

A Freudian's Inquiry into Gandhi's Truth

Dr. A. Raghu Kumar Ph.D
Advocate, Hyderabad
email: avadhanamraghukumar@gmail.com
+91-9441015709 (MObile)

About hundred years ago, during February and March 1918, an **event** occurred in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. Mahatma Gandhi fasted for the first time for a public cause. He had fasted earlier on several occasions for religious and personal reasons. It was Gandhi's first intervention in a labour dispute, almost immediately after Champaran movement, even without any breathing time. It was also the first effective use of Satyagraha in resolving industrial dispute, the impact of which had been there for a longtime in Ahmedabad textile industry, and could be considered as a case study in alternative methods in industrial relations, other than the one well known theory called as '**conflict theory**' of Marxists. The strike went on for about three weeks without any visible end, and only after the declaration of Gandhi's intention to fast till both the parties to the dispute come to the negotiating table. And it is only three days later, the dispute could be resolved, on March 19, 1918. Here is an effort to recollect the '**event**' for the sake of present generations, and for the posterities, on its hundredth year. An enquiry conducted by Erik H. Erikson, a Freudian psychoanalyst, during 1960s in understanding Gandhi's concept of truth, and origins of non-violence based on this **event** resulted in an enormous work **Gandhi's Truth – On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence, W.W. Norton & Company Inc. New York 1969**. It is with this work as reference the present contribution is made, to commemorate the Ahmedabad textile workers' and the significance of Gandhi's action in this regard..

There is little reference to this episode in Gandhi's autobiography – The Story of My Experiments with Truth in Chapter 144 and 146 under the heading "In Touch with Labour" and "The Fast". Even in many other biographies of Gandhi written by his aids, disciples, including that of Louis Fischer – The Life of Mahatma Gandhi, this issue had received very little attention. Gandhi in his autobiography says: "Unless the strikers rally and continue the strike till a settlement is reached or till they leave the mills altogether, I will not touch any food."¹ Even in D.G Tendulkar's Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in eight volumes also, there is a very brief description of the event. How could such small and insignificant issue, for Gandhi and many Gandhians, inspire a Freudian psychologist, Erik H. Erikson, to make it a full fledged subject matter of his thesis? What is that treasure of truth he could find in this less significant issue?

To tell the truth, to be truthful to oneself, and to others, and to adhere to the truth in some of the testing times is the toughest challenge in all human endeavors. Falsehood may offer easy protection, save one from the present and may also allow a secured future. But to abide by the truth and to be ready to give one's life for the sake of truth is an eternal challenge to all those who believe in intellectual honesty. A Socrates, a Johannes Kepler, a Galileo Galilei, a Giordano Bruno etc., live in eternity, and death is no end to them, not because they are superior to others, but because they said what they believed and were prepared to lay down their lives for their believed truth. A Jiddu Krishna Murthy had that honesty to announce that he was not the God even at the cost of all that charm and prestige that status could have offered him. In certain testing circumstances, some may prefer silence to the risk of telling the truth. Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, a British historian says²: "... Even those who believe in truth, and distinguish it correctly, tend to warp, conceal or deny it for their own ends. The new danger is more subtle and more corrosive: liars will have nothing to prove – and defenders of truth will have no case to demand of them – if the very distinction between truth and falsehood is abandoned as a meaningless curio of a pedantic past. In a world where all utterances are of equally little value – the very world into which we are slipping – the only merit is in silence; joining the voiceless, reveling in illiteracy, abandoning language. No development is more terrifying to those

¹ M.K. Gandhi, The Story of my Experiments with Truth, New Central Book Agency (P) Ltd, London, p.449

² Felipe Fernandez – Armesto, Truth – A History and A Guide for the Perplexed, Bantan Press, London, 1997, p.194

who sustain truth or revive it than the breakdown of confidence in the power of language to express it...”

Gandhi is an enigma, most detestable to some and unquestioningly lovable to many. The trainer and the Chief of the Army of non-violent warriors in the India’s struggle for freedom from colonial yoke, he remains to be the most misunderstood personality. Probably there will be no country which has disowned its own father, and no disciples who disowned their own guru with so much vengeance and so quickly. All opponents were united in vilifying him each for his or her own purpose. Probably he himself is partly responsible for this emerging mystification or obfuscation, or probably his defenders failed him, as in the case of many prophets. The thankless job of an Indian David who fought with the British Goliath! The story of David and Goliath teaches us a lesson about facing problems of gigantic proportions and impossible situations by seeing them from the God’s point of view. But the David had at least a sling in his hand, along with the grace of God. But this frail and hesitant lawyer had, apart from unflinching faith in the Truth (Truth is God for him) only untrained mass of suppressed souls over decades or even centuries, fearing even to raise their heads at the sight of this mammoth British imperial state. In fact, large sections of Rajas, feudal lords, industrialists and intellectuals cooperated and aided the growth of this impregnable monolithic State. But one “Moniya” growing into “Mohan”, graduating into “Mr. M. K. Gandhi”, and then evolving into “Mahatma” converted a simple technique of the non-violent protest into a militant non-violence, “Satyagraha”. Apart from dethroning this invincible Monarch, he also presented before the world civilization an alternative mode of struggle to the long history of mindless and remorseless killings, armed struggles, wars and destruction of all sorts in the name of liberty, freedom, equality, self rule and fraternity – the eternal ‘last war’ for distant ‘eternal peace’ and ‘democracy’.

Erik H. Erikson, a German-born American psychologist and psychoanalyst, known for his theory on psychological development of human beings, credited with the coining of the phrase “identity crisis” visited India in 1962, where he ‘had been invited to lead a seminar on the human life cycle’ in Ahmedabad. It was the author’s first trip to India. Hindu philosophy visualizes a cyclic view of life and history. In this process, somehow, he entangled himself in subjecting Gandhi’s involvement in the textile workers’ strike in Ahmedabad to some critical examination keeping the Ahmedabad textile workers’ strike as its background. This has resulted in one of the rarest contributions towards understanding Gandhi: **Gandhi’s Truth – On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence, W.W. Norton & Company Inc. New York 1969.** Ahmedabad city is of unique interest precisely because of its unbroken manner of its development, built on a medieval guild structure, to a modern industrial city, financed primarily by local investments, and managed by some rich local families. Erikson says “Living on the estate of one of these families [the family of Ambalal Sarabhai, the mill-owner] , I soon became newly aware of the role which Gandhi had played in the labour relations of this city and of the significance of that role for his rise to national leadership.”³

Freudian psychology also invokes a typical ‘life cycle’ which, however, differs with the concept of traditional Hindu ‘life cycle’. Erikson considers the Hindu scriptures as “platonic”⁴ in the sense that they outline the eternal meaning of the preordained stages, and considers “eternal meaning” becoming “righteous tyranny” at the height of priestly power, and something of a “hoax” in an era of cultural disintegration. “First it must be noted that traditional Hindu images of life, in contrast to our clinical emphasis on infantile vulnerabilities, do not conceptualize stages before the “sense” is reached, that is, before a child can listen attentively to things told and read and sung and shown to him, when he is eager to attach himself to people who will teach him: until a boy is eight years old, he is like one newly born, marked only by the caste in which he is born.”⁵

Several major incidents occurred in the year 1919 in the field of labour world over. At the end of the First World War, the war that was intended to be the war for democracy, there was a Peace

³ Erik H. Erikson, Gandhi’s Truth – On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence, W.W. Norton & Company Inc. New York 1969 p.9

⁴Ibid, p.34

⁵ Ibid, p.34-5

Treaