps Mission to India. (Azad, 2003)<sup>55</sup>

Azad also writes about how after a news flash about Subhas Bose's death in an air crash, a "deeply moved" Gandhiji

sent a message of condolence to Subhas Bose's mother in which he spoke in glowing terms about her son and his services to India. Also, Cripps complained to Azad that 'he had not expected a man like Gandhiji to speak in such glowing terms about Subhas Bose.

Shridhar Charan Sahoo says after the failure of Cripps Mission,

Gandhi opted for an immediate national struggle despite vehement opposition by Jawaharlal Nehru, Azad, and Rajgopalchari. The mood of the Mahatma now acquired a revolutionary élan. The words, he made use of at the time, like 'rebellion', 'revolt', 'anarchy', and 'uprising', definitely did not fit into the ethics of a non-violent struggle. On August 9, 1942, Mahatma Gandhi gave the call of 'Quit India' which he described as an 'open rebellion', a swift, non-violent revolt'. Though Gandhiji urged the freedom fighters to 'do or die', he gave them no plan or programme of action. In fact, after the arrest of Gandhiji and other leaders people were simply in the dark as to what should be their modus operandi. (Sahoo, 2007)<sup>56</sup>

Sahoo adds in his paper that Bose was elated over the launching of the Quit India Movement and considered 1942 as "the year of Grace".

He, moreover, announced over the Azad Hindi Radio in Germany, a programme of action called 'Nonviolent Guerilla Warfare' to be followed by the freedom fighters in the Country. The object of the Non-violent Guerilla warfare, in his view was twofold – 'Firstly to destroy war production in India and secondly to paralyse the British administration in the Country'(Roy, 2001).<sup>57</sup> Keeping these objections in view, Bose called upon every section of the society to participate in the historic struggle. He asked the people to stop paying all taxes, workers in industries to launch a strike, and carry out sabotage to impede production. The students were called upon to organize secret guerilla bands for carrying on sabotage in different parts of the country.

Women and girl students were required to act as secret messengers and provide shelter for the men who fight. The Government officials were also appealed by Subhas to give all available information to fighters outside and to hamper production by working inefficiently. For the general public, he also chalked out a programme of action. They were asked to take up a boycott of British goods, publish secret bulletins and set up secret radio stations. The other items recommended to be put into operation were setting fire to Government Offices and factories working for war purpose, interrupting postal, telegraph and telephone communication interrupting railway bus and tram services so as to hamper the transport of soldiers or of war material and lastly destroying police stations, railway stations and jails. (Sahoo, 2007)<sup>58</sup>

Sahoo is sure that Bose's concept of non-violent guerilla warfare influenced the nature and course of the Quit India movement to a considerable extent. It ran counter to the Gandhian strategy of truth, non-violence, and a clean and open fight. Bose's non-violent guerilla warfare exemplifies how differently the same concept could be interpreted by leaders and thinkers to the confusion of the ordinary person, who is supposed to accept it.

The non-violent guerilla warfare call gave an altogether different dimension to Mahatma Gandhi's epistemology on non-violence. Sahoo claims that the "Quit India Movement brought Gandhi and Bose ideologically nearer to each other and marked the climax of Bose's attempts to radicalize the Congress organization". The problem is *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: The Forgotten Hero* leaves the conceptual confluence of two of the greatest freedom fighters of India untouched. Sahoo and Samar Guha, an activist of the Indian Freedom movement who has written extensively on Netaji Subhas Bose, give credence to the impression that Gandhi and Bose together won freedom for India though their mode of fighting was altogether different.

In author's view, *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: The Forgotten Hero* and a recent claim by military historian General G D Bakshi that Clement Attlee, who was British prime minister when the English rulers announced the decision to withdraw from India, told the then Acting Governor of West Bengal P B Chakraborty that the principal reason for their withdrawal was "erosion of loyalty to the British crown among the Indian army and Navy personnel as a result of the military activities of Netaji" (Kanwal, 2016)<sup>59</sup> negate the role of non-violence and *Satyagraha* in the Indian freedom movement.

Benegal's *Sardar: The Iron Man of India* (1993), starring Paresh Rawal in the role of India's first deputy prime minister, stresses the great influence Mahatma Gandhi had on Vallabhbhai Patel. The film emphasizes non-



violence, *Satyagraha* and equality of religions, the three cardinal principles of the Mahatma's life.

The film shows how an England-returned barrister left his lucrative legal practice to join the Indian freedom struggle "moved by Gandhi's ability to withstand any oppression by the mightiest parts with his unique weapons of non-violence and *Satyagraha*" (Gandhi, 2006) and sacrificed a lot in his life to remain loyal to his leader. The Gandhi-Patel partnership began in 1918 when the father of the Indian nation handed over leadership of the Kheda *Satyagraha* to Patel.

The peasants' movement was launched to seek redressal for the grievances of the farmer community. It went on for six months and forced the Government to a settlement which said that only 8 percent of the land revenue would be recovered.

In a stray pamphlet attributed to him, Vallabhbhai said: A bitter war is on between the public and the blind administration. It has auctioned many houses. It has auctioned standing crops. It has threatened imprisonment. But in spite of all this, the public has stood firm. (Gandhi, 2006)<sup>60</sup>

Gandhi attributed the success of Kheda *Satyagraha* to Sardar Patel. He said,

A leader's skill is judged by the competence in selecting his assistants for the execution of his plans. Many people were prepared to follow my advice, but I could not make up my mind as to who should be my deputy commander. I then thought of Vallabhbhai. I must admit that when I met Vallabhbhai first, I could not help wondering who this stiff-looking person was and whether he would be able to do what I wanted. But the more I came to know him, the more I realized that I must secure his help. Vallabhbhai too has come to the conclusion that although he has flourishing practice today and is doing very important work in Municipality, he must become a whole time public leader. So, he has taken the plunge. If it were not for his assistance, I must admit that this campaign would not have been carried through so successfully. (Gandhi, 2006)<sup>61</sup>

If Jawaharlal Nehru was like a son to Mahatma Gandhi, Vallabhbhai Patel was like a younger brother. But in loyalty to Gandhi, Patel was perhaps fiercer than most in the Congress Party. In a humorous way, he once said that he had locked his brain and given the key to Gandhi (Gandhi, 2006). After Kheda *Satyagraha*, he spearheaded *Satyagraha* in February 1928 in Bardoli, and then in a place in Gujarat consisting of 137 villages with a population of about 88,000, which received an increase of 22 percent in tax assessment from the Bombay Revenue Department. For several weeks, the government insisted adamantly that there was no need to reconsider the

assessment but pressure from the *Satyagraha* eventually forced the governor, Sir Leslie Wilson, to appoint an independent committee of inquiry, and the committee's report favoured the peasants' position. The final consequence, therefore, was a dramatic victory for Bardoli, with only a small increase of revenue, and a substantial blow to the government's authority and credibility (Dalton, 2012).<sup>62</sup>

Dalton writes in his book that the degree of non-cooperation obtained by Patel and Gandhi in Bardoli was so extraordinary that "it must rank as a textbook example of successful small-scale *Satyagrahas*". Bardoli provided Gandhi with a template to follow in his later civil disobedience movements, like a salt march to Dandi. When the Government was signing a settlement with the agitating peasants, Gandhi wrote,

Bardoli is a sign of the times. It has a lesson both for the Government and the people; for the Government if they will recognize the power of the people when they have truth on their side and when they form a non-violent combination to vindicate it.... Nonviolent energy properly stored up sets free a force that becomes irresistible. (Gandhi, 2012)<sup>63</sup>

Gandhi lauded Patel's role in the Bardoli *Satyagraha* and emphasized the continuous education and practice of non-violence by Indians.

Before they can claim to have become a non-violent organisation, they must receive education in non-violence not through speeches or writings, necessary as both may be, but through an unbroken series of corporate acts, each evoking the spirit of non-violence. Sjt. Vallabhbhai knows what he is about. He has set for himself this more difficult task of constructive effort or internal reform. (YI, 1928)<sup>64</sup>

Besides, the agitation established a close bond between Gandhi and Patel. In a report headlined "Bolshevik regime in Bardoli. Mr. Vallabhbhai Patel in the role of Lenin", *The Times of India* reported on July 4,

Iron discipline prevails at Bardoli. Mr. Patel has instituted there a Bolshevik regime in which he plays the role of Lenin. His hold on the population is absolute.... Though Mr. Patel is the chief figure at Bardoli, the brain behind the agitation is Mr. Gandhi, who from his Ashram at Sabarmati is in careful touch with the situation, while Patel himself constantly seeks his leader's advice. (Dalton, 2012)<sup>65</sup>

Apart from Kheda and Bardoli *Satyagraha*, Patel promoted and propagated the philosophy of non-violent peaceful resistance of the Mahatma through agitation against the Rowlatt Bill (Black Bill, 1919) but whenever there was a need, he did not shy away from using force. This is

what he did with kingdoms which resisted joining the Indian state after independence.

On the equality of religions, Sardar Patel's legacy, it seems, is not without blemish. At least Abul Kalam Azad, a prominent Congress leader, has raised doubts about Patel's secularism in *India Wins Freedom*, an autobiographical narrative. Aza writes in his book,

When the question of forming provincial Government arose, there was a general expectation that Mr. (K F) Nariman would be asked to lead it in view of his status and record. This was not however done... Since Nariman was a Parsee and Kher a Hindu, this led to wide speculation that Nariman had been by-passed on communal grounds. Even if it is not true, it is difficult to disprove such an allegation. (Azad, 2003)<sup>66</sup>

But a committee comprising Gandhi and D N Bahadurji, a respected Parsi gentleman, "eventually held that the charge against Patel was not proved" (Ghose, 1991).<sup>67</sup>

Azad also charges Patel with having discriminated against Muslims in Delhi in the aftermath of the partition. He claims even Gandhi, who was responsible for building him up, was hurt deeply that

Patel should now be following a policy which was quite contrary to everything for which he himself stood.... Patel had not only failed to give protection to Muslims, but he lightheartedly dismissed any complaint made on this account. Gandhiji said that he had now no option but to use his last weapon, namely, to fast until the situation changed. Accordingly, he began his fast on 12 January 1948. In a sense, the fast was directed against the attitude of Sardar Patel and Patel knew that this was so. (Azad, 2003)<sup>68</sup>

But Urvish Kothari, writer of a Gujarati book, *Sardar: Sacho Manas Sachi Vat* (The Truth Regarding a Fair Man), gives several instances which point out that contrary to Azad's claim, Patel was a practical man whose governance did not suggest an iota of antipathy towards any particular community. Kothari claims Patel did not allow Hindu-Muslim unity to break during the Bardoli *Satyagraha* and visited Amritsar during the communal holocaust in the wake of partition to appeal to the Sikhs to allow vulnerable Muslim migrants to pass by.

Kothari also reveals that the first home minister of Independent India took drastic steps, like imposing collective fines in areas where communal riots broke out. He also asserts that Sardar organized a special train for Delhi-based Muslims belonging to Rampur to their hometown in the western part of Punjab (now in Pakistan). Nawab of Rampur wrote a letter of appreciation on September 13, 1947, to Sardar, saying that he was

“immensely grateful” to him for showing the special gesture towards “his people” (Counterview, 2013).<sup>69</sup>

During the communal frenzy in the aftermath of partition, Sardar Patel threatened to deal severely with partisan police officers. On September 7, 1947, Patel issued orders to shoot rioters at sight. Subsequently, four Hindu rioters were shot dead at Old Delhi Railway Station (Bordoloi, 2016).<sup>70</sup>

V P Menon, state department secretary under Vallabhbhai Patel, recalls in his book *The Transfer of Power in India* another incident that took place on the evening of September 9, 1947, in Patel’s residence to corroborate the first Indian Home Minister’s bi-partisan approach during the riots. While Menon was sitting with Vallabhbhai and Cabinet Secretary H M Patel in 1 Aurangzeb Road, a man rushed into the house to say that a Muslim had been butchered close by.

In a voice charged with the deepest anguish, the Sardar exclaimed: “What is the point in waiting and discussing here? Why don’t you get on with the business and do something?” Next morning a Delhi Emergency Committee was formed. Two types of camps were formed in different parts of Delhi, one for Hindu and Sikh refugees from West Punjab and the other of Muslims of Delhi itself, too frightened to go home. Sardar was a tired man during these days. He had four officials reporting to him regularly and he personally toured the disturbed areas and refugee camps to supervise relief work. (Bordoloi, 2016)<sup>71</sup>

Vijay Tendulkar, author of *Sardar: The Iron Man of India*, writes in his book *The Last Days of Sardar Patel: And, the Mime Players: Two Screen-Plays* that Patel regretted in the presence of V P Menon and Maniben that, “We have lost control over own soldiers. Sikh and Rajput soldiers brought to protect the city have themselves attacked the Muslims.” After this, an emergency committee of the Cabinet was set up under Lord Mountbatten to deal with the situation and the Sikh and Rajput soldiers were replaced by the Madras Regiment (Tendulkar, 2001).<sup>72</sup>

V Shankar, Patel’s secretary, recounts the latter’s anxiety after hearing about the threat to the shrine of Nizamuddin Auliya. The Sardar wrapped his shawl around his neck and said,

“Let us go to the saint before we incur his displeasure.” We arrived there unobtrusively. Sardar spent a good forty-five minutes in the precincts, went around the holy shrine in an attitude of veneration, made enquiries here and there of the inmates and told the Police Officer of the area, on pain of dismissal, that he would hold him responsible if anything untoward happened. (Bordoloi, 2016)<sup>73</sup>

Kishore Gandhi, the writer of *India's Date with Destiny: Ranbir Singh Chaudhary: Felicitation Volume*, recalls another instance that reflected Patel's commitment to Hindu-Muslim unity. Kishore quotes Patel as having told the 36th session of the Congress at Ahmedabad on December 28, 1921,

As Chairman of the Reception Committee, Vallabhbhai made a stirring speech and said that we have tried to overcome our weaknesses honestly and in a definite manner. The proof, if any proof is needed, is Hindu-Muslim unity, I can proudly claim that our relationship is not merely of friendship but of fruitful cooperation so that we can take the nation forward. Similarly, we have established cordial relations with Parsi, Christians and other citizens of the country. (Gandhi, 2006)<sup>74</sup>

Rajmohan Gandhi, the author of *Patel: A Life* and Shyam Benegal, telebiographer of Jawaharlal Nehru and adviser to *Sardar: The Iron Man of India*, attribute the confusion over the secular credentials of the first Indian Home Minister to manipulation by political groups to appropriate his legacy. Neither Gandhi nor Benegal have even an iota of doubt that the Sardar showed no partisanship in dealing with communal violence in the country after the partition.

Rajmohan writes in the biography of Patel,

Vallabhbhai's was a Hindu heart. He was unquestionably roused more by a report of 50 Hindu or Sikh deaths than by another of 50 Muslim deaths. But his hand was just. Patel agonized over Hindu and Sikh suffering but punished Hindu and Sikh offenders, a sense of duty rather than his heart governing the Home Minister's hand...while Vallabhbhai's frank tongue revealed his Hinduness, many an observer failed to see Patel's effort to enforce the law, or his anxiety to save Muslim lives. (Bordoloi, 2016)<sup>75</sup>

Benegal stands by what Rajmohan has written in his book. Benegal notes that though historical narrative is constantly telescoped by hindsight and contemporary conditions, "there is, however, no debate on Sardar Patel, his position was very clear on every major ideological and economic issue, and is best illustrated in Rajmohan Gandhi's biography of him". He is of the opinion that there ought not to be any controversy on the ownership of Patel's legacy. "While it is true that Sardar Patel was not a Socialist like Jawaharlal Nehru, this difference in economic outlook cannot be used as a handle to appropriate Patel by the political Right" (Hebbar, 2013).<sup>76</sup>

*Sardar: The Iron Man of India* portrays a first Indian home minister who not only believed in Gandhi and his principles but never once complained about being shortchanged when, despite his name having been recommended by 13 out of 15 committees of the Congress for prime

ministership, Gandhi preferred Nehru over him. Despite his serious differences with Nehru over settling only Muslims in houses vacated by Muslim migrants and taking Kashmir to the United Nations, he remained in the cabinet because Gandhi wanted the two of them to work together.

It seems to us that even Mahatma Gandhi would not have agreed with Azad's inference of Patel being communal. During the partition riots, the Mahatma noted about the then home minister,

The Sardar always used to walk with his head high but I tell you today he walks with his head bent. (Bordoloi, 2016)<sup>77</sup>

The author believes that unlike Nehru, who was modern, Patel was more of a traditionalist. This was illustrated in the Bardoli *Satyagraha* when this close confidante of Mahatma Gandhi used caste organizations to propagate against the then Bombay Government's unjust tax assessment imposed on the villagers in Bardoli.

*Veer Savarkar*, directed by Ved Rahi and produced by *Savarkar Darshan Prathisthan*, deals mainly with Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's adventures first in India, then in England and lastly in Andaman and Nicobar's Cellular Jail where he was incarcerated for 11 years. Whether rightly or wrongly, it does not touch upon the part when Savarkar was charge-sheeted for Mahatma Gandhi's assassination or acquitted and espoused and promoted Hindutva. As put succinctly by former Indian Prime Minister Morarji Desai in Bombay's Legislative Council on April 8, 1948, that disservice in this part "offset" "Savarkar's past services" (Noorani, 2012).<sup>78</sup>

In the first part, Savarkar comes across as a great patriot who took an oath before the family deity to get India liberated, founded a secretive organization *Abhinav Bharat Mandal* with his elder brother Ganesh for this objective, celebrated the golden jubilee of the first Indian War of Independence in 1857 in England, publicly supported Madan Lal Dhingra, the assassin of Curzon Wylie, did not flinch from jumping into a raging sea to escape from the British, and distributed manuals on bomb-making.

This Savarkar wrote books on the Indian War of Independence in 1857 and Joseph Mazzini, the Italian politician who struggled for Italian unification, in Marathi and got them secretly published. This Savarkar was arguably the only person in the history of the British Empire to be sentenced to transportation for life twice. He spent over ten years in Cellular Jail with his brother Ganesh, alias Babarao. He met Mahatma Gandhi first at India House in London in October 1909 during the Dussehra celebrations there. The two had differences on almost every other issue, including vegetarianism, the use of violence in gaining freedom for India, ways of

eliminating untouchability from the Hindu society, the use of machinery, and even reconversions.

Gandhi was a strict vegetarian. For him, ahimsa (non-violence) was a creed. He assigned the *Harijan* name to the untouchables but also justified *Varnashram* for the better part of his life. He did not feel the need for reconverting people to Hinduism. He also backed labour against machines and wanted Hindus to treat the cow as their mother and work for its protection.

Veer Savarkar, on the other hand, was non-vegetarian, strongly advocated the use of violence against the English invaders, sought the abolition of the four-caste system, organized inter-dining, set up the Patitpavan temple for all Hindus and appointed a Dalit priest there, and backed reconversions. He was no worshipper of cows and supported modernity, technology, machines, and industry. On untouchability, he was on the same page as B R Ambedkar.

He said at a Ganesh festival in Valmiki Basti in Nashik,

I wish I would see untouchability removed. After my death, may those giving a shoulder to my coffin be comprised of businessmen, of Dhed and Dome (the so-called low castes) apart from Brahmins! Only on being consigned to the flame by them all will my soul rest in peace. (Pathak, 2015)<sup>79</sup>

The lower castes were greatly impressed by the yeoman service. On August 13, 1924, the untouchable community of Bhagur, the birthplace of Savarkar, invited him for Rakshabandhan and tied rakhi to his wrist (Pathak, 2015).

Ambedkar and Savarkar formed a mutual appreciation club. The latter felicitated the former on his 50th birthday on April 14, 1942, writing,

His (Ambedkar's) work is of an eternal nature, humanitarian and that of imbued with pride in one's own country. The feeling that a great man like Ambedkar is born in a so-called untouchable caste will eliminate the despair prevalent in the hearts of untouchables, and from the life of Ambedkar they will get the energy to face the dominance of so-called touchables. (Pathak, 2015)<sup>80</sup>

Savarkar invited Ambedkar to inaugurate a temple in Peth Kila in Ratnagiri in 1931, to which the latter wrote,

Due to my engagement in the previously scheduled programme I am unable to join the function, but as you are in the social field this has lent an occasion to draw a favourable conclusion in this matter. Destruction of untouchability alone will not make untouchables an inseparable part of Hindu community.

Chaturvarnya (four-fold varnas) itself should be abolished. I am extremely delighted to say that you are among those few who felt the necessity of this. (Pathak, 2015)

The author is of the view that Savarkar, despite his claims, and Mahatma Gandhi did not have many differences when it came to the eradication of untouchability except that the former was for the reconversion of Hindu converts while the latter had reservations against it. However, it is possible that the two flogged the issue with different objectives. It looks plausible that Savarkar sought the removal of caste divisions to strengthen the Hindu religion and stop the migration of people from it.

No wonder he turned against Ambedkar after the latter converted to Buddhism with his supporters.

Possessed by hatred for Hinduism, Dr. Ambedkar has been selectively showering abuses on Hinduism day in and day out. He claims that Buddhism is rational, free of defects and superior to other religions. While condemning what he terms as superstitions and evil practices in Hinduism, he should be equally forthright in condemning similar practices in the followers of Christianity and Islam. For example, the exponents of both these religions have given sanction in their religious scriptures to the practice of slavery and condemning slaves to a status worse than animals, (Vangmaya, 1956)<sup>81</sup>

During his incarceration in Cellular Jail, and then his release from there on May 21, 1921, and subsequent internship in Ratnagiri, Savarkar went through a major transformation. He started espousing militant Hindutva and penned his seminal book *Essentials of Hindutva*, defining Hinduism as an ethnic, cultural and political identity. Through the book he advocated the creation of a Hindu state, an *Akhand Bharat* (United India). Hindu Mahasabha was formed in Ratnagiri in January 1924.

The biggest difference, the author believes, between Mahatma Gandhi and Savarkar was that the former believed in the equality of all religions while the latter considered Hindutva superior to other religions. The former was inclusive while the latter was majoritarian.

The two men had very different approaches to the struggle against Britain. Gandhi, who became the leader of the Indian National Congress (INC), was a pacifist with an inclusive attitude towards Muslims and Christians. Savarkar, who would lead the Hindu Mahasabha, was a right-wing majoritarian who spawned the idea of Hindutva or Hindu-ness – the belief that the Hindu identity is inseparable from the Indian identity. (Economist, 2014)<sup>82</sup>



Savarkar became strident towards Muslims in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s when Mahatma Gandhi backed the Pan-Islamic Khilafat movement in exchange for support for the non-cooperation movement and transformed Congress into an organization representative of all castes and communities.

His attitude towards Muslims, who made up a quarter of the population before partition, and other non-Hindus was less liberal. He regarded them as alien and separate, in effect not as real Indians. He was fiercely opposed to the formation of Pakistan and what his great-nephew (Ranjit Savarkar) calls the “appeasement” of Muslims. He believed that they, along with the Europeans, had crushed Hindus for a millennium. (Economist, 2014)

*The Economist* writes that

Savarkar’s enthusiasm for violence sits uncomfortably with conventional ideas of how India got its independence. India’s first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and then the Congress party promoted a pacifist narrative of history, the idea that Gandhi and the likes of B R Ambedkar, a social reformer who inspired the Modern Buddhist Movement, triumphed through non-violence resistance. (Economist, 2014)<sup>83</sup>

In our opinion, the film *Veer Savarkar* promotes violence, daredevilry and a Hindutva, which will not be in sync with Islam, Christianity and other religions, and the equality of religions principle of Mahatma Gandhi, but at the same time, it also exposes the unfairness of the caste system and the British Empire.

Savarkar in the film is not just a historical figure but also a hero and a superhuman who challenges the might of British imperialism and arouses the audience’s masculinity and pulp patriotism with his nostril-flailing defiant dialogues and actions. His character is not necessarily built on what you find written in academic history.

In fact, what is true about Savarkar in *Veer Savarkar* is also true about Bhagat Singh in *The Legend of Bhagat Singh*, Ambedkar in *Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar*, Patel in *Sardar: The Iron Man of India* and Bose in *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: The Forgotten Hero*, and even Mohandas Karamchand in *Gandhi*. They may not necessarily fit into the characters that emerge out of archives, research monographs or books of professional historians.

Besides incorporating details from the written history, they also draw heavily from the popular view of history, pander to the cinematic elements – romance, revenge and violence are its must-have ingredients – of Bollywood and contextualize the past with the present. No wonder cinema,

and Hindi cinema, in particular, ends up creating its own history through the biopics.

*The Legend of Bhagat Singh*, for instance, not only discovered Bhagat Singh's beloved but also faced flak from Vijay Anand, the then chairman of the Central Board of Film Certification, for being disrespectful towards the father of the nation. Singh's family rubbished the film's claim that the revolutionary was engaged to a girl from Manawalegaon. The CBFC deleted derogatory statements like "You are lying" and "History will never forgive you", made by Singh's followers to Mahatma Gandhi. Anand defended the cuts, saying,

Gandhi's portrayal is very weak. He doesn't even hold his head high. I told the filmmakers he was the father of the nation. Don't let him look like a cow. (Roy, Malhotra, 2015)<sup>84</sup>

Professor Rachel Dwyer says,

Hindi cinema interprets Indian history, telling stories about the nation whether under threat or victorious, looking at sexuality and gender, looking at great figures of the past, implying a contrast with the present, and considering other such themes – rather than trying to represent accurately the given historical moment. The past is used, then, as a heterotopia, or another place, more often than as heterochromia, or different time. The past shown in the film can then tell us more about the present than the present itself can.

These are not the official views of history, based on facts and archives or research monographs written by professional historians. Indian cinema's history belongs instead to another kind of history – a popular view of the past, sometimes called "bazaar history", whose stories and images derive from epics, poems, theatre, and folktales. This kind of history is closely linked to the urban theatre that emerged in the nineteenth century, the Parsi theatre, and to the mass-produced image enabled by calendar art (chromolithography) and photography.

The power of cinema's history is that it often replaces academic history in the public imagination. Indian cinema's history is not about truth nor is it an enquiry into truth. It is a presentation of the past built on images, words, and imagination. It is interested in rumour and gossip, to which facts are subsidiary. History must be told as plots, not events. Cinema is created imaginatively, using image, music, and dialogue as the foundations upon which its own poetry and metaphor are developed and elaborated with gesture and costume to create a sensibility. History has to be shown in ways that suit the features of the films and their genres. (Dwyer, 2004)<sup>85</sup>

Christopher Pinney also notes in his book *Photos of the Gods: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India* (2004) that visual images in India tell a different history from the official sources; and he cites the example of Bhagat Singh, who was more popular than Gandhi in the 1920s but is excluded from most official histories.

Robert A Rosenstone, in *The Historical Film as Real History*, adds “numerous biopics of Bhagat Singh support this view, and it is likely that key moments that have circulated in popular prints or Chromolithography are found in the films, which in turn tell their own histories” (Rosenstone, 2015).<sup>86</sup> The author couldn’t agree with them more.

The question is why have Indian filmmakers shied away from chronicling Mahatma Gandhi’s entire life for the 70-mm screen, content with only portraying him in minor roles in historical movies, and being selective in simplifying and propagating his principles to the Indian public? Why do we still not have a biopic to take the life story of the father of the Indian nation to the Indian masses? To borrow a phrase from Rachel Dwyer, why is the Mahatma missing from Bollywood? As emphasized earlier, Benegal’s *Making of the Mahatma* portrays only a part of his life and not the whole.

Even *Mahatma – Life of Gandhi 1869–1948* (1968), based on the eight-volume biography of the Mahatma by D G Tendulkar and edited down from over 50 hours of footage assembled by Gandhi’s youngest son, Devdas, is only a documentary, which hardly has the reach of a feature film. Moreover, the documentary does no analysis of the epoch events like the salt agitation, Quit India movement, village reconstruction programme, *Swadeshi* programme, or his march through Noakhali, which put an end to the partition riots there. The documentary, directed by former jeweller and freedom fighter Vithalbhai Jhaveri, at best can be used a reference.

It seems that after a perusal of 103 years of Indian cinema the filmmakers between 1940 and 1960 did make an attempt to deliver Gandhi’s message on political morality to the Indian public. During this period, a large number of films centred on the themes of truth, non-violence, untouchability, *Swadeshi*, and the equality of religions. Though these films revolved around Gandhian principles, they did not completely abandon song and dance and fistfights between good and evil, the rigmarole of the Hindi cinema. In fact, the very first talking film in India, *Alam Ara* (1931), was advertised as “a perfect 100 percent Indian talkie with all talking, singing and dancing” (ToI, 1931).<sup>87</sup>

After the mid-1960s, Rajesh Khanna, the ultimate king of romance, ruled the fantasy world, leaving no space for Gandhi’s epistemology, which stressed on self-denial and celibacy and pooh-poohed the *naachna-gana* of

the Hindi cinema. In the early 1970s, the introduction of Amitabh Bachchan's *Angry Young Man* led to a major increase in violence in the Bombay cinema. This completely shut the door on Mahatma Gandhi, the apostle of non-violence, who upheld the immediacy and ultimacy of ahimsa.

It is widely believed that the violence increased further in Hindi cinema in 1991 when India liberalized its economy.

Since the 1990s, depictions of violence have accelerated in Hindi cinema, recalling acerbic points of view, for example, 'Violence is not an event but a worldview and way of life' (Taylor 2003: 209)...The threat to security has spun beyond the discovery of violence in the alien terrorist (predictable difference, as in *Black Friday*, Anurag Kashyap, 2004) to the terrorist masquerading as citizen and the citizen masquerading as terrorist with the body politic (unpredictable sameness, as in *Mumbai Meri Jaan*). (Bhattacharya, 2013)<sup>88</sup>

The author believes Gandhi does not fit into Bollywood, which has an obsession with song and dance and violence. His spartan, bare-minimum livelihood and invocation of religious idioms to attract the public to his cause does not appeal to an industry where a splash of grease and paint is a must. His message on forgiveness is a misfit in a cinema where retribution is the *raison d'être* for violence.

In his research on Hindi cinema, titled *Recipe for Hindi Cinema Blockbuster: Research for Marketing Decisions*, Vikas Shukla classifies the evolution of Bombay films into five phases – golden period (1940 – early 1960s), second phase (late 1960s – early 1980s), third phase (late 1980s – early 2000), and last phase (2003 – to date). While his golden period produced many classics, including *Shree 420*, *Awara*, *Mother India*, *Pyasa*, and *Naya Daur*, etc., the second phase introduced two super stars – Rajesh Khanna and Amitabh Bachchan – and signified the birth of two genres – romance and action. The third phase brought about a major shift in movie-making procedures with the introduction of advanced graphics and special effects, etc. The current phase has familiarized Hindi cinema with a number of technical advancements, including visual effects. It has also coined the concept of the 100 crore club, emphasizing the importance of releasing as many prints of the movie as possible in multiplexes.

Gandhi and the principles he propounded have a place in the golden period and the current phase. The golden period stressed Gandhian principles like truth, swadesh, untouchability, equality of religions, and non-violence while the current phase has portrayed him as an exemplar with whose aid one can find answers to the problems afflicting the Indian society.

In her book *Bollywood's India: Hindi Cinema as a Guide to Contemporary India*, Dwyer argues that

Hindi cinema is obsessed with violence, but this usually focused on verbal abuse and violence as marker of manhood, as well as the failure of the state to prosecute wrongdoers, allowing heroes to pursue their own moral codes. Many films, especially in the 1970s and '80s, showed the hero beating up villains, who frequently threaten any women he is protecting. The hero himself may be attacked, often in a masochistic display of his self-pity. Few films deal with actual violence and the fear of it. In older films, the police may arrive too late, showing that they do not do anything, but today they are seen to be corrupt and are themselves feared by the public in films such as *Dabangg/Fearless*. (Dwyer, 2014)<sup>89</sup>

David J. Schaefer and Kavita Karan quote from M Madhava Prasad's *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction*, Lalitha Gopalan's *Cinema of Interruptions* and Nikhat Kazmi's *Ire in the Soul: Bollywood's Angry Years* to say that "for many Hindi cinema theorists, the level of violence in Hindi cinema began to surge in the 1970s with the subaltern "Angry Young Man" persona of Amitabh Bachchan in films such as *Sholay*, which advocated the mobilization of India's poor and dispossessed classes in response to authoritarian governmental power. For Kazmi, the violent themes found in the Angry Young Man films of the 1970s and 1980s promoted a "myth of rebellion" that raised and diffused potentially disruptive socio-cultural conflicts by providing a cathartic release for audiences" (Schaefer and Karan, 2013).<sup>90</sup>

Non-violent passive resistance and civil disobedience and non-cooperation, apparently, would give no excuse to the Hindi filmmakers to unleash an adrenaline rush in a gory confrontation between the forces of good and evil. Nor would the Mahatma's life give them an opportunity to push in a romantic angle. They would rather tell the stories of young revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh and Rani Laxmibai, where they can bring in both in the name of creative freedom.

No wonder Singh has been by far the most-filmed Indian freedom fighter.

The only leader of the anti-British freedom struggle who has been a popular subject for the biopic is 'Shaheed' (Martyr) Bhagat Singh. A leader regarded in his time as more popular than Gandhi, Bhagat Singh is barely mentioned in official histories though he is still much cited by establishment figures and revolutionaries, and his image is present all over India, especially in Punjab and the north, from vendors' stalls to the offices of radical lawyers and certain trade unions. (Dwyer, 2014)<sup>91</sup>

Dwyer points out that the biopics on Bhagat Singh (1907–1931) “play down his role as an intellectual, a writer, an atheist, and a committed Marxist; instead they concentrate on his short, heroic life, his fearless and valiant nature and his use of violence, casting him as a romantic hero who appeals to the young” (Dwyer, 2014).<sup>92</sup>

Gandhi’s non-violence, despite having been practiced and propagated by him as a creed, is still not in complete agreement with Sanatan Dharma, the largest religion in India. Sanatan Dharma, though it declares non-violence as one of its supreme ideals, does not rule out violence as a last resort for the re-establishment of order in the society.

While the (Sanatani) tradition expounds the dictum “ahimsa paroma dharma” (non-violence is the highest dharma), it does not rule out righteous violence altogether, especially as a last resort, as in the Mahabharata, when all other resources have failed. (Paranjape, 2015)<sup>93</sup>

Even in his lifetime, the non-violence of the Mahatma was not the victor in every situation. Had that been the case, he would not have exhibited a turnaround and become appreciative of the methods adopted by Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose for the liberation of the country from foreign rule or supported the use of force to drive out Pakistani mercenaries from Jammu & Kashmir in 1947. It is also a proven fact that many members of the Congress Party were getting tired of Mahatma Gandhi’s fetish for non-violence and fasts after the country gained independence. His differences with Jawaharlal Nehru and Vallabhbhai Patel on the partition of the country were out in the open. How else would you explain his absence when India’s “tryst with destiny” began at midnight on August 15, 1947?

In his book *The Death and Afterlife of Mahatma Gandhi*, Makarand R Paranjape cites multiple reasons to say that the father of the Indian nation had become inconvenient for many congressmen and they all but killed him symbolically. Paranjape quotes Robert Payne, the writer of *The Life and Death of Gandhi*; Tushar Gandhi, the Mahatma’s great grandson; Justice Jeevan Lal Kapur Commission’s six-volume report on the assassination; and Gandhi himself to say how Gandhi had become an irritant in his last days and the Jawaharlal Nehru government bungled big time in securing his life.

Paranjape claims Gandhi himself said to an unnamed correspondent on December 18, 1947, one-and-a-half months before his assassination,

“I know that today I irritate everyone. How can I believe that I alone am right and all others are wrong? What irks me is that people deceive me. They should tell me frankly that I have become old, that I am no longer of any use

and that I should not be in their way. If they thus openly repudiate me, I shall not be pained in the least". (Paranjape, 2015)

That Gandhi was inconvenient is obvious: he had not only urged the disbanding of the Congress in his "last will and testament", but he had opposed the Partition, threatened to walk across the border into Pakistan, asked for the Viceregal Palace to be turned into a hospital, and, of course, been conspicuous by his absence at the midnight hour when India kept its "tryst with destiny", with Jawaharlal Nehru sworn in as the first Prime Minister. (Paranjape, 2015)<sup>94</sup>

It has also been discovered that Gandhi embarrassed many among his associates, including Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel, with his fetish with experiments on celibacy with Manuben, Sushila Nayar and others. In a diary entry of January 31, 1947, Manuben refers to a letter to Gandhi from his follower Kishrelal Mashruwala where Mashruwala calls her "Maya" (an illusion or a temptress) and asks the Mahatma to free himself of her clutches. To this, Gandhi replies: "You do whatever you want but I am firm in belief regarding this experiment."

Even as Manuben and Gandhi walked through Noakhali in Bengal, two of his entourage – R. P. Parasuram, who had acted as his secretary, and Nirmal Kumar Bose, also his secretary and later director of Anthropological Society of India – left in anger over Gandhi's behaviour. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, in a letter to Gandhi on January 25, 1947, currently among the Patel papers, called a "terrible blunder" on Gandhi's part that pained his followers "beyond measure" (Mahurkar, 2013).<sup>95</sup>

Nehru found Gandhi's advice to newlyweds to stay celibate for the sake of their souls "abnormal and unnatural" (Adams, 2012).<sup>96</sup>

Jad Adams, the biographer of Mahatma Gandhi and writer of *Gandhi: Naked Ambitions*, is sure India suppressed Gandhi's "bizarre sexual history" in the process of elevating him into the "Father of the Nation".

When he was assassinated in January 1948, it was with Manu and Abha by his side. Despite her having been a constant companion in his last years, family members, tellingly, removed Manu from the scene. Gandhi had written to his son: "I have asked her to write about her sharing the bed with me," but the protectors of his image were to eliminate this element of the great leader's life. Devdas, Gandhi's son, accompanied Manu to Delhi station where he took the opportunity of instructing her to keep quiet. (Adams, 2012)<sup>97</sup>

It seems to us that non-violence, and *Satyagraha* by extension, is the one principle with which Bollywood has a major compatibility problem with

Mahatma Gandhi. Of course, it would not touch sexual abstinence even with a barge pole.

Hindi cinema's aversion to non-violence is not something that arose only after 1975, the Year of Violence and Sex in Films as per the *Illustrated Weekly of India* and the year Amitabh Bachchan's *Angry Young Man* arrived. It was there even in 1946, when *Dr. Kotnis Ki Amar Kahani* made its debut, in 1957, when Dilip Kumar's *Naya Daur* hit the box office, and 1960, when Navketan's *Hum Dono* was released.

The criminal protagonist or the anti-hero did not make their entry with Amitabh Bachchan's Vijay in Yash Chopra's *Deewar*. He existed in the form of Raj Kapoor's Raj in *Awara* (1951) and *Shree 420* (1955). The difference is only of scale and magnitude. The Rajs of *Awara* and *Shree 420* repent their crimes in the end and promise to reform while Vijay dies trying to impute his smuggling avatar on poverty, social equality and mother-worship.

*Dr. Kotnis Ki Amar Kahani* (1946) and *Hum Dono* (1960), despite being anti-war films, do not so much make a statement against the war but only point out the traits of goodness and nobility that can shine through even in war, hostility and bloodshed. *Mission Kashmir* (2000) calls war and terrorism unethical, evil and cruel only when they flout the principles of love and forgiveness. It does not condemn the use of violence for its very existence (Juluri, 2008).<sup>98</sup>

Even *Lage Raho Munnabhai*, the second-most successful film on Mahatma Gandhi after the biopic by Richard Attenborough, exhibits ambivalence on non-violence. It does not waver at all on truth, a related epistemology of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhis. Makarand R Paranjape says,

The film, it seems to me, shows a great deal of ambivalence towards violence in its scheme of things, repeatedly showing the efficacy of violence and the defeat, at least partial, of non-violence. Instead of fetishizing non-violence, Munna Bhai looks at it as a part of a larger arsenal that needs to be employed to combat social evils and corruption.... Munna Bhai, in contrast to Gandhi, seems to adopt a more contemporary, even practical approach, preferring non-violence, endorsing and espousing it, but not ruling out the use of mock-violence to threaten adversaries into submission, as in the climax of the movie. One is reminded of Ramakrishna's advice to the snake that was converted to non-violence and found itself almost battered to death. The sage said to the snake, "I asked you not to bite, but I did not ask you not to hiss." In Gandhi's world, both biting and hissing seem to be forbidden. The practice of ahimsa does not accommodate either. (Paranjape, 2015)<sup>99</sup>



When it comes to non-violence and *Satyagraha*, *Lage Raho Munnabhai* is as much about Bollywood as it is about Mahatma Gandhi. Like the other Bollywood films, it does not pretend to be realistic: “instead, it is sentimental, not mimetic but mythic, aiming at simulation (also stimulation), not fidelity” (Paranjape, 2015).<sup>100</sup> Ironically, the film displays no contradiction when it comes to truth, the other principle of the Mahatma. Paranjape says *Lage Raho*'s idea of what constitutes Gandhism and not just Gandhigiri is its “abiding and enduring commitment to truth, both at the practical level and the spiritual level”.

From Jhanvi's declaration at the beginning of the film through Munna's admission that he is not the professor he pretends to be, to Simran's admitting that she is *manglik* at the end of the film, it is truth that emerges as the highest value. To that extent, the film's understanding of Gandhi is centred more on truth than on non-violence. Thus, we even get a contemporary adaptation of Gandhism of our times, where despite the exigencies, contingencies and temptations of a materialist-consumerist ethos, maintaining faith in truth becomes the way out of both the morass of individual inertia and civic dysfunctionality. Gandhian orthopraxy is observed as adherence to truth more than to non-violence: This becomes its defining characteristic. (Paranjape, 2015)<sup>101</sup>

The author is of the view that Hindi films do not have so much of a disagreement with the father of the Indian nation on truth. They have no problem with using the Mahatma either as an exponent, votary of truth or an exemplar to establish truth in the society. Truth is what binds Gandhi and Raja Harischandra, the legendary king of Ayodhya and a part of Rama's ancestry, first put on celluloid by Dada Saheb Phalke. There are definite parallels between the life story of not only Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Harischandra but also Gandhi and Dada Saheb Phalke who introduced cinema to the Indian masses.

Gandhi learned his lesson on non-violence from, among others, Jesus Christ and the New Testament in the Bible. A deeply religious man, he instituted morality and religion into politics in pre-independent India. Phalke, on the other hand, discovered cinema through a film on Jesus and then brought the eternal stories of India's religious traditions to life.

Gandhi absorbed truth from Harishchandra, the legendary king from the Ikshvaku dynasty, which later produced Rama, among others. Phalke began his journey in Hindi cinema by narrating the story of *Raja Harishchandra* on the big screen and went on to film *Lanka Dahan*, *Kaliya Mardan*, *Gangavatanan*, *the Birth of Shri Krishna*, *Satyavan and Savitri*, *Shri Krishna Shishtai*, *Bhakta Sudama*, *Hanuman Janna*, *Bhakta Pralhad*, etc. In other words, what Gandhi did in Indian politics, Phalke did in Hindi

cinema. If Gandhi is considered the father of the Indian nation, Phalke is regarded as the father of Indian cinema.

Phalke heralded and led the era of films with Hindu mythology, which continued through the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. Interestingly, like Gandhi, Phalke also believed in building an inclusive society and resurrecting Indian nationalism.

Phalke himself was a sincere nationalist, driven by a desire to create a truly Indian cinema that reflected its traditions and aspirations – and yet, for this he was inspired by a screening of a movie about Jesus Christ. Indian cinema's eclectic religiosity, in my view, like India, to a large extent, wasn't exclusionary in the least. By the 1930s, as the talkies began, film-makers around the country began to make feature films in a variety of languages, marking the foundations of the other major regional film centres as well (which today are called "Tollywood", "Kollywood" and so on). They made stories about the gods too, and the saints, and often saw in them a very similar message of love, justice, and most of all, equality, that the Mahatma was advocating at that time. (Juluri, 2013)<sup>102</sup>

The parallels between Dada Saheb Phalke and Mahatma Gandhi point out how the stories, themes, casting, and sensibilities in Hindi cinema and Indian politics have reflected each other for over a century.

While the films of today seem less overtly influenced by the ideals of great men like Gandhi, the fact remains that India's film culture and political culture remain deeply reflective of each other in many ways. (Juluri, 2013)<sup>103</sup>

Harischandra's name is mentioned in Hindu scriptures, like Mahabharata, Markandeya Purana, the Devi-Bhagavata Purana, and Aitareya Brahmana. His story was believed to have inspired Yudhishtira, the eldest of the Pandava brothers, to stick to the truth in his life and undergo all adversities for it. There is a temple dedicated to Harischandra in Pimpri, near Pune in Maharashtra. *Raja Harischandra* was the first film made about the life of the king. It was followed by *Ayohyecha Raja* (Marathi), *Satyawadi Raja Harischandra* (Phalke, 1932), *Satya Harischandra* (Kannada), and others later.

Gandhi, like Harischandra, suffered a great deal for his creed on truth in his personal life and insisted on fulfilling all his personal commitments. Like Harischandra, Gandhi even insisted on India fulfilling all the commitments made to Pakistan at the time of the partition, including the payment of Rs.55 crores as its share.

The Mahatma believed in what Harischandra is promised in the film – restoration of his former glory and divine blessings – if he does not deviate from the path of truth in the face of adversities. The father of the Indian nation firmly believed that the truth and non-violence could never fail in achieving their objectives.

If Harischandra had to sell his wife, son and himself to fulfil his commitments to sage Vishwamitra and did not allow his wife Taramati to cremate their son Rohitasava in the cremation ground owned by his master Veerabahu without paying the requisite fees and undergoing the severest of tribulations due to sage Vasishtha, Gandhi suffered on account of his irreconcilable differences with his eldest son Harilal. Harilal became addicted to whatever Gandhi abstained from – alcohol, debauchery, greed, “insincerity”, “hypocrisy” (Gandhi, 1914).<sup>104</sup> The father and the son had different notions of a father’s responsibility towards his children, and children’s duty towards their father (Gandhi, 2013).<sup>105</sup>

Harilal renounced all family ties in 1911 but his troubled relationship with his father continued. Gandhi claimed to have disowned him in May 1906 in a letter to Laxmidas Gandhi, “It is well if Harilal is married; it is also well if he is not. For the present, at any rate, I have ceased to think of him like a son” (Gandhi, 1906).<sup>106</sup>

The bickering came to a boiling point when Gandhi accused Harilal of having raped his sister-in-law in June 1935. This is how Tushar Gandhi, great grandson of the Mahatma, interpreted: “Manu is telling me a number of dangerous things about you. She says that you had raped her before eight years and she was so much hurt that medical treatment was also taken”, written in one of the three Gujarati letters to Harilal by Gandhi on June 6, June 19 and June 27, 1935. Tushar accused auctioneers – Mullock’s auctions in England – of the letters of sensationalism after the latter claimed that Gandhi accused his son of having violated his own daughter, Manu, when the actual accusation was that Harilal had raped Manu, his sister-in-law.

Gandhi also wished in one of the letters that Harilal had died instead of taking alcohol.

Please let me have pure truth, please tell me if still you are interested in alcohol and debauchery. I wish that you better die rather than resort to alcohol in any manner. (Sinha, 2014)<sup>107</sup>

It seems that Gandhi liked Pralhad, Shravana and Harischandra because he also felt an innate pull towards non-violence, truth and a sense of duty towards his parents from his childhood.

Otherwise, how come he never displayed a propensity towards following Arjuna or other warrior characters in the *Mahabharata* he read in his childhood? Even in the case of Yudhishtira, he admired the eldest *Pandava* prince not for his valour but for sticking to the truth.

Like all children, Mohandas loved to listen to stories about gods and goddesses, demons and celestial dancers from Hindu mythology and especially from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, but surprisingly he was not impressed by hero-warriors like Arjuna or Lord Krishna. Among the characters he admired were Raja Harischandra, who always spoke the truth; Shravana, who died while caring for his aged parents; and Pralhad, who defied his demon-father because of his love of Lord Vishnu. All of them suffered because of their faith in truth, and in many ways, they are examples of *Satyagraha* that Gandhi would one day propagate. His *Satyagraha* was a fight for truth led by peaceful soldiers ready to face every obstacle with courage. (Gupta, 2010)<sup>108</sup>

Hrishikesh Mukherjee's *Satyakam* gives expression to a host of Mahatma Gandhi's principles. Using the metaphor of Jabala Satyakam's illegitimacy (The story goes that when Jabala Satyakam, a boy, wishes to join ascetic Gautama's *ashrama*, his mother Jabala, a maid, instructs him to tell the ascetic the truth about his lineage. The mother did not know who Jabala Satyakam's father was. The ascetic admires the boy's courage to speak the truth and admits him), the film makes a scathing comment on untouchability. The film has its Jabala Satyakam moment when Ranjana's son, born out of her rape by the prince, confronts Satyasharan Acharya nee Daddaji (Ashok Kumar) with the truth that he does not accept his daughter-in-law and him because of his paternity.

But more than that it gives voice to the unalloyed idealism of India's national leaders who fought for the country's freedom from the British rule and Hrishikesh Mukherjee through Satyapriya, the engineer, who cannot withstand the bribing culture embedded in the country through the politician-contractor-bureaucrat nexus. It also vents Mukherjee's frustration over the systematic corruption that became rooted in the country immediately after independence.

Mukherjee said as much in an interview in 2000.

The idea behind making a film is to communicate. Communicate what? Anything which has an effect on me. If I feel like laughing, I want to share that with my audience. I have made comedies like *Golmaal* or *Chupke Chupke*. When something makes me indignant I have made films like *Satyakam*, which is about corruption. Similarly, I have made a romantic film or a tragedy. (Jai Arjun Singh, 2015)<sup>109</sup>

The filmmaker said something similar to Jai Arjun Singh, the writer of *Talking Cinema and The World of Hrishikesh Mukherjee: The Filmmaker Everyone Loves*,

I wouldn't like a film to be made on my life. Parts of me have already been projected in some of my films. *Satyakam* reflects my idealism, *Chupke Chupke* my humour and *Alaap* my pessimism, while *Bawarchi* was about my father... (Jai Arjun Singh, 2015)<sup>110</sup>

Satyapriya's riposte that a truthful man should not only be ready to suffer on its account but also be ready to administer pain to others for it replicates what Mahatma Gandhi experimented with and proliferated during his lifetime.

*Satyakam*, in spite of being a commercial failure, has influenced and will continue to influence film viewers in India and across the globe. Jai Arjun Singh gives one example of how the film inspired writer and filmmaker Ranjit Kapoor to stay straight during a crisis when he was tempted to follow a wrong path in the late 1960s.

Kapoor recollected to Singh when he was interviewing people for a book about the film *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro* (Kapoor wrote the dialogues of the film), "*Main galat raaste pe jaane waala tha* (I was about to head down the wrong path)," he said, remaining reticent about the details, and then he happened to go to a hall and watch a film titled *Satyakam*. "I was with a friend, we had time to kill, and the tickets were tax-free". The film, which turned out to be about a stubbornly honest, principled man struggling to survive in an imperfect world, was far from the fast-paced entertainment they had hoped for but Kapoor was riveted.

"My friend sitting next to me fell asleep out of boredom, but I was weeping silently in the hall", he recalled. "After watching that film, the world began to seem like a very different place – I had hit rock bottom, but I picked myself up". Forty years later, the experience was still so fresh in Kapoor's mind that he dedicated his film *Chintuji* to Hrishikesh Mukherjee, Dharmendra and Narayan Sanyal (who wrote the novel on which *Satyakam* is based).

Singh writes that he discovered only later what a strong impact this film had had on other sensitive viewers of his generation. "I can still not see *Satyakam* without it wrenching me and turning my stomach inside out", the late Farooque Shaikh told Singh in 2013. "It is so disturbing and cuts so close to the bone even today, how many would make such a film, and would they be able to release it without interference?" And the writer and historian Mukul Kesavan, who had just entered his teens when *Satyakam* was released, wrote in his piece "Partition at the Pictures" that "this extraordinary

film” was “perhaps the most relentless realisation of the idea that individual integrity is public virtue”.

Singh adds “*Satyakam* reflects both headiness of those days (days of freedom movement) – the headiness of the Nehruvian dream – and the despair that came with that dream’s erosion”. It is set between the mid-1940s and the early 1950s.

