

III. Gandhi and the Non-Aligned Movement

Gandhi's Non-Violence Gave Birth to the Non-Aligned Nations Movement

by Paul Gallagher

Jan. 30—The great nation of India's freedom and independence from the British Empire was a transcendent event of the 20th Century. India's independence was won through persuasion of the Indian people to non-violent resistance by Mohandas Gandhi, called *Mahatma* Gandhi or "great soul," who neither held nor sought any political or party office. Gandhi also gave the impetus which led, through a series of conferences convoked by his colleague and follower Jawaharlal Nehru, to the Non-Aligned Nations Movement, with its five principles of co-existence of nations (*Panchsheel*).

All but the first of these Asian Relations Conferences took place after Mahatma Gandhi's death—he was assassinated 75 years ago today, by a Hindu nationalist who would not accept Gandhi's persuasion to love India's Muslims equally with his fellow Hindus and to demonstrate that love. Such assassinations so often strike great leaders who confront the British Empire.

The Power of Truth

Nehru wrote in *The Discovery of India*, published in 1945:

"Gandhi ... entered the Congress organization [in 1917] and immediately brought about a complete change in its constitution. He made it democratic and a mass organization.... Gandhi represents the very antithesis of quietism. He has been a demon of energy and action, a hustler, and a man who not only drives himself but drives



Through a series of conferences called by his colleague Jawaharlal Nehru, Mohandas Gandhi provided the impetus for the founding of the Non-Aligned Movement. Here he addresses the Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi, April 2, 1947.

others. He has done more than anyone to fight and change the quietism of the Indian people."

Mohandas Gandhi heard in 1924 that someone (in the West) had called him "a saint trying to be a politician." He responded that the truth was the opposite, and this was true of his entire 33 years leading the Indian people to freedom. He did not drive for complete non-violence in every situation which confronted British colonies during the Boer War and the two world wars; he reserved the right "to contradict myself"; he did not make strategic plans but took action on "instinct." Non-violence to him meant commitment to Truth; his word for Indian non-violent resistance, *satyagraha*, means roughly "forceful truth" or "insistence on truth." Again, Nehru wrote, "I do not know of any person who holds to the truth as Gandhi does."

Gandhi began in 1915 by quietly exploding Theosophy leader Annie Besant's meeting in the city of

Benares of (British and Indian) princely, philosophical, and industrial glitterati of “The Raj.” He bluntly and ruthlessly criticized the lack of love for humanity of both the imperialists and the oppressed who were present. When his March 1919 *hartal* (boycott of economic activity) against a British obscenity called the Rowlett Act spread rapidly and successfully to millions throughout India, he nonetheless went to Bombay and Punjab to confront those who rioted against British security forces during the *hartal*.

This is not *satyagraha*.... Our duty is chiefly to get ourselves arrested. It is a breach of religious duty to endeavor to secure the release of those who have committed deeds of violence.

He asked that people fast and pray for the “English gentlemen we have injured.”

This led to a first turning point in Gandhi’s decades of creative non-violence in India. In Amritsar, a city of several hundred thousand in Punjab, the *hartal* was massive and completely peaceful, with Hindu-Muslim and Indian-European fraternization throughout the streets from April 6-9, 1919. The British authorities reacted by deporting the two Congress Party leaders there on April 9. This, as the British no doubt planned, led to some rioting on April 10. Then on April 13, Indians at a large mass meeting in a field were mowed down by British rifles under Gen. Reginald Dyer, “to produce a sufficient moral effect from a military point of view,” Dyer said. His name and his actions in Amritsar are infamous to this day.

But Gandhi went immediately again to Punjab, where he was welcomed by very large crowds, and *strongly criticized the rioters* of the previous days, expressing the greatest anguish for the beating of two English teachers who had been killed. He supported what became the non-punishment of Dyer by a commission of inquiry. He said in Lahore:

Forgiveness is more manly than punishment. [Indians] have better work to do, a better mission to deliver to the world. Non-violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute.

Addressing a meeting of Indian Christians at this time, according to his biographer Louis Fischer, Gandhi read or recited to them the last five stanzas of Percy Shelley’s “The Masque of Anarchy” (“Stand ye calm and resolute...”) which the poet wrote in response to a similar massacre against a peaceful demonstration by British cavalry troops, 100 years earlier. The poem is an original expression of the kind of non-violent resistance Gandhi wanted, and the disarming effect it can have on oppressors.

Nationalism of the Human Race

This was Gandhi’s commitment throughout his 33 years of *satyagraha*—his actions of non-cooperation; his fasts, in which he was prepared to die and nearly did; his marches, prayers; his staying always in the houses of Untouchables; and his persuasion of millions. He said in 1920, in conversation with Bal Gangadhar Tilak, that the task was to purify India:

Ours is a religious movement designed to purge Indian political life of corruption, deceit, terrorism, and the incubus of white supremacy.

In *The Discovery of India* Nehru also quoted Gandhi this way:

My idea of nationalism is that my country may become free; that if need be, the whole of the country may die so that the human race may live. There is no room for race hatred here. Let that be our nationalism.... I do want to think in terms of the whole world. My patriotism includes the good of mankind in general. Therefore, my service of India includes the service of humanity.... Isolated independence is not the goal of the world’s states. It is voluntary interdependence. The better mind of the world desires today not absolutely independent states warring one against another, but a federation of friendly, interdependent states.

After Gandhi’s Salt March of 1930, which sparked many millions of Indians into spontaneous peaceful resistance to the British salt tax, and involved the futile



Brig. Gen. Reginald E. Dyer, who ordered the massacre at Amritsar, April 13, 1919.

British arrest of 60,000 Indians, many of the British imperial elite realized that Britain would have to give up the “jewel” and core of its empire. The exception, Winston Churchill, who bitterly hated “that half-naked fakir,” said that year, “Sooner or later you will have to crush Gandhi and the Indian Congress and all they stand for.” But most British imperialists took, from that year on, the “break India into as many pieces as possible before leaving” path. Viceroy Mountbatten broke it in two; the British would have broken it into ten or more “ethnic provinces” had Gandhi not spoken, prayed, fasted, marched, pleaded, and persuaded Indians—especially Hindus—against religious hatred.



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Gandhi's salt march from Ahmedabad to Dandi, March 12 to April 5, 1930 sparked many millions of Indians to participate in massive, peaceful non-cooperation with their British rulers. The British monopolized salt, forbade Indians from collecting it, and taxed it heavily.

Ending Colonialism

In 1940 Gandhi wrote and got the Congress Party to adopt this resolution:

The All-India Congress Committee firmly believes in the policy and practice of non-violence, not only in the struggle for *Swaraj* [independence], but also, in so far as this may be possible of application, in free India.

The Committee is convinced, and recent world events have demonstrated, that complete world disarmament is necessary and the establishment of a new and juster political and economic order, if the world is not to destroy itself and revert to barbarism. A free India will, therefore, throw all her weight in favour of world disarmament and should herself be prepared to give a lead in this to the world....

Effective disarmament and the establishment of world peace by the ending of national wars depend ultimately on the removal of the causes of wars and national conflicts. These causes must be rooted out by the ending of the domination of one country over another and the exploitation of one people or group by another. To that end India will peacefully labour, and it is with this objective in view that the people of India desire to attain the status of a free and independent nation. Such freedom will be the prelude to the close association with other countries within a comity of free nations for the peace and progress of the world.

In April 1945 when the charter conference of the United Nations was opening in San Francisco, Indian and foreign correspondents asked Gandhi for a statement from him that they could report and circulate there. Louis Fischer, his friend and biographer in *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, reports it:

India's nationalism spells internationalism. There will be no peace for the Allies or the world unless they shed their belief in the efficacy of war and its accompanying terrible deception and fraud, and are determined to hammer out a real peace based on the freedom and equality of all races and nations.... Freedom of India will demonstrate to all the exploited races of the Earth that their freedom is near and that in no case will they henceforth be exploited.

On Sept. 7, 1946, Jawaharlal Nehru made a radio address to the nation in which he defined the basic tenets of India's future foreign policy: non-alignment; national freedom and sovereignty, anti-colonialism; anti-racism and anti-fascism; an attitude of friendship towards the countries of the West—all countries—and a commitment to world peace.

On the same day, Nehru sent out invitations *on these principles* for the Asian Relations Conference of 1947, held in Delhi beginning March 23, the first of the meetings that led to Bandung. Nehru wanted Gandhi to address the opening of this conference, but Gandhi was speaking and praying

against riots and hatred in Bihar and Bengal Provinces, and Nehru could not drag him to Delhi until April 1. Gandhi said:

I will not like to live in this world if it is not to be one. Certainly I should like to see this dream realized in my lifetime. I hope that all the representatives who have come here from the Asian countries will strive to have only one world.

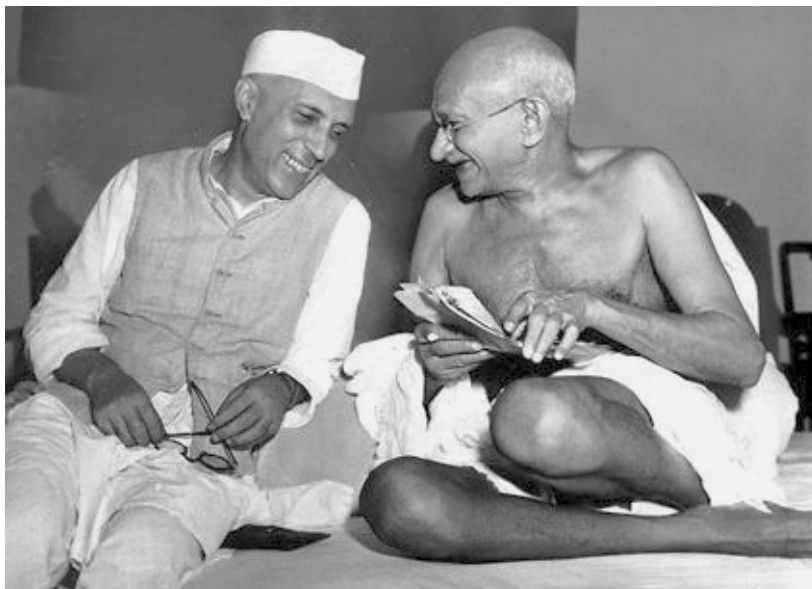
All the Asian representatives have come together. Is it in order to wage a war against Europe, against America, or against other non-Asiatics? I say most emphatically, "No," this is not India's mission.... It will be a sorry thing if we go away from this conference without a fixed determination that Asia shall live, and live as free as every Western nation. Conferences like the present should meet regularly, and ... India is the place. Asia's message of love and truth will conquer the West. This conquest will be loved by the West itself. The West is today pining for wisdom.

In the same remarks Gandhi strongly criticized his own country, the organizer of the conference, for the religious riots which were then occurring, and called them an *obstacle to world peace*. And he knew quite well the British had instigated these riots in Bengal, after starving Bengalis to death during World War II.

Panchsheel

A second Asian Relations Conference was held in 1950, also from a call by Jawaharlal Nehru and discussing the same principles of non-alignment and non-violence. Then due to the growth of tensions between India and China over Tibet, India proposed the Panchsheel Agreement of 1954 between those two countries. Nehru and Zhou Enlai issued the Joint Statement of June 28, 1954, including the five principles of co-existence: mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; mutual non-aggression; mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs; equality and cooperation for mutual benefit; and peaceful co-existence. They hoped for

Panchsheel as the framework, not only for relations between the two countries, but also for



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"Asia's message of love and truth will conquer the West. This conquest will be loved by the West itself. The West is today pining for wisdom." —Mohandas Gandhi. Here, Jawaharlal Nehru with Gandhi at a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee—the presidium of the Congress Party—in Bombay, July 6, 1946.

their relations with all other countries, so that a solid foundation could be laid for peace and security in the world.

Panchsheel was incorporated the following year in the 10 Principles of International Peace and Cooperation of the April 1955 Bandung Conference of African and Asian Nations, organized by India and four other Asian countries.

Nehru and Gandhi

As to Gandhi's influence on Jawaharlal Nehru, consider Nehru's words to the Indian nation over the radio within an hour after Gandhi's assassination, 75 years ago. And consider that Nehru was then India's Prime Minister, and the most secular-minded of its leaders:

The light has gone out, I said, and yet I was wrong. For the light that shone in this country was no ordinary light. The light that has illumined this country for these many years will illumine this country for many more years, and a thousand years later that light will still be seen in this country, and the world will see it and it will give solace to innumerable hearts. For that light represented the living truth, and the eternal man was with us with his eternal truth reminding us of the right path, drawing us from error, taking this ancient country to freedom.