The seeds of idealism which sprouted in Indian cinema in the late 1930s and early 1940s continued to flourish through the 1950s. The films in this decade were suffused with the feelings of nationalism, service, inter-religious bonhomie, and love for all human beings. They were in sync with the goals set by Mahatma Gandhi’s Congress and promoted reforms to build an egalitarian society. During these decades, Bollywood turned out the largest number of biopics (based primarily on the lives of Hindu gods and goddesses). They build on Gandhi’s appeal for religious tolerance, against untouchability, for an equitable system of wealth distribution, and the primacy of labour over machines.

Such cinema continued to prosper until the end of the 1960s though filmmakers had started adding a dash of colour here and a dash of romance, *dishum-dishum*, and drama there to the themes of righteousness and idealism. The 1950s and 1960s came to be known as the golden period of Indian cinema.

No wonder actor Aamir Khan wishes he were born then.

To me the 1950s-60s were the golden period of Indian cinema. During that time the creative talents, be it director, actor, lyric writers, composers, writers and in every department, used to be excellent...I think that people during that time were more passionate about filmmaking. All the old films I see, I feel that I should have worked in them. *Teesri Manzil*, *Guide* and the list is unending. They are so fantastically made. I wish I was born during that period. (News18, 2010)<sup>111</sup>

Even Professor Rachel Dwyer finds it hard not to allow the 1950s, which she maintains was the era in which so many classic films were made and the great directors Mehboob Khan, Bimal Roy, Raj Kapoor, and Guru Dutt were at their peak, to dominate her book *100 Bollywood Films* (Dwyer, 2005).<sup>112</sup>

The period 1940–1960 saw a turnout of films like *Padosi*, *Dr. Kotnis Ki Amar Kahani*, *Hum Ek Hain*, *Samadhi*, *Shaheed*, *Mother India*, *Phir Subah Hogi*, *Shriman Satyawadi*, and a large number of films based on stories of India’s national icon.

Loosely based on Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* and adapted by actor Mubarak, *Phir Subah Hogi* deals with social injustice and inequality, unemployment and disillusionment, hope and despair. It makes

a strong case for the average man who hoped for a better tomorrow after India attained freedom from her colonial masters.

Writer Abdul Zamil Khan says “conflict” is at the core of the film: both external – unemployment, poverty, crime, and internal – guilt vs. conscience. Krishen Saigal’s camera lovingly and patiently follows the characters through both sets of conflict. Shot with shadows and light emphasizing every emotional curve and arc that the characters go through, *Phir Subah Hogi* is the visualization of an ideology and its pros and cons on celluloid. As a psychological study of crime and punishment, *Phir Subah Hogi* is extremely insightful (Khan, 2006).<sup>113</sup>

The film makes a scathing comment on Jawaharlal Nehru’s internationalism and non-alignment at the cost of dealing with more pressing issues such as starvation, the inadequacy of housing, unemployment, and poverty.

Sahir Ludhianvi’s parody on *Saare Jehan Se Achha*, Iqbal’s song, *Cheen, va ARAB hamara hindostan hamara, Rahne ko ghar nahein hai, sara jehan hamara, Kholi bhi chin ga-iee hai, Benchain bhi chin ga-iee hain, Footpath bombai-iee kay hain ashyan hamara* (China and Arabia are ours and so is our India; we claim the whole world, but there is no place to live. (the) rooms are snatched away, the benches are crowded too, Bombay’s footpath is now really our home) is a satire on homelessness and poverty.

Like Satyapriya of *Satyakam*, *Shriman Satyawadi*’s Vijay (Raj Kapoor) is obsessed with the practice of unalloyed truth. For this reason, he does not shirk from ticking off either his girlfriend Gita (Shakila) or would-be father-in-law Champa Lal (Nasir Hussain). A true follower of Mahatma Gandhi, Vijay practices truth as a creed.

But Dwarka Anand alias Daduji (Amitabh Bachchan) of *Satyagraha* is more like Anna Hazare, who liked to dictate terms to the government, than Mahatma Gandhi, who would try to bring about a transformation in administration through love and soul force. Prakash Jha’s denial notwithstanding, *Satyagraha* has unmistakable and visible traces of the Anna Hazare movement against corruption at Jantar Mantar, which brought government business to a standstill in 2011. Daduji may not resemble Kisan Baburao Hazare physically but there are many similarities between their anti-corruption movements and these look “far from coincidental” (Chakravorty, 2013)<sup>114</sup>

Gandhi would not have approved of the way Daduji first slaps the collector and then goes on to dictate terms to the district administration. The biggest problem with the film is that it tries to roll both Gandhi and Hazare into Daduji and in the process ends up being neither true to Gandhi nor to the social activist from Maharashtra. American journalist and author Robert Kolker is not impressed by the film.

This is a serious film focused on political corruption in a small town and, by extension, the country as a whole. Its title means roughly “zeal for truth” and originates in the movement of the great Indian figure of liberation, Mahatma Gandhi. Images of Gandhi appear throughout the film, and one of its main characters, the schoolteacher Dwarka Anand (Amitabh Bachchan), like Gandhi, goes on a hunger strike to bring justice to his hot, dusty town.

While the overall tone of the film is deeply serious – at one point one of the demonstrators against corruption sets himself on fire and Dwarka himself is shot and martyred under orders of the official he is demonstrating against – there is a romantic interlude between two of the main characters and the demonstrators themselves tend to break into song from time to time. But the impression of all this is not of an avant-garde piece, stretching the conventions of the genre like the work of Jean-Luc Godard, for example. Rather, director Prakash Jha is pulling together the conventions of Indian cinema to satisfy expectations while directing them toward a serious end. (Kolkar, 2015)<sup>115</sup>

Ankur Mutreja finds the movie “completely unreal”, not presenting the “true picture of reality” (Mutreja, 2015).<sup>116</sup>

The author believes the truth in Hindi cinema is a casualty because, barring exceptions, there is always an attempt to enforce it through violence. If you go by what Mahatma Gandhi said about this, non-violence is the means, and truth, or God, or the liberation of India is the end, one can safely conclude that Hindi cinema pursues the end through the wrong means.

It is possible to pursue both truths without regard to nonviolence, and nonviolence without regard to truth. We have seen, however, that one without the other tends to make the exercise of the pursuit of each on its own potentially reckless. The pursuit of truth on its own makes us the self-righteous and even capable of killing in its name. Truth runs the risk of turning into absolutism. Similarly, nonviolence pursued on its own, uncoupled with truth, could simply be used as a cover to countenance passivity, even cowardice, and degenerate into a form of self-indulgence – just as truth on its own could degenerate into a form of self-righteousness. (Sharma, Gandhi Marg)<sup>117</sup>

The author is of the view that *The Legend of Bhagat Singh*, *Veer Savarkar*, *Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose: The Forgotten Hero*, and *Mission Kashmir* do not portray the Gandhian principle of honesty because the first three chase the dream of independence through bloodshed while the fourth resorts to violence to establish the supremacy of love, forgiveness and the equality of religions. They flout the cardinal principles of Mahatma Gandhi and allow the truth, independence and forgiveness to degenerate into a form of self-righteousness.



But to pit the revolutionary streak in India's independence movement against Mahatma Gandhi's nationalist movement based on non-violence would be erroneous, to say the least. Throughout the independence struggle, the two ran parallel, complementing each other, one adding to the efforts of the other and one enriching and bolstering the other.

It was the militant nationalism of the famous Lal-Bal-Pal with their slogan of "Swaraj is my birthright" to revolutionary terrorism with bombs, pistols, individual martyrs like Surya Sen and Bhagat Singh which formed the background to Gandhi's emergence. (Ganguli, SOL)<sup>118</sup>

Gandhi was opposed to the violence of the revolutionaries as much as he was opposed to the violence of the occupational western forces, but he never questioned the nationalism of the former. In fact, he held the patriotism of Bhagat Singh, Subhash Chandra Bose and others second to none. The two streams – of violence and non-violence – coursed side by side until India regained independence from the British in 1947. To say that either one of them solely won liberation for India or to deny credit to either of them would not just be unfair but patently unjustified.

*Dr. Kotnis Ki Amar Kahani, Do Aankhen Barah Haath* and *Maine Gandhi Ko Nahin Maara*, on the other hand, to a great extent stick to the Gandhian prescription on service and non-violence while the story and treatment of *Hum Dono* is *poori filmi* (having what Rachel Dwyer calls noticeable features – melodrama, heightened emotion, especially around the family, an engaging narrative, stars, a certain *mise-en-scène*, usually one of glamour, grandiloquent dialogues and the all-important songs) (Dwyer, 2005).<sup>119</sup>

Besides the Hindi filmmakers' repulsion towards non-violence, the second reason why Mahatma Gandhi has been missing from Hindi cinema is because Gandhi's life story lacks what one would call the basic ingredients of Hindi cinema – excuses for bringing in music, dance, plots involving star-crossed lovers, siblings separated by fate, a dramatic reversal of fortunes, and melodrama. His strong espousal of non-violence hardly leaves any scope for building heightened tension that could explode through gore, prolonged gun battles, fist fights, overturning of vehicles, and bomb blasts in climatic scenes (*Parinda, Ghayal, Gardish, Damini, Ghatak, Tezaab, Baazigar, Aankhen*, and *Shola Aur Shabnam*, etc.).

Mahatma Gandhi may have all the qualities an audience would like to see on screen but his story certainly does not have the ingredients that would allow Bollywood to build up tension for an action-packed climax, which might be necessary to bring about a cathartic effect on the viewers. The author's opinion is that his story also lacks dramatic elements that might

help the cinema audience escape the harsh realities of their life. It undoubtedly gives no opportunity to the filmmaker to push in music, dance, love, romance and glamour, and sex quotients.

A third reason is that a film on Mahatma Gandhi would not only take several decades to get clearance from various sources in the Indian government but might also generate controversy and a plethora of court cases afterwards. Remember, even Richard Attenborough, who made a hagiography *Gandhi* in 1982, covering only 49 years of the Mahatma's life from 1898 to 1948 and leaving out all the controversies in his life, particularly his experiments on celibacy, had to run from pillar to post for over two decades and the tenure of three prime ministers before he secured the nod of the Indian government for finances for his dream project.

To cite a small example of the kind of ordeal Attenborough went through, look at what happened at Aga Khan Palace in Pune before he started his 10-day shoot there in 1981–1982. At least a few trustees of the Gandhi National Memorial Society (GNMS) objected to a foreigner making a film on the father of the Indian nation, and one senior trustee resigned over the issue. Even the then chairman of the Society, Morarji Desai, asked then secretary of the GNMS Shobhana Ranade why “do we need a *nakli* (fake) Gandhi to portray the Mahatma?”, referring to Ben Kingsley (IT, 2014).<sup>120</sup>

Attenborough was advised not to shoot in the room where Gandhi was imprisoned. Moreover, his entire crew of 200 had to follow vegetarianism, the no-smoking rule and prohibition during the shoot and get the place cleaned every day before their departure for the hotel.

Ranade revealed more 33 years later in August 2014, after Attenborough had breathed his last,

It was in the year 1981–82 when I learnt from Delhi about Sir Richard Attenborough, who was going to make a film on Gandhi, that he would come to Pune for shooting at Aga Khan Palace. I was thrilled, but a few trustees of Gandhi National Memorial Society did not appreciate the making of a film on Gandhi (by an outsider) and felt it would not be original. Attenborough was put through major scrutiny and told to strictly abide by the rules inside the monument. He was told that “no errors would be tolerated”. (Nambiar, 2014)<sup>121</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi was detained in Aga Khan for close to 22 months in the wake of the Quit India movement. He lost his wife Kasturba while in the palace as well as his secretary, Mahadev Desai, during this period.

During the making of the film, Attenborough faced court cases and allegations of racial bias in the Indian Parliament. In 1981, Morarji Desai and six other trustees of the Navajivan Trust, founded by Mahatma Gandhi,

sought an ad interim injunction restraining “completing, producing, distributing or exhibiting” *Gandhi*. The case was dismissed in April 1981 (Ghosh, 2014).<sup>122</sup>

Attenborough faced constant scrutiny and pressure for both the sanction of \$703 million provided to him in loan guarantees by the Indian government and accusations of the maltreatment of Indian workers at the shoot. The *Times of India* reported on April 20, 1981, under the headline “Eject Sir Richard for racial bias, says elders”, that in the Upper House

M C Bhandare of Congress (I) read out press reports that abuses were hurled at Indians (involved in the project) and there was disparity in wages and allowances between them and foreigners. (Ghosh, 2014)<sup>123</sup>

Moreover, 20 well-known Indian filmmakers, including Muzaffar Ali, Basu Chatterjee, Kumar Shahani, M S Sathyu, Girish Karnad, and Saeed Mirza, wrote to the then Information & Broadcasting minister, criticizing the government decision to finance the film.

The filmmakers wrote their objections under the banner Forum for Better Cinema in the form of a letter, adding,

“We'd like to make it clear that we don't question Sir Richard's right to make this film with his own finances, nor do we doubt his sincerity in wanting to make a film on this subject.” The letter was partly published in the *Times of India* on August 9, 1980. (Ghosh, 2014)<sup>124</sup>

Ironically, *Gandhi* became the largest contributor to the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC), raking in some \$10,038 million. Since the NFDC had contributed around one-third of the film's total budget of \$2, 208 million, it would have earned over four-and-a-half times its investment.

The objection from Forum for Better Cinema also points out how the NFDC, which came into being in the form of Film Finance Corporation (FFC) under the Union Ministry of Finance in 1960, has been manipulated by certain filmmakers. It is as much a failure of the NFDC as Hindi cinema if we still do not have a proper biopic of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

With the haphazard extensions of its remit and the repeated policy shifts imposed on it, the absence of a clear definition of the NFDC's responsibilities to the Indian cinema has remained a persistent problem. (Rajadhyaksha, Willemen, 2014)<sup>125</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi is not the only one whose life story has not been put on celluloid in India. Jawaharlal Nehru's and Indira Gandhi's stories have not been canned for cinema viewers either. Dwyer claims

plans to make biopics of Indira Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru have been cancelled due to fears over the controversy they would generate, including court cases – all of which would delay the film’s release, not to mention perhaps cause actual violence. (Dwyer, 2014)<sup>126</sup>

*Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose – The Forgotten Hero* faced a PIL (public interest litigation) in the Calcutta High Court by five researchers who objected to the “romantic scenes” in the film and the fact that the narrative depicted Bose as married (Malhotra, 2015).<sup>127</sup>

It seems that Indian governments have been particularly thin-skinned when it comes to the portrayal of their top leaders, on celluloid and in print. Gulzar’s *Aandhi*, which, many believed, had traces of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, was banned a few days after its release.

It is reported that Indira Gandhi felt that the protagonist’s character, played by Suchitra Sen, bore similarities to her and there was a scene showing the protagonist stubbing out a cigarette in an ashtray to suggest she was a smoker. (Chatterji, 2015)<sup>128</sup>

More recently, *Red Sari*, a “dramatized” biography of Sonia Gandhi by Javier Moro, was not published for five years, between 2010 and 2015, because Congress took severe exceptions to it (Congress spokesman Abhishek Manu Singhvi said the book contained “untruths, half-truths, falsehoods and defamatory statements”) and a slew of protests made the atmosphere unfavourable for publishing the book in India. It was only published in January 2015 after Sonia Gandhi’s lawyers gave it the go-ahead (FP, 2015).<sup>129</sup>

Similarly, films on Sonia Gandhi – first, a promotional project of the Congress Party called *Parivaar ki Den* (Ghosh, 2014)<sup>130</sup> and second, a movie called *Sonia* by filmmaker Jagmohan Mundra (Dhillon, 2006)<sup>131</sup> – have failed to see any progress after their release more than a decade ago.

Shockingly, the Hindi film industry, which churns out over a thousand films a year, has produced only a handful dedicated to untouchability, an inhumane practice prevalent in the Hindu religion for thousands of years. Even after over a century of Bollywood, with the theme of untouchability, we only have *Achhut Kanya* (1936), *Neecha Nagar* (1946), *Sujata* (1959), *Ganga Jamuna* (1961), *Ankur: The Seedling* (1973), *Jaag Utha Insaan* (1982), *Damul* (1985), *Bandit Queen* (1994), *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar* (2000), *Bawandar* (2000), *Eklavya: The Royal Guard* (2007), *Aarakshan* (2011), and *Shudra: The Rising* (2012). Even in *Bandit Queen*, the focus is more on dacoits and retribution; the lower caste status of Phoolan Devi is only coincidental.

There are also references to untouchability in Shyam Benegal's *Manthan* (1976), J P Dutta's *Ghulami* (1985), Ashutosh Gowariker's *Lagaan* (2001), *Swades* (2004), and Vikas Bhardwaj's *Omkaara* (2006). Apparently, the dozen or so films on untouchability is a telling commentary on how Hindi cinema has avoided the sensitive subject of the caste, or what Harish S Wankhede calls "cast away" the caste.

From a Dalit perspective, when one enquires about their space during the past one century of the film world, only a handful of non-decrepit, obscure examples are presented. Caste as a peculiar Indian reality is an acceptable fact but it is often cast away by the Bollywood filmmakers. (Wankhede, 2013)<sup>132</sup>

Even in the above-mentioned films, untouchability is either shown from a Brahmanical point of view or the pain and suffering of being an untouchable are lost somewhere under the glitz and glamour of the cinema. The commercial nature of the box office makes it almost incumbent on Hindi filmmakers not to delve deeply into the subject and move beyond the stereotypes of caste hierarchies.

In *Achhut Kanya* the viewer, in fact, identifies, voyeuristically, with the star and removes the politics of the subaltern untouchable completely from the text. Cinema confronts a radical opposition (Brahmin – untouchable) and an essential social fact of Indian modernity but deflects its dramatic consequences...*Achhut Kanya* is concerned with the projection of an unproblematic liberal humanist worldview (couched in melodramatic excess) in which the metatext of dharma finally triumphs. As Ashis Nandy observed, Bombay Cinema keeps faith with its absolutist traditions, unlike folk and popular theatre, which always had a more transformative political potential. Although intercaste marriage takes place when Bimal Roy returned to the theme of caste and untouchability in *Sujata* (The Well-Born, 1959), the highly cultured star quality of Nutan once again concealed out the "horror" of miscegenation between the upper-caste Adhir (Sunil Dutt) and the untouchable *Sujata* (Nutan).

In *Achhut Kanya* that agenda is already becoming thoroughly systemic as the husband who had planned to kill his wife for infidelity emerges reformed upon listening to the fakir's tale, and the audience is left with the redemptive strains of the devotional song "Hari Base Sakal Samsara" (The Lord dwells everywhere). The untouchable is finally incidental to the triumph of the form which subsequently becomes eminently iterable. Other disadvantaged classes of professional types – the peasant, the prostitute, the single mother, the widow, the saint, those wrongfully condemned by the justice system – will enter the formulaic world established by *Achhut Kanya*, extending its

themes, displacing its main characters but leaving the form itself intact. (Mishra, 2013)<sup>133</sup>

They rather stick to the formulaic interpretation of caste oppression, which still exists in parts of India. It primarily manifests through inter-caste love and caste discrimination in public places. The Bollywood hero typically suffers discrimination at the hands of feudal masters through the entire film and explodes only in the end, taking to violence to kill the oppressive landlord or erstwhile upper caste king. Shoma A Chatterji, the film critic, indicates in a paper titled *The Culture-specific Use of Sound in India Cinema* that Indian cinema does not aim at winning the war against untouchability.

Many Indian films are often focussed on describing the dominant paradigms of caste as a manifestation of the essentially hierarchical nature of Indian society through films like *Achhut Kanya*, *Sujata*, *Jaag Utha Insaan*. It has also produced particular interpretations of the caste question through films like *Damul*, *Aakrosh*, *Ankur* and *The Bandit Queen* (none of which strictly conform to the ideology upheld and propagated by the mainstream) which, by virtue of their commercial success, (except for perhaps, *Damul*) could be brought within the periphery of the mainstream. It would be in the fitness of things to say that mainstream Indian cinema unwittingly adheres to the beliefs of people like Benjamin, Williams, Hall, Bourdieu, and Foucault who have brought in newer ways of theorising culture. Mainstream cinema, like Stuart Hall, reflects culture as “a site of convergent interests rather than a logically or conceptually clarified idea.” The field of culture is seen as “a constant battlefield” where “strategic positions” are “to be won or lost.” Mainstream cinema departs from Hall's belief that there are no victories to be gained because here, the box office must be appeased at all costs so far as commercial Indian cinema goes. Like all politics however, the politics of silence in Indian cinema, mainstream or offmainstream, is the art of the possible. (Chatterji, 1999)<sup>134</sup>

Hindi filmmakers use stereotyped situations, tropes, folk music, and symbols to give expression to the helplessness and oppression of the untouchables. In many films, untouchable characters have been portrayed as cowering, dumb or silent (*Ankur: The Seedling* and *Lagaan*). Slashing the tongue of a Dalit for chanting god's name (*Shudra: The Uprising*), whipping a Dalit man (*Ankur: The Seedling*), forcing him to pull a plough or cart or forcing Dalit women to have sex (*Shudra: The Uprising*) are some of the usual ways adopted by feudal castes in the films to torture the untouchables.

The Dalits are presented as submissive animate selves, degraded and destitute with almost no hope for a better future. Similar to Karan Johar's designer NRI lifestyle, the parallel cinema is also content with a designer reality and addresses those social questions which will not make its audience uncomfortable and agitated... The representation of Dalit persona and his/her ideological and moral characteristics reflect the Gandhian visualisation of the 'Harijan', that is, dependent (*Sujata* 1959), submissive (*Damul* 1985) and suitable to the ethics of socio-cultural Brahmanical values (*Lagaan* 2001). The Dalit movement which has impacted the socio-political churning in the most impressive way and produced a robust independent 'Political Dalit' has almost no representative narrative available in the mainstream Bollywood films. (Wankhede, 2013)<sup>135</sup>

It appears that Hindi filmmakers sincerely portrayed the struggle of deprived and dispossessed sections against social discrimination between 1935 and 1960, for about two-and-a-half decades. This period produced the largest number of reform movies, be they on untouchability, equality of religions, non-violence, or *Swadeshi*. They juxtaposed good versus evil and justified the dreams of the untouchables for a better bargain from the Hindu society.

The nationalist hope that the newly born nation has to pass this transitory phase to achieve the ideals of modernity was promisingly reflected in this decade. It created that duality between the 'good versus evil' as the concrete contestation between the rich and poor and sensitively defended the aspirations of the downtrodden. (Wankhede, 2013)<sup>136</sup>

After that, the mainstream cinema did to untouchability what it did to non-violence, *Swadeshi* and the equality of religions. It concentrated on exploiting romance, song, dance, action, and violence to recover its investment or make profits, leaving the radical work of exposing the horrible practices of untouchability and ushering a change in society through images to the art filmmakers, or what is known as parallel cinema.

Wankhede quotes Sharmishtha Gooptu on how the 1960s ignored the issues of deprived sections. "The 1960s narrowed down its concerns to the emotional ghettos of the upper-middle class people. The decorative and bulging style of the city rich, Western attire, foreign locations and cosmopolitanism gripped the narratives making Shakti Samant and Pramod Chakravarty household names" (Wankhede, 2013).<sup>137</sup> He goes on to add,

The bourgeois hero was a romantic lover, good hearted and indulged mainly to satisfy the burning emotional quench. In the times of Shammi Kapoor and Rajesh Khanna as the spokespersons of Bollywood, it was difficult to assume that popular cinema could notice the other wretched world. Caste

was completely blacked out as if the socialist dreams were already fulfilled within the first decade itself. However, the upper caste names, brahmanical cultural rituals and Hindu aesthetics were portrayed as the natural assets of the entire nation.

With the beginning of Amitabh Bachchan's Angry Young Man era in the mid-70s, a further shift from the sensible social portrayal of the unequal society took place.

He (The Angry Young Man Superstar) primarily contested the issues of poverty, corruption, and lawlessness but hardly showed any concern to deal with the social maladies such as caste discrimination or women's empowerment. It was reflective of the fact that the idea of Heroism needed a peculiar social background (upper caste) and hence no-body (including Govind Nihalani), during this age of 'anger and frustration', even imagined to portray a realist Dalit protagonist fighting against social and capitalist ills. (Wankhede, 2013)<sup>138</sup>

From the mid-1970s to the late 1980s, popular Hindi cinema did not give much space to the issues of historically marginalized and socially suppressed classes. During this period, whatever films on untouchability were produced, they either came from parallel cinema (*Ankur: The Seedling*, *Manthan*, *Damul*, etc.) or mainstream film directors who were known for their realistic cinema (J P Dutta's *Ghulami* and K Vishwanath's *Jaag Utha Insaan*). Even afterwards, the filmmakers dealt with the subject as one of the minor sub-plots in their movies (*Lagaan*, *Swadesh*); *Aarakshan* and *Eklavya: The Royal Guard* are the only notable exceptions, and the first faced protests from anti-reservation groups while the second bombed at the box office.

Critics of *Aarakshan* faulted it for aggrieving both the upper castes and the lower castes. It had to be banned in Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, and Punjab after fears were expressed that it could stoke class wars.

Critics say that *Aarakshan* depicts upper castes in a bad light for the way they mistreated Dalits, while at the same time ignoring how the quota system helped lift many people out of poverty.

"While the overall theme of the film is not objectionable, it is loaded with anti-Dalit and anti-[quota] dialogues," P.L. Punia, chairman of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, said. "*Aarakshan* has failed. It is likely to create communal tension." (Khan, Awal, 2011)<sup>139</sup>

No wonder Wankhede accuses Bollywood of "making superficial attempts to demystify the socio-political realities".



The marvellous fictional narratives are distantly separated from the quotidian complexities of the average person. It cunningly avoids itself from indulging in the hard questions of social reality and in most of the cases imposes a structured narrative meant to address the emotive and psychological concerns of the Hindu social elites. Hindi films are written, directed and produced by a dominant set of people that celebrate the tastes and values of the upper class-caste sensitivities. Even the film critics, historians, and scholars have studied cinema as an art aloof from the rugged conflicting social realities. The experiences of caste discrimination and exclusion have a negligible presence in the narratives of the Bollywood cinema. (Wankhede, 2013)<sup>140</sup>

More often than not, Hindi filmmakers depict the various shades of society to entertain their viewers, even in a movie on untouchability because they are catering to the entire society and not just Dalits. The spiralling cost of movie making and the replacement of single screen talkies and theatres by multiplexes, an urban phenomenon, is another reason films stay away from controversial subjects like social discrimination, which primarily exists in villages now. Filmmakers would not want to risk their investment by producing a radical art form.

If a director makes a critical movie on caste or religion, he tries to balance depicting the social reality by providing entertainment and fulfilling the commercial purpose. For a director, the target audience is not solely Dalits. One should accept the fact that for the masses, cinema is a form of entertainment. Caste, a serious social issue, does not always translate readily into entertainment material. Recently, the release of *Aarakshan* and *Shudra—the Rising* met with opposition by various Hindu groups. They claim that the films negatively portray the Hindu religion and caste system. (Pathania, 2013)<sup>141</sup>

Pathania finds it unreasonable to expect Bollywood to be pro-Dalit and bring about a transformational change in society through its content. “Why do we expect glamorous cinema to be pro-Dalit when the market is its godfather as the caste issue is a selective reality of the market in present times?” he asks. He disagrees with scholars who accuse Hindi cinema of not having given enough representation to the untouchables or given voice to their aspirations.

The author does not agree with Pathania that Bollywood has no obligation to break the clutch of commercial logic and engage with the darker side of societal behaviour, and rather veers toward Manoj Kumar, who cites three reasons why Hindi cinema has stayed away from dealing with the caste question.

The issue related to Dalits has not been handled properly by Bollywood. It seems that Hindi cinema turned a blind eye towards the caste system. There are lots of reasons behind this; firstly, this sort of movies cannot be sold like other masala movies. Secondly, the caste question needs a serious and sensitive dimension so there are no Dalit actors or directors who can represent their story in their way like Dalit writers in literature such as Omprakash Valmiki, Namdev Dashed, Arjun Dangle. Next, the issue of the caste is dangerous territory, full of complexities similar to religious-communal problems so no director or producer wants to take this kind of risk. As it has been rightly said about Hindi cinema, “Bollywood films are fond of that attire which is flamboyant and can hide the real crippled skin”. (Kumar, 2014)<sup>142</sup>

Writer Nandini Bhattacharya is sure that Hindi Cinema’s disinterest in untouchability is either a conspiracy of silence or simply an attitude of indifference.

Since the film *Achhut Kanya* (Franz Osten, 1936), forms of bare life, such as untouchability, have been rarely covered by Hindi cinema, despite emergent articulations of Dalit identity in Indian political and social life. Not only does the cinema not present, let alone represent, untouchability, it never articulates a reason for its lack or for its absence. (Bhattacharya, 2013)<sup>143</sup>

Film actor Aamir Khan raised his voice against social discrimination through his programme *Satyamev Jayate* in 2012. He called it a “mental illness” (IDSN, 2012), and met with the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to raise the issue of manual scavengers. He recalled Mahatma Gandhi’s fight against untouchability, asking,

Why did Gandhiji give so much importance to the removal of untouchability, or based on caste? Let’s reflect on that for a moment. I think it is because the freedom he was fighting for was not just political. He did not merely want a different set of people in the corridors of power. Freedom for him meant freedom for each and every citizen of India. A freedom that could only be born from genuine equality, and the protection of the dignity of every Indian. Untouchability was clearly incompatible with his vision of freedom. (Khan, 2012)<sup>144</sup>

Writer Arundhati Roy questions Mahatma Gandhi’s views on *Chaturvarna* and emphasizes the complete abolition of caste structure, as suggested in Baba Saheb Ambedkar’s ‘liberating, revolutionary rage’ *Annihilation of Caste*.

History has been unkind to Ambedkar. First, it contained him, and then it glorified him. It has made him India’s Leader of the Untouchables, the king

of the ghetto. It has hidden away his writings. It has stripped away the radical intellect and the searing insolence". (Roy, 2014)<sup>145</sup>

Roy is of the view that India needs a Dalit revolution. She charges Gandhi with treating untouchables with condescension and contempt, for example, by not partaking meals with Balmikis in the sweeper colony in New Delhi he stayed in for a few months in 1946. She calls interpretations of Gandhi's and Ambedkar's utopias by the end product alone wrong, arguing what is more important is the impetus behind those utopias.

For Ambedkarites to call mass struggles against contemporary models of development "eco-romantic" and for Gandhians to hold Gandhi as a symbol of justice and moral virtue are shallow interpretations of the very different passions that drove the two men. (Roy, 2014)<sup>146</sup>

She argues that

Brahminism is practised not just by the Brahmin against Kshatriya or the Vaishya against the Shudra, or the Shudra against the Untouchable, but also by the Untouchable against the Unapproachable, the Unapproachable against Unseeable. It means there is a quotient of Brahminism in everybody, regardless of which caste they belong to. It is the ultimate means of control in which the concept of pollution and purity and the perpetration of social as well as physical violence—an inevitable part of administering an oppressive hierarchy—is not just outsourced, but implanted in everybody's imagination, including those at the bottom of the hierarchy. It's like an elaborate enforcement network in which everybody polices everybody else. The Unapproachable polices the Unseeable; the Malas resent the Madigas; the Madigas turn upon the Dakkalis, who sit on the Rellis; the Vanniyars quarrel with the Paraiyars, who in turn could beat up the Arundhatiyars'.<sup>147</sup>

She says Ambedkar was against this, saying that Brahminism "is the very negation of the spirit of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity" (Roy, 2014).<sup>148</sup> Ambedkar called for the complete elimination of the caste system.

Ambedkar argued that caste society did not merely justify material deprivation, but also ritual, psychic, and even physical segregation. Organized along 'an ascending scale of reverence and a descending scale of contempt,' caste society was the perverse ordering of persons along a hierarchy of dignities. Untouchability was 'an aspect of social psychology: it [was] a sort of social nausea of one group against the other' (Chakrabarty, Mazumdar, 2007).<sup>149</sup>

In contrast to dominant ethno-historical characterizations of the caste order that privileged the Brahmin as the fulcrum of the system, Ambedkar argued

that untouchability was central to the caste Hindu order. From his position as spokesperson for an exceptional community, degraded and yet possessing a latent political power, Ambedkar argued that the untouchables formed the glue of the Hindu order although they were despised and marginalized. The principle of untouchability provided the single point of unification for the touchable but otherwise fragmented Hindu castes. In every other respect, differences of belief and practice fractured Hinduism irretrievably. To locate untouchability, that which was extraneous or supplementary to caste Hinduism as caste's secret was perhaps the most powerful attempt yet by anyone to provide a systemic theory of caste.

If Gandhi (and Congress nationalists) characterized untouchability as a problem of religious inclusion, Ambedkar politicized the putative split between these two domains, and simultaneously questioned the terms of religious *and* political inclusion, to argue that the horizon of emancipation could not be contained within existing social relations. (Chakrabarty, Mazumdar, 2007)<sup>150</sup>

For over a decade and a half, the Mahatma and the doctor fought a constant tug of war over untouchability. Gandhi and his cohorts called untouchables an intrinsic part of Hindu society while Ambedkar believed they were a separate minority. The latter launched the fiercest attack on Hindu inclusiveness when he turned to Buddhism with his followers.

The final, and most powerful symbolic challenge to Hindu inclusiveness came two decades after the Poona Pact compromise, with Ambedkar's 'conversion' to Buddhism on October 14, 1956, shortly before his death. Though he described it as Dalits' *return* to their Buddhist past, Ambedkar's actions were perceived as Dalits' symbolic exit from the Hindu community; a final refusal to countenance Hinduism's historic degradation of the untouchable. For Ambedkar, Buddhism was significant to the extent that its demise was personified in the figure of the Dalit Buddhist. (Chakrabarty, Mazumdar, 2007)<sup>151</sup>

Ambedkar described untouchables as

Buddhists and Broken Men hence Dalit, meaning 'ground down,' or broken to pieces. [This was a term that Ambedkar had first used during the late 1920s, in his newspaper, *Bahishkrit Bharat*.] A destitute, territorially dispersed community of suffering, they were history's detritus. Because the Broken Men had resisted the movement of history, they symbolized obdurate social forms and practices that could not be subsumed by the mainstream. (Chakrabarty, Mazumdar, 2007)<sup>152</sup>

The author believes that blaming Mahatma Gandhi for what he believed in until he was in his mid-50s is not the right approach while agreeing with Ambedkar that the eradication of untouchability can only be achieved by establishing a casteless society. The results of a survey done by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) and the University of Maryland, United States of America, across 42,000 households in India in 2014 would justify drastic measures to deal with the menace.

The survey found that 27 per cent people belonging to every religion and caste, including Muslims, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, admitted that they practiced untouchability in some form. The survey claimed that 35 per cent of Jains, 30 per cent of Hindus, 23 per cent of Sikhs, 18 per cent of Muslims and 5 per cent of Christians admitted practicing untouchability. It discovered that untouchability was widespread in Northern India, with 53 per cent of the respondents in Madhya Pradesh, 50 per cent in Himachal Pradesh, 48 per cent in Chhattisgarh, 47 per cent in Bihar and Rajasthan, 43 per cent in Uttar Pradesh, and 40 per cent in Uttarakhand admitted to the practice (ITV, 2014).<sup>153</sup>

The *Swadeshi* prescribed by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was a multidimensional, omnipresent and all-encompassing force that did not leave any aspect of Indian life in the pre-independence era untouched. From religion to politics to education to economy to the social spectrum, it straddled everything. From pin to the needle to bread labour to heavy machinery, it touched upon everything.

Gandhi found a *Swadeshi* spirit dwelling in every great faith of the world, particularly in the non-proselytizing Hinduism. The Mahatma was prepared to reform every flaw, iron every wrinkle, and repair every defect, but would not want to change his ancestral religion. "Thus, as for religion, in order to satisfy the requirements of the definition, I must restrict myself to my ancestral religion. That is the use of my immediate religious surrounding. If I find it defective, I should serve it by purging it of its defects," he declared in his definition of *Swadeshi* (Gandhi, 1916).<sup>154</sup>

In the political domain, the Mahatma wished to work with indigenous institutions and serve them by curing them of their proved defects. In economics, he insisted on using only things produced by his immediate neighbours and aiding the latter in improving their products and services and finding a market. He emphasized on developing India's villages in self-supporting, self-contained units that would exchange only such necessary commodities with other villages as are not locally producible. In his scheme of things, the villages would be the main repositories of power. He wanted a revival of the ancient village communities with prosperous agriculture, decentralized industry, and small scale co-operative organizations.

His *Swadeshi* stressed bread labour, where there was no place for machines designed to reduce the employment of people. He likened machinery to “a snake-hole which may contain from one to hundred snakes”.

Where there is machinery, there are large cities; where there are large cities, there are tram-cars and railways. And there only does one see electric light. The honest physician will tell you that where means of artificial locomotion have increased, the health of the people has suffered. I remember that, when in European town there was scarcity of money, the receipts of the tramway company, of the lawyers and of the doctors went down, and the people were less unhealthy. I cannot recall a single good point in connection with machinery. (HS, 1908)<sup>155</sup>

Gandhi was not against saving labour but did not want the introduction of machines for greed.

I would welcome any day a machine to straight crooked spindles. Not that blacksmiths will cease to make spindles; they will continue to provide spindles, but when the spindle goes wrong, every spinner will have a machine to get it straight. Therefore, replace greed by love and everything will be all right. (YI, 1924)<sup>156</sup>

Gandhi's *Swadeshi* doctrine underlined Hindi and vernacular languages as the medium of education. It prescribed 100 percent prohibition on the consumption of alcohol, tea, coffee, and tobacco. The Mahatma regarded the use of liquor as a disease rather than a vice and went to the extent of saying,

If he were appointed dictator of India, only for an hour, he would, in the first instance, close all the liquor shops without compensation, and compel the mill-owners to start refreshment rooms to provide harmless drinks to the workmen. (Thakur, 2009)<sup>157</sup>

The use of hand-spun cloth was a must in Gandhi's *Swadeshi*. He was all for giving protection to Indian industry and handicrafts and to the way of life of the people. Gandhi's spinning wheel turned out to be a major symbol of liberation from foreign subjugation. The father of the Indian nation was also against urbanization and the use of contraception to control the population, and looked at *Swadeshi* as a major means of protecting the environment. He wanted the observance of self-denial to control the population.

it is said by the protagonists of the use of contraceptives that the conception is an accident to be prevented except when the parties desire to have children. I venture to suggest that this is a most dangerous doctrine to preach anywhere; much more so in a country like India, where the middle-class male population has become imbecile through abuse of the creative function. (Gandhi, 2013)<sup>158</sup>

Historian Ramchandra Guha considers Gandhi an early environmentalist (Kalland, Persoon, 1998).<sup>159</sup> Gandhi's village republic – agriculture and village industries – was central to his objective of building a green ecosystem. Damage to the environment was what made him repulse modern means of transport – cars, buses, trains, airplanes – which, though they increased the pace of commuting, added dangerous gases to the atmosphere.

The *Swadeshi* movement, according to writer L M Bhole, preceded Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Bhole divides the movement into five phases – Phase I (1850–1904), Phase II (1905–1917), Phase III (1918–1947), Phase IV (1948–1991) and Phase V (1991 onwards).

The first phase was led by Dadabhai Naoroji, Gopal Krishan Gokhale, Mahadev Govind Ranade, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and G V Joshi (Laxminath, 2016)<sup>160</sup> but the real push to the movement came at Calcutta Town Hall on August 7, 1905, when the Congress passed the famous boycott resolution. It started from Calcutta, then the capital of the British Empire, but soon spread to various parts of India, including Punjab, Delhi, Madras, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh. The movement began in reaction to Viceroy Lord Curzon's decision to divide Bengal into eastern (capital Dacca) and western parts. The chief architects of this movement, also known as the Vandematram movement, were Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, Lala Lajpat Rai, and Aurobindo Ghosh.

Gandhi's Kheda *Satyagraha* and non-cooperation movement were patterned on the *Swadeshi* movement. Unlike the Congress moderates, who wished to confine the movement to making a bonfire of foreign clothes in 1905, the *Swadeshi* movement under the Mahatma (the third phase) came to cover several aspects of Indian life. Gandhi invented symbols like the spinning wheel, khadi, and cap and was able to sell them to the masses. His *Swadeshi* applied to social, political, religious, education, and economic fields.

Ironically, the advent of *Swadeshi* in Bollywood, which was then known as Bombay cinema, came around the same time as when Gandhi rose to become the most important leader in the Congress party. T Jansen, a freelance cameraman from America, shot a full-length newsreel on *Swadeshi* in 1915. Titled *The Great Bonfire of Foreign Clothes*, it was screened at The Globe and West End theatres of Bombay for two weeks. It

showed Mahatma Gandhi as the most prominent amongst the other nationalist leaders.

This was followed by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Dada Saheb Phalke, Ratan Tata, and Manmohandas Ramji joining hands to set up a nationalist cinema enterprise with the working capital of Rs. 500,000 (1917–1918). Unfortunately, the enterprise did not last very long as Ramji and others differed over the profitability prospects of the venture (Kishore, Sarwal, Patra, 2016).<sup>161</sup> Phalke, the father of the India cinema, then floated the Hindustan Film Company with a group of Bombay-based textile businessmen – V S Apte, Mayashankar Bhat, L B Pathak, Madhav Jesing, and Gokul Damodar. According to the agreement, the films produced by Phalke before 1917 became the property of the company (Kishore, Sarwal, Patra, 2016).<sup>162</sup>

Kishore, Sarwal and Patra also cite from Somnath Ray's book *Hiralal Sen: A Monograph* to point out that Sen established his Royal Bioscope Company in Calcutta in 1898 and started to film real-life events and staged theatre (Ray 2009: 20).<sup>163</sup> The trio also see R G Torney and N G Chitre's *Shree Pundalik* (1912), who many believe was the first Indian film, as part of the *Swadeshi* cinema but there are others who believe that since *Shree Pundalik* was a photographic recording of a popular Marathi play, the cameraman Johnson was a British national and it was processed in London, it could not be called the first Indian film (Wikipedia, 2015).<sup>164</sup>

Kishore, Sarwal and Patra believe Phalke's *Raja Harishchandra* (1913), *Lanka Dahan* (1917), and *Shri Krishna Janma* (1918), and Baburao Painter's *Sairindhri* (1920) were successful in establishing an early nationalist tradition in Indian cinema through mythological films. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, in his newspaper *Kesari*, praised "*Raja Harishchandra* as the first *Swadeshi* feature film" (Bandyhopadhyay, 1993).<sup>165</sup>

Kishore, Sarwal and Patra also put Shantiniketan product D N Ganguly's *Bilet Ferot* (alternate title *England Returned*; 1921), a satirical silent film about the educated Bengali people who blindly aped British culture, in the same category.

In an obvious bid to block the march of *Swadeshi* cinema, the British Parliament passed a Cinematograph Act in 1918. Subsequently, four separate censor boards were set up under the Act in Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, and Rangoon in May 1920. Opposing the government move, freedom fighter Lala Lajpat Rai sought cinema's exclusion from the censor, saying that it was a tool of free expression. Later, in 1927, a board was set up in Lahore as well. The main concern of the British government was to use the censor "as an instrument to serve their imperial politics and reject



whatever was inimical to the interests of the Raj” (Bandyhopadhyay, 1993).<sup>166</sup>

In 1921, a district magistrate in Karachi and an officer of the Bombay State prohibited the exhibition of a mythological film called *Bhakta Vidur*, saying, “It is (was) likely to excite disaffection against the Government and incite people to non-cooperation” (FFL, 2014).<sup>167</sup> The film was considered a “thinly veiled resume of political events in India”, with Vidur appearing as Mr. Gandhi, clad in a Gandhi cap and khaddar shirt.

The loyal officers of the court of Dhritharashtra who represented the King Emperor in the film, were awarded “donkey bahadur” titles, an apparent spoof on the Diwan Bahadur titles bestowed by the British government. The government banned the film, saying that the intention of the film was to “create hatred and contempt and to stir up a feeling of enmity against the government” (Kishore, Sarwal, Patra, 2016).<sup>168</sup>

In 1927, another nationalistic film *Vande Mataram Ashram* was censored and briefly banned because it criticizes the British education policies and counterposes a defence of the traditional Indian teaching system. In 1930, V Shantaram’s *Swarajya Toran (Flag of Freedom)* was forced by censors to change its name to *Uday Kal (Thunder of the Hills)*. Eleven years later, they banned the screening of *Sikandar* in military cantonment areas because the government feared that King Porus’ call to drive foreigners out of India could instigate a mutiny (Vasudev, 1978).<sup>169</sup>

Over the next two decades, the foreign government took several measures to stifle the Indian cinema industry. This included a restriction on the length of films to conserve stock for war propaganda films in 1942 and an increase in the entertainment tax in Bombay, Madras, and the United and Central Provinces two years later. During World War II (1939–1945), the British government in India installed a Director of War Publicity on the Censor Board to ensure that films contained nothing that would work against the war efforts (Baskaran, 1981, p. 144).<sup>170</sup>

In 1943, Kismet’s song *Dur Hato ai Duniya Walon Hindustan Hamara Hai* (Stay out! O Outsiders, India is ours) not only injected a note of patriotism among the masses but also preached religious tolerance and communal harmony. Moreover, “Dur Hato” transformed into the filmy equivalent of Gandhiji’s “Quit India” call. Another couplet of the song: *Tum Na Kisi ke aage Jhukna, German ho ya Japani* (Bow not before anyone, be it German or Japanese) also tried to hoodwink the authorities. The impact of the song in the cinema halls was electric (Baskaran, 1981).<sup>171</sup> Mahatma was renamed Dharmatma and a number of scenes and dialogues were deleted. The producers of Iman Farosh were asked to delete all cries of

*Inquilab Zindabad* (Long live the revolution) uttered by crowds (Baskaran, 1981).<sup>172</sup>

For over first two decades of Indian cinema, until 1955, a number of mythological and realistic films promoted *Swadeshi*. *Dharati Ke Lal* (1946), based on the Bengal famine of 1943–1944, was one of them. The film portrays the severe food scarcity, which Gandhi had only believed after visiting Bengal, Assam and Madras.

Apart from cooperative farming, Gandhi proposed a number of things to control the food shortage in India. He wanted every individual to curtail his or her requirements of food to the minimum, substitute food grains and pulses with vegetables, milk, fruits, etc., and utilize every flower garden for cultivation. He also wanted a ban on oil-seeds and oil-cakes, etc. and black marketing and economization of food grains and pulses by the army personnel.

*Dharti Ke Lal* (Children of the Earth) was one of the first films that portrayed socialist realism. It had a non-professional cast and depicted the theme of uprooted humankind in the Bengal famine. Colonial apathy, disdain, and the abdication of responsibility in the context of its citizens is evident in one of the scenes of the film when a female character succumbs to prostitution to save the life of her only child, who was in a critical condition for want of food and milk. The situation further worsens when her husband is ready to become a pimp for his wife. The film was adapted from the short story *Annadata* by Krishan Chander.

Ironically, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, journalist, writer, director, producer, and columnist, who promoted Gandhi's cooperative farming for the achievement of self-reliance in the production of food grains, did not quite approve of the Mahatma's revulsion towards cinema. In a letter written to the father of the nation, Abbas pleaded with him to reconsider his views on cinema. "My dear Bapu," he wrote,

Today I bring for your scrutiny and approval a new toy my generation has learnt to play with – the CINEMA! ...All that I wish to say is that cinema is an art, a medium of expression and therefore it is unfair to condemn it. You are a great soul Bapu... Give this little toy of ours, the Cinema, which is not as useless as it looks, a little of your attention and bless it with a smile of toleration. (Khan, 2016)<sup>173</sup>

The other big irony is that Abbas' will, conveyed through a newspaper column, decreed that his funeral procession should pass by the statue of Mahatma Gandhi at Juhu Beach (Khan, 2016),<sup>174</sup> which shows how much he respected the genius of the Mahatma despite the two not being on same page on the usefulness of cinema.

*Naya Daur* (1957) fits Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy like a glove. It not only repudiates the supremacy of machine over man but also points out the dangers inherent in the replacement of labour with heavy machinery and villages with urban agglomerations in an overpopulated country like India. Its bus-tonga race is a kind of David-Goliath where the underdog is triumphant.

The blockbuster reflects shades of Gandhi by juxtaposing a tonga, a living thing, against the lifeless machine, the motor car.

Dead machinery must not be pitted against the millions of living machines represented by the villagers scattered in the seven hundred thousand villages of India. Machinery to be well used has to help and ease human effort. (Harijan, 1935)<sup>175</sup>

The Mahatma equated machine and man with a human body and soul combination. He was sure that just as the soul outlasts the body, man will outlive the machine and handicrafts will outlast the machine age.

I have the conviction within me that, when all these achievements of the machine age will have disappeared, these our handicrafts will remain; when all exploitation will have ceased, service and honest labour will remain. It is because this faith sustains me that I am going on with my work... Indomitable faith in their work sustained like Stephenson and Columbus. Faith in my work sustains me. (Harijan, 1935)<sup>176</sup>

Ideally...I would rule out all machinery, even as I would reject this very body, which is not helpful to salvation, and seek the absolute liberation of the soul. From that point of view, I would reject all machinery, but machines will remain because, like the body, they are inevitable. The body itself...is the purest piece of mechanism; but if it is a hindrance to the highest flights of the soul, it has to be rejected. (YI, 1924)<sup>177</sup>

The creation of writers Akhtar Mirza and Kamil Rashid and director B R Chopra, *Naya Daur* endorsed Gandhi's opposition to heavy machinery at the cost of human labour by displaying symbols of bread labour – Dilip Kumar holding a crowbar and Ajit an ax – even on its posters. It is clear from its very beginning who it sides with in the contest between machines and humans. The triumph of the tonga over the motor car in the race at the end seems to be a natural corollary to what has been going on in the film for just less than three hours.

The Mahatma expressed a similar conviction during his lifetime.

I am clear that, whilst this machine age aims at converting men into machines, I am aiming at reinstating man turned machine into his original estate. (Harijan, 1936)<sup>178</sup>

*Naya Daur* argues against fulfilling the greed of a few in the name of providing leisure for the teeming millions, something Mahatma also questioned in his speeches and writings.

I want the concentration of wealth, not in the hands of a few, but in the hands of all. Today machinery helps a few to ride on the backs of millions. The impetus behind it all is not the philanthropy to save labour, but greed. It is against this constitution of things that I am fighting with all my might. (YI, 1924)<sup>179</sup>

Abbas' *Dharti Ke Lal* and Chopra's *Naya Daur* point to how Hindi filmmakers in Bombay, the world of fantasy, weaved stories between 1940 and 1960 to reflect the idealism and principles of Mahatma Gandhi on *Swadeshi* (*Swa* in Sanskrit stands for apna). Besides these two, there were a number of other Hindi movies – *Do Bigha Zameen*, *Mother India* – that touched upon the travails of farmers in the country.

However, after 1960, films on *Swadeshi* went into a downslide, with filmmakers and writers deserting the genre for more lucrative and appealing romance, action and mystery dramas. It was left to parallel cinema directors to explore the precept further. Shyam Benegal's *Manthan* (1976) was one such movie which gave voice to the exploitation of farmers by greedy milk vendors and money lenders in villages. *Manthan* also exposes the caste fault lines in rural society, which are manipulated by the money lenders to build their trade against the dairy cooperative, an offshoot of the *Swadeshi* Gandhi greatly emphasized.

The film claims it was financed by 500,000 farmers in Gujarat, the first example of cooperative filmmaking, but the *Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema*, a library journal by Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willemen, says *Manthan* was made through the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB), a controversial organization headed by Dr. V Kurien, who shares script credit.

Rajadhyaksha and Willemen allege

Established in 1965 to regularise milk co-operatives and to enhance their productivity with new technology, the NDDB was accused of aggravating India's foreign debt and of diverting resources destined to help the rural poor into servicing the urban upper-class market. Made during this controversy to enhance the NDDB's image, *Manthan* tells a version of the organisation's early years when corrupt local politicians, middlemen and an uneducated community's prejudices had to be overcome to create local co-operatives. (Girish) Karnad plays what is presumably a fictional version of Dr. Kurien

himself while Kharbanda is the villainous Sarpanch (village head). Shah and Patil represent the voices of progress among the peasantry. (Rajadhyaksha, Willemen, 1999)<sup>180</sup>

But Naseeruddin Shah, who played a vital part in the movie, refutes Rajadhyaksha and Willemen. Calling *Manthan* a unique film, he says,

It had 5,00,000 financiers, all of them members of the Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation who paid two rupees each, to amass a figure of 10,00,000 rupees – more than enough at that time to make a film of that kind with a large cast, on location. In later years, of course, there were films I acted in, shot in Bombay, on starvation budgets like 3,50,000 rupees, but *Manthan* was probably the first Indian film to be financed by a cooperative. (Shah, 2015)<sup>181</sup>

*Manthan* greatly promoted the cause of the cooperative milk movement in India. Benegal turned to this after

making two of the three documentaries on Operation Food, called Operation Flood I and II, which led to the White Revolution – all because of Dr. Kurien and his rural marketing initiative IRMA, which was a pioneering institute. While doing these documentaries, I used to travel around the whole country and I came across many beautiful places. And I said to Dr Kurien that these documentaries will be seen largely by those who have already been converted to the cause. What about the larger public? He agreed with me but said that there was no money (for a large project). Dr Kurien never allowed anyone to spend any money that he didn't get value from. (ET, 2012)<sup>182</sup>

Benegal says he got to know Kurien in 1960 when he was working with an advertising agency for Amul milk products.

Marginal farmers would do milk farming on a meagre subsistence basis, and it was Kurien who put a finger on the problem. The farmers did not know how to market their products, and what Kurien achieved by bringing them together under a co-operative (Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation) was extraordinary. He led the farmers to make India one of the largest milk producers in the world with Operation Flood (White Revolution). (Benegal, 2012)<sup>183</sup>

*Manthan* was initially made for Gujarat farmers and released in Gujarat but it was subsequently released across the country and did very well.

*Manthan* went on to be used as an example across the country on how to set up a cooperative. The National Dairy Development Board, of which Kurien was founder-chairman, introduced the film to several African and Latin

American countries. It was also screened for the United Nations Development Programme. The then PM also sent a copy of the film to the erstwhile Soviet Union. (Benegal, 2012)<sup>184</sup>

Unlike the 1940–1960 period, when the emphasis was on directly disseminating Gandhian messages through straight social stories, the new crop of Bollywood filmmakers (liberalization onwards) adopted a much more nuanced approach to popularize the ideals and principles of the Mahatma among the Indian masses. The new filmmakers are not shy of using a tapori language to add to the appeal of the message or contextualizing the precepts in contemporary settings.

Thus, you have Mohan Bhargava (Shahrukh Khan) in *Swades: We, the People*, a NASA scientist who wears modern clothes, works on laptops and drives around in a caravan but modelled after the father of the Indian nation. Like Gandhi, Mohan is a successful NRI (Non-resident Indian). He returns to India to find his nanny Kaveriamma and take her back with him, but in the process he undergoes a complete transformation to become, what Kae Reynolds of the University of Huddersfield Repository calls, a servant-leader, like Mahatma Gandhi and others across the globe.

*Swades* begins with a quote by Mahatma Gandhi,

“Hesitating to act because the whole vision might not be achieved, or because others do not yet share it, is an attitude that only hinders progress,” and ends by demonstrating “that even small acts – like many acts of Gandhi and other servant-leaders – have the possibility to forge humanity ahead in the struggle to undo hierarchical notions of leadership, to find purpose in serving the needs of others, and to discover the purpose in our destiny. (Kae, 2012)<sup>185</sup>

*Swades* has many layers of Gandhi’s *Swadeshi* doctrine. It emphasizes respect for one’s own culture, language and development, which will come about through the use of local resources and collective bread labour. There are several parallels between Mohan, the scientist who works on the NASA project Global Precipitation Measurement (GPM), which aims to prevent global war shortages using satellite technology, and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the biggest-ever leader of India who foregoes family to work for the freedom of his country.

Where Gandhi undertook a train journey in third class to learn about India, Mohan comes face to face with the grim reality of the country on a journey he is sent on by Kaveriamma to collect land rent from a weaver-turned-farmer Haridas. Where Gandhi invoked soul power to transform his countrymen on untouchability, *Swadeshi*, the equality of religions, truth and non-violence, Mohan uses all the compassion and persuasion at his

command to eradicate caste differences. Where Gandhi built a mass movement to regain Indian independence, Mohan of *Swades* unites people in Charanpur to tap electricity from a spring. Both become the change they want to see.

*Swades* builds a strong case for retaining the indigenous talent in the country and using it for India's process. Like Gandhi, whose *Swadeshi* stressed producing or consuming from the neighbourhood, the film argues for tapping local natural resources, talent and surroundings to be self-sufficient and self-contained. Kae says the story

deals with themes of social justice, social change, homecoming, and personal transformation at levels that are very real but perhaps also quite distant from a typical US American's own personal reality. Action and dialogue depict clashes of contemporary global and culturally traditional values, roles, and leadership, themes that are significant to servant-leadership today. The film uses water and light as an overarching metaphor for unifying human needs, technology (satellites for GPM, telescopes, hydraulic power, electricity) and nature (stars, rainbows, water) as a metaphor for unifying global perspectives with local perspectives. (Kae, 2012)<sup>186</sup>

It is amazing to see how Mohan, who only drinks mineral water during his vacations in Charanpur, takes to wrestling in the mud with postman Nivaran Dayal Shrivastava (Rajesh Vivek) during his final return. The film is about an "outsider" who criticizes India's problems and blind adherence to tradition but transforms to accept all the imperfections of his country and unite the people to take problems head on.

*Swades* stamps approval on Gandhi's advocacy of developing villages as self-sufficient republics by improving agriculture and setting up cottage industries. Gowariker himself said this a year after its release,

The film (*Swades*) is about urbanites who are villagers at heart. The challenge is to create enough rural opportunity to stop people from getting seduced by big-city glitz. (SBNN, 2015)<sup>187</sup>

Gaurang Chauhan, a film critic, believes *Swades* is Gowariker's best movie to date.

*Swades* is perhaps the only film that addressed the brain drain issue so delicately without being preachy. The character arc of Mohan Bhargav, the way he goes through and feels different emotions for the first time in his life and the way his character changes from when the movie started to that towards the end. It's the story of his self-discovery. (Chauhan, 2016)<sup>188</sup>

Chauhan, the author believes, is not alone when he puts *Swades* above *Lagaan: Once Upon a Time* (2001), a much more commercially successful film by Gowariker. The author is of the view that the former is a better carrier of Gandhi's *Swadeshi* message.

According to Corey K Creekmur of the University of Iowa, both films seek to define "Indianness" through collective action spurred by a hero, but whereas *Lagaan* required translation into the context of the present, *Swades* functions as a direct commentary on current conditions. Moreover, whereas the earlier film depicted its hero and heroine as a Victorian-era Krishna and Radha, *Swades* relies on the now more ideologically charged invocation of Mohan and Gita as a modern Ram and Sita.

Unlike *Lagaan*, which uses cricket as a metaphor for nationalism, *Swades* is a successful "hybrid of the recent NRI (Non-Resident Indian) film", which invokes the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi and the ideology of the independence movement.

The message of *Lagaan* for contemporary India – that members of different castes and religions can succeed when they come together as an all-Indian group – was displaced onto the mythic past of the first all-Indian cricket team. *Swades* avoids such displacement or allegory by locating its inspiring story firmly in the globalized, web linked present and thus seems to implicate an audience that cannot keep its message safely in the past. (Creekmur, UoI)<sup>189</sup>

Unlike Bhuvan of *Lagaan*, who united the people in his village Champner to challenge British officers of the Indian government in 1893, Mohan Bhargava is a "fully assimilated, literally globalized scientist who skilfully handles a press conference in high-tech, jargon-laden English" (Creekmur, UoI).<sup>190</sup> Bhuvan is given a *fait accompli* by the British Captain Andrew Russel but Mohan consciously takes a decision to return to Charanpur from the United States of America.

Bhuvan and Gouri are depicted as Victorian-era Krishna and Radha while *Swades* relies on the more ideologically charged invocation of Mohan and Radha as a modern Ram and Sita. Incidentally, Mahatma Gandhi was a bigger devotee of Rama than Krishna.

Both *Swades* and *Lagaan* invoke khadi as a symbol to stress *Swadeshi*. In *Lagaan*, you have villagers attired in white khadi watching the cricket match from an incline while in *Swades* you have Charanpur residents watching old Dharmendra-starrer *Yaadon Ki Baraat* on a projector screen. *Lagaan* makes no direct reference to Mahatma Gandhi but *Swades* is full of such references – you see Rajni Bakshi's *Bapu Kuti: Journeys in Rediscovery of Gandhi* lying on Mohan's desk, Gita teaching school



children about the Quit India movement, and Mohan's belief in girls' education mirrors Gandhi.

There is an abundance of mythology and nationalism in both films. In *Lagaan*, villagers frustrated over their cricket team's inability to get the English batsmen out invoke Krishna. *Swades* draws heavily from Ramayana (name of the village Charanpur because it has footprints of Ram and Sita, and Gita (Gayatri Joshi)'s performance as Sita one Dussehra evening).

The patriotism of Guran (Rajesh Vivek), Deva (Pradip Rawat) and Arjan (Akhilendra Mishra), and even Bhuvan (Aamir Khan), is the loud, preachy and in-your-face kind while the nationalism and *Swadeshi* of Mohan in *Swades* is more like Mahatma Gandhi – calm, quiet, rational, inclusive, and subtle (note what he says after sleeping on a cot for the first time – he slept soundly for the first time in ages – and how he starts drinking tap water from mud pots and glass tumblers after surviving for so long on treated bottled water). The author strongly believes that *Swades* not only outdoes *Lagaan* in the way it portrays Gandhian principles but it also betters the attempts made by Hindi filmmakers in the 1940–1960 era.

Every time there is a debate on secularism, two institutions invariably get mentioned as shining examples. The Indian defence forces and the Mumbai film industry are always cited as perfect instances of how secularism should be practiced. No wonder Bollywood, which has flagrantly violated the Gandhian philosophy on non-violence, does better when it comes to portraying India as a family where multiple religions cohabit and bloom.

Even during the worst atmosphere of communal disharmony, Mumbai filmmakers, actors, choreographers, musicians, stuntmen, playback singers, story and screen play writers, producers, and lyricists belonging to diverse religions work in tandem to entertain the hundreds of millions of viewers across the length and breadth of India, and even outside its borders. Muslims sing Hindu bhajans and Hindus render melodies in the praise of Allah.

Bollywood is the only space where a trinity of Khans – Shahrukh Khan, Salman Khan and Aamir Khan – has ruled over the box office for many years; where a Muslim actor Yusuf Bhai can adopt a Hindu name, Dilip Kumar, and a Hindu musician R S Dileep Kumar can change his religion and name to Allah Rakha Rahman and yet they continue to be on top in their domains; and where a Muslim superstar (Shahrukh) marries a Hindu girl (Gouri) and names his son AbRam and a Hindu actor (Pankaj Kapoor) marries a Muslim woman Neelima Azeem and the two name their son Shahid Kapoor.

Hindi cinema right from its early days has been a secular space. Not only did Fatima Rashid nee Nargis marry Sunil Dutt (1958), and Sharmila Tagore

say “I do” to Mansoor Ali Khan Pataudi, the famous captain of the Indian cricket team (1969), but Bollywood also put different religions under one roof from its very inception.

When it comes to equality of religions, Hindi cinema can broadly be divided into five parts – first phase (1930–1961), second phase (1962–1973), third phase (1974–1990), fourth phase (1991–2009), and fifth phase (2010 onwards). The first phase was under major influence of nationalist movement in the country and portrayed idealism and principles of the Congress and Mahatma Gandhi through mythologicals, social dramas etc.

The second phase veered away a bit from the Gandhian philosophy, emphasizing family dramas and romance more, with Rajesh Khanna ruling the cash returns. The third phase drafted equality of religions into the lost-and-found formula, with Manmohan Desai becoming the torchbearer with films like *Amar Akbar Anthony* (1977), *Naseeb* (1981), *Desh Premee* (1982), and *Coolie* (1983). While the fourth phase stressed a critical examination of communal riots, particularly the 1984 anti-Sikh violence and 2002 anti-Muslim violence with *Zakhm* (1999), *Bombay* (1995), *1947 Earth* (1998), *Fiza* (2000), *Dev* (2002), *Mr. & Mrs. Iyer* (2002), *Parzania* (2007), and *Firaaq* (2009), the fifth phase has disparaged religion to a great extent with films like *Oh My God* (2012), *P K* (2014), and *Dharam Sankat Mein* (2015).

In the first phase, the basic objective of the films based on theme of the equality of religions was to promote inter-religious unity and communal amity. Therefore, you had films like *Padosi* (1941), *Hum Ek Hain* (1946), *Anari* (1959), *Dhool Ka Phool* (1959), and *Dharamputra* (1961). These films showed characters from different religions living under one roof and making sacrifices to sustain each other. *Padosi* depicts the ideal bonding between a Hindu and a Muslim family, which is essential to sustain the inter-religious character of India. V Shantaram’s film, also called *Shejari* in Marathi, sets the benchmark for the tolerance and respect one should have for religions other than their own through next door neighbours Mirza (Gajanan Jagirdar) and Pandit (Mazhar Khan).

Similarly, Prabhat Film Company’s *Hum Ek Hain*, starring Durga Khote, Rehman and Dev Anand, is a prototype of the India Mahatma Gandhi dreamed to see after the independence of the country. It not only houses a Hindu, a Muslim, a Christian, and an untouchable under one roof in one family but also binds them to a single mother, Vidya Devi (Durga Khote).

This is what Gandhi craved.

I do not expect India of my dream to develop one religion, i.e., to be wholly Hindu, or wholly Christian, or wholly Musalman, but I want it to be wholly

tolerant, with its religions working side by side with one another. (YI, 1927)<sup>191</sup>

Elsewhere, he said,

Hindustan belongs to all those who are born and bred here and who have no other country to look to. Therefore, it belongs to Parsis, Beni Israelis, to Indian Christians, Muslims and other non-Hindus as much as to Hindus. Free India will be no Hindu raj, it will be Indian raj based not on the majority of any religious sect or community, but on the representatives of the whole people without distinction of religion. I can conceive of a mixed majority putting the Hindus in a minority. They would be elected for their record of service and merits. (IMD, 1947)<sup>192</sup>

Like the caste system, Gandhi's opinion on religion too evolved over time. Initially, he could not conceive of politics and a nation without religion.

For me, politics bereft of religion are absolute dirt, ever to be shunned. Politics concern nations and that which concerns the welfare of nations must be one of the concerns of a man who is religiously inclined, in other words, a seeker after God and Truth. For me, God and Truth are convertible terms, and if anyone told me that God was a god of untruth or a god of torture, I would decline to worship Him. Therefore, in politics also we have to establish the kingdom of Heaven. (YI, 1925)<sup>193</sup>

He found politics, religion and nation inseparable.

I could not be leading a religious life unless I identified myself with the whole of mankind, and that I could not do unless I took part in politics. The whole gamut of man's activities today constitutes an indivisible whole. You cannot divide social, economic, political and purely religious work into watertight compartments. I do not know any religion apart from human activity. It provides a moral basis to all other activities which they would otherwise lack, reducing life to a maze of 'sound and fury signifying nothing'. (Harijan, 1946)<sup>194</sup>

The Mahatma agreed with his detractors that his politics was derived from his religion.

I could not live for a single second without religion. Many of my political friends despair of me because they say that even my politics are derived from religion. And they are right. My politics and all other activities of mine are derived from my religion. I go further and say that every activity of a man of religion must be bound to God, that is to say, God rules your every breath. (Harijan, 1934)<sup>195</sup>

He equated the religion that dictated his political behaviour to honesty.

I cannot isolate politics from the deepest things of my life, for the simple reason that my politics are not corrupt, they are inextricably bound up with non-violence and truth. (YI, 1931)<sup>196</sup>

Later he went on to call the religion pervading his politics non-sectarianism.

Indeed, religion should pervade every one of our actions. Here religion does not mean sectarianism. It means a belief in ordered moral government of the universe. It is not less real because it is unseen. This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, etc. It does not supersede them. It harmonizes them and gives them reality. (Harijan, 1940)<sup>197</sup>

However, later in his life, Gandhi insisted on the separation of religion and politics. "Religion is a personal matter, which should have no place in politics" (IMD, 1947).<sup>198</sup> He emphasized that the state should have no role in promoting a religion.

I swear by my religion. I will die for it. But it is my personal affair. The State has nothing to do with it. The State would look after your secular welfare, but not your or my religion. That is everybody's personal concern. (IMD, 1947)<sup>199</sup>

He demanded that the Indian state not associate with a particular religion and keep out of all religious affairs.

I do not believe that the state can concern itself or cope with religious education. By religion I have not in mind fundamental ethics, but what goes by the name of denominationalism. We have suffered enough from State-aided religion and a State Church. A society or a group, which depends partly or wholly on state aid for the existence of its religion does not deserve or better still, does not have any religion worth the name. (IMD, 1947)<sup>200</sup>

Based on Khushwant Singh's book by the same name published in 1956, Pamela Rooks' *Train to Pakistan* depicts the catastrophe caused by partition and the displacement of tens of millions of Hindus and Pakistan. The film celebrates the tiny humanity that survived the hatred and bloodshed during 1947. Set in Mano Majra, a silent village on the border of India and Pakistan towards the Indian side of Punjab, the film makes it incumbent on the majority community to protect the minorities. It portrays the suffering caused by the majority community's loss of trust in the minorities. The film

also makes it mandatory for the state administration to be impartial in any communal situation to ensure the survival of a secular democracy.

Mahatma Gandhi stressed these two factors.

Hindus, if they want unity among different races, must have the courage to trust the minorities. Any other adjustment must leave a nasty taste in the mouth. Surely the millions do not want to become legislators and municipal councillors.

And if we have understood the proper use of *Satyagraha*, we should know that it can be and should be used against an unjust administrator whether he be a Hindu, Musalman or of any other race or denomination, whereas a just administrator or representative is always and equally good whether he be a Hindu or a Musalman. We want to do away with the communal spirit.

The majority must, therefore, make the beginning and thus inspire the minorities with confidence in their bona fides. Adjustment is possible only when the more powerful take the initiative without waiting for a response from the weaker.

So far as employment in the Government departments is concerned, I think it will be fatal to good government if we introduce there the communal spirit. For administration to be efficient, it must always be in the hands of the fittest. There should be certainly no favouritism. But if we want five engineers we must not take one from each community but we must take the fittest five even if they were all Musalman or all Parsis.

The lowest posts must, if need be, be filled by examination by an impartial board consisting of men belonging to different communities. But the distribution of posts should never be according to the proportion of the numbers of each community. The educationally backward communities will have the right to receive favoured treatment in the matter of education at the hands of the national Government. This can be secured in an effective manner. But those who aspire to occupy responsible posts in the Government of the country can only do so if they pass the required test. (YI, 1924)<sup>201</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi wanted the majority to trust the minorities and not look at them as traitors.

Surely, it is cowardly on the part of the majority to kill or banish the minority for fear that they will all be traitors. Scrupulous regard for the rights of minorities well becomes a majority. Disregarding of them makes of a majority a laughing stock. Robust faith in oneself and brave trust of the opponent, so-called or real, is the best safeguard. (DD, Gandhi)<sup>202</sup>

P C Joshi believes Gandhi's approach to secularism was derived from his empirical view or insight into the complexity of the Indian social structure and not from abstract principles and ideals.

Gandhi had a dynamic and not a static view of the Indian social structure. He recognised from the point of view of the reconstruction of the Indian polity, not the primacy of the religious divisions but the existence of multi-religious, regional economics, societies and cultures in a country of sub-continental dimensions like India. Again, in Gandhi's view, "the division between classes and masses" is more basic than the division between Hindus and Musslamans. Gandhi's Ram Rajya is an idealized expression of a society free from "the division between the classes and the masses", it was a peasants' Utopia and not a Hindu Raj. (Joshi, 2007)<sup>203</sup>

Kamal Hassan's *Hey Ram!* (2000) shows how Indian secularism has suffered on account of the seeds planted by the divide and rule policy of the British, the baggage of partition based on religious cleavage and the increasing role of religion in Indian polity. Taking the assassination of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi as a fulcrum, the film goes on to expose how the politics of Mandir and the supposed appeasement of Muslims by Gandhi, or the perception of it, have gone on to cause irreparable damage to India's secular fabric in the years after independence.

When Sriram Abhyankar tells Saket Ram that Gandhi is responsible for the Muslim violence against Hindus, he is only giving voice to what has long been the perception of some Indian Hindus. Former IPS (Indian Police Service) officers Ram Kumar Ohri and Jai Prakash Sharma write about the "ridiculous lengths of appeasement" Gandhi went to seek the support of Indian Muslims on several occasions, like

- a. supporting the Khilafat agitation (based on a purely pan-Islamist issue),
- b. his subsequent refusal to condemn the atrocities committed on the Hindus by the Moplahs (1921), and c. calling the Muslim fanatic Abdul Rashid, who had murdered Swami Shradhanand, an eminent leader of Arya Samaj in his sick bed, as his brother (1926). (Ohri & Sharma, 2013)<sup>204</sup>

Of course, *Hey Ram!* in the end goes on to debunk the allegation of Muslim appeasement against Gandhi as a repentant Saket Ram seeks the Mahatma's forgiveness. The film ultimately emphasizes the unity of religions and Gandhi's role in unifying the Hindus and Muslims. The film faithfully portrays the Hindu-Muslim violence in Calcutta in 1946 and Mahatma Gandhi's presence in the city to control it.

The communal conflict of Calcutta in 1946 was at its peak that broke down Gandhi...The Great Calcutta Killing, as it was named, began in the morning

of August 16, 1946 and lasted for four days, terrorizing the people and paralyzing the whole city. It was estimated that during these four days, 4,000 people were killed and 10,000 injured. Gandhi did not spare anybody. He said that he did not believe this to be the act of Hooligans. It was an act of both Hindu and Muslims, who supported the Hooligans morally. He said, “all Hindus and Muslims are responsible for it”. They should have to strive hard to bring brotherhood among all and bring back the atmosphere of peace. When Gandhi saw his appeal was falling flat, he threatened a fast unto death. (Dasa, 2005)<sup>205</sup>

Gandhi preferred to stay at Hydari Mansion, an abandoned and dilapidated house in a frenzied Muslim locality. The then Prime Minister of Bengal Huseyn Suhrawardy stayed with him. Gandhi transformed Calcutta into a peaceful city, but the peace only lasted for nine days. When violence returned, Gandhi began an indefinite fast and within days the peace was restored and groups of Hindus surrendered their arms before the Mahatma.

*Road to Sangam*, on the other hand, asks Muslims to introspect about the reasons of their alienation in India, take pride in their Indianness and make efforts to reach out to the police and administrative machinery. Shot against the backdrop of the immersion of Gandhi’s ashes in the confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and mythical Saraswati in Allahabad, the film goes on to stress the unifying nature of Mahatma Gandhi’s philosophy.

Hashmatullah (Paresh Rawal) is right when he tells his detractors in the Muslim community that Mahatma Gandhi gave his life for them. The author has not an iota of doubt that the Mahatma’s non-violence faced its stiffest test when it came to Hindu-Muslim unity. He undertook four fasts in his life – three for the restoration of Hindu-Muslim brotherhood and the fourth, the longest one (21 days), to stop communal riots.

In fact, Gandhi anticipated the strongest test of his non-violence on Hindu-Muslim unity even before his arrival in India from South Africa.

My South African experience had convinced me that it would be on the question of Hindu-Muslim unity that my Ahimsa would be put to severe test, and the question presented the widest field for my experiments in Ahimsa. (Gandhi, 2012)<sup>206</sup>

The author strongly believes that Hindi cinema has done the most to proliferate the message of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi on the equality of religions, but the greatest part of it belonged to the first phase (1930–1961), particularly the last two decades of it when the genius of Hindu and Muslim filmmakers showed their best giving voice.

Lyricist Sahir Ludhianvi, playback singer Lata Mangeskar, and actress Nanda combined in *Hum Dono* to give Indian filmgoers the gem *Allah tero*

*naam, Ishwar tero naam, sabko sanmati de Bhagwan*, which points to the oneness of God and invokes Him to make them wise. This was when Guru Dutt could produce a film on Lucknow's Muslim culture (*Chaudvin Ka Chand*, 1960) and Mohammad Rafi, Shakeel Badayuni, Naushad, Mehboob, and Dilip Kumar got together in *Amar* (1954) to produce *Insaf ka Mandir hai ye bhagwan ka ghar hai, kehna hai jo keh de tujhe kis bat ka dar hai* (This house of God is a temple of justice. Don't fear to say what you want to say).

Filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt, son of a Brahmin father and Muslim mother, terms the phase as a golden age.

Most Hindu filmmakers of those times made these films dealing with the Muslim culture without any self-consciousness. They made these films because that culture was a part of them. The filmmakers of those days had the best of both cultures in them – no wonder that age is called the golden age of Hindi cinema. (Bhatt, 2005)<sup>207</sup>

Rafi in fact went on to sing about a dozen superhit bhajans invoking Krishna and Rama. And many of these were picturized on Dilip Kumar, alias Yusuf Khan. No wonder Bhatt calls the thespian a symbol of plurality.

I remember the last scene of *Ganga Jamuna* (1961) in which Dilip Kumar dies saying “*He Ram*”. Most people who saw the film then felt that the reverence with which this Muslim actor had uttered *He Ram* reminded them of Gandhi's last moments. Cinema-goers imagined this was how the Mahatma must have died. However, *Ganga Jamuna* faced severe problems when it was seen by members of the censor board. Some board members who had communal leanings wanted to delete this very scene, saying that they could not have a Muslim saying “*He Ram*”. In spite of being secular to the core, Dilip *saab* faced many problems from both within the community and outside it. He was the prime target of all those people who had designs to revive the religion of the majority and destroy the pluralism of India. But Dilip *saab* did not bow down to these forces. He stuck to his guns and remained a symbol of secularism for all of us. (Bhatt, 2005)<sup>208</sup>

Though many films in the second phase (1962–1973) also continued to churn out the secular *bhajans*, the main theme now focused on romance and love stories. The third phase (1974–1990) brought to Indian cinema Manmohan Desai, the filmmaker who made plurality an intrinsic part of his lost-and-found formula. Sidharth Bhatia, author of *Amar Akbar Anthony-Masala, Madness and Manmohan Desai*, says Amar Akbar Anthony (1973) was an example how Hindi cinema “greatly contributed to a secular idea of India” (Chhaya, 2013).<sup>209</sup>

Akshay Manwani says a



discernible element in Desai's films was the overt secular nature of his films as was best exemplified by *Amar Akbar Anthony*. Desai often portrayed India's diverse religious and cultural spectrum by having one or more of his characters from across different communal backgrounds. In *Desh Premee* (1982) for instance, the different communities that inhabit Bharat Nagar include the Sikhs, the Bengalis, the Muslims, and Tamilians. Desai had shown this propensity for cultural and religious egalitarianism early on, in *Chhalia* itself. One of the most popular songs from the film was the title track, "*Chhalia mera naam, chhalna mera kaam, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Isaayee, sabko mera salaam*". (Manwani, 2016)<sup>210</sup>

Like *AAA* and *Desh Premee*, in *Coolie* the hero Iqbal has a Christian girlfriend (Rati Agnihotri) and a Hindu friend (Rishi Kapoor). In *Naseeb* the hero sings *John Jaani Janardhan ye tino naam hai mere, Allah, Jesus, ram hain mere* (I have three names John, Jaani, Janardhan. I believe in Allah, Jesus, and Ram) emphasizing on India's composite culture.

The fourth phase (1991–2009) was very critical of communal violence, terrorism, the insurgency in the northeast, and the demolition of the Babri Mosque. This phase produced many films portraying the communal riots that took place in the aftermath of the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984 (*Hawayein*, 2003, *Amu*, 2005); the Babri Mosque demolition (*Bombay, Naseem*, 1995, *Black Friday*, 1993); Kashmir violence (*Roja*, 1992); and the 2002 Gujarat riots (*Final Solution*, 2003, *Parzania*, 2007 and *Firaaq*, 2009). In this phase, movies were also made on the partition of India-Pakistan (*Gadar: Ek Prem Katha*, 2001, *Train to Pakistan*, 1998, *Earth*, 1998, *Shaheed-E-Mohabbat Boota Singh*, 1999, *Hey Ram*, 2000, *Khamosh Pani, Pinjar*, 2003, and *Partition*, 2007). These films not only emphasize the equality of religion, the central point of Indian secularism, but also point out the inherent dangers posed to it by bigotry, communalism, violence, and terrorism. These films draw attention to the threat secularism faces from the communal riots, terrorist violence and insurgency.

Former Indian Home Secretary Madhav Godbole believes the frequent communal riots and the non-punishment of the instigators, the spread of communalism, the demolition of the Babri Mosque, the banning of cow slaughter, the non-implementation of a uniform civil code, the unjustified protection to minority educational institutions, large-scale conversions, and the mixing of religion with politics have disillusioned the majority as well as the minorities in terms of secularism. Godbole calls for defining words like secular and minority, the creation of a commission on secularism, the separation of religion from politics, and doing away with religious propagation and the protection of minority education institutions. He also wants the deletion of the prohibition of cow slaughter, a restriction of police

departments and the enactment of basic electoral reforms (Godbole, 2016).<sup>211</sup>

Recent Hindi films have referred to the dangers of Islamophobia (*New York*, 2009, *My Name is Khan*, 2010) and also, like Mahatma Gandhi, castigated narrow monolithic religious frameworks of Hinduism and Islam. They have also scoffed at practices that have nothing to do with basic religion (*Oh My God*, 2012, *p k*, 2014, *Dharam Sankat Mein*, 2015).

Overall, Hindi cinema has portrayed the five principles of Mahatma Gandhi sporadically, with the exceptions of non-violence, which found an outlet only in select films around Indian independence, and the equality of religions, which has been a favourite with Mumbai filmmakers throughout the history of Bollywood.

The author is of the view that Mumbai filmmakers have either portrayed Mahatma Gandhi through hagiographies or tried to put him in a straitjacket.

Dhananjay Rai rightly looks at the absence of Gandhi and the presence of Bapu in Bollywood as the absence of cinema's critical engagement with the father of the nation.

The cinemas made on Gandhi are profound expressions of his philosophical values and justification of values. These values are endorsed in a big way through the absence of the condition wherein "Other" standpoint could become allusion. Therefore, films made on Gandhi take the sojourn with "Other" in an altogether different way; they do not raise uncomfortable questions, especially questions from "invisible places". The question even pops up only to be mitigated through the Gandhian way. In this way, conditions are not projected wherein empirical answers are sought. (Rai, 2011)<sup>212</sup>

They have hardly made any effort to understand why there was ambivalence in the Mahatma's views on untouchability, the partition of the country and even non-violence. Hindi cinema has not made an honest effort to decipher why Gandhi evolved over time and many times appeared to be a direct contradiction of his earlier self.

The author believes there were at least two Gandhis who fought for Indian freedom from British occupation between 1905 and 1948. The first Gandhi believed in varnashram, was inflexible on the change of vocations and was against inter-dining and inter-marriages. He was a strong votary of the caste system and attributed the successful organization of fairs and meetings to this. This Gandhi came into bitter conflict with Bhimrao Ambedkar in the 1920s. But after the mid-1920s, a new Gandhi took over. This Gandhi not only called for the abolition of transgressions in the caste system but also advocated change of vocations, inter-dining, inter-caste and

inter-religious marriages. This Gandhi wished death for a Hinduism that allowed caste discrimination.

Gandhi initially opposed the partition of India with his full might. He lampooned Mohammad Ali Jinnah's two-nation theory as un-Islamic and unreasonable. He argued that the "vast majority of Muslims of India are converts to Islam or descendants of converts. They did not become a separate nation as soon as they became converts" (Harijan, 1940).<sup>213</sup> When he was told that an overwhelming majority of Muslims were in favour of Pakistan, the democratic Gandhi took over and started arguing that there should be no forcible resistance to partition. He wrote,

If the eight crores of Muslim desire it, no power on earth can prevent it, notwithstanding opposition violent or non-violent. (Harijan, 1940)<sup>214</sup>

He even warned that "to undo Pakistan by force will be to undo Swaraj". (Harijan, 1947)<sup>215</sup>

In the same way, Gandhi had fundamental differences with Bhagat Singh and his fellow revolutionaries and strongly disapproved of political violence to attain freedom, but this does not mean that he questioned Singh's bravery and did not value his sacrifice and made no effort to save his life from the gallows. Gandhi also had major differences with Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and was instrumental in ejecting the latter from the Congress president's chair in 1939. But once he believed that Subhas could win freedom for India with the help of the Axis powers, he developed a fascination for his great escape and the way Subhas formed the Indian National Army with the help of Indian PoWs and expatriates in Malaya (now Malaysia) and Burma.

Be it *Veer Savarkar*, *Baba Saheb Ambedkar* or *The Legend of Bhagat Singh*, Hindi filmmakers are ever eager to pit Gandhi as a villain against their protagonists. There is no effort to look at the father of the Indian nation as a victim of the circumstances. There is no attempt to understand why the Mahatma needed time to jettison the caste biases and prejudices ingrained in him since his childhood.

The filmmakers have made no attempt to scrutinize, what Chunibhai Vaidya calls, clever distortions in the light of recorded history.

The proposal for the partition of the country and violent reaction against it generated tensions which ultimately resulted in sectarian killings on a scale unprecedented in human history. For the ethnic Muslims, Gandhiji was a Hindu leader who opposed the creation of Pakistan on sectarian grounds. Ethnic Hindus looked upon him as an impediment to their plan to revenge the atrocities on Hindus. (Vaidya, 1948).<sup>216</sup>

No effort has been made on the part of the filmmakers or even Pradip Dalvi, the director of the play *Mee Nathuram Godse Boltoy* to analyse why there were half a dozen attempts on Gandhi's life between 1934 and January 30, 1948. The filmmakers have only perpetuated myths on Gandhi's role in the partition, the release of Rs.55 crore and the alleged appeasement of Muslims and Pakistan, which have been part of the public perception for long.

Vaidya talks about how the release of Rs.55 crores to Pakistan was embedded through manoeuvres in Gandhi's fast, which he undertook against the Hindu-Muslim frenzy from January 12, 1948 and onwards in Delhi.

He cites at least half a dozen facts – Sushila Nair told her brother Pyarelal (Gandhi's secretary) that Gandhi decided to fast until the madness in Delhi had ceased; Gandhiji's own announcement on January 12 did not contain any reference to the Rs.55 crore; there was no reference to it in his discourse on January 13; Gandhiji's reply on January 15, to a specific question regarding the purpose of his fast, did not mention it; the press release of the government of India did not mention it; and the list of assurances given by the committee headed by Dr. Rajendra Prasad to persuade Gandhiji to give up his fast did not include it – about the fast to “put to rest the 55 crore concoction”.

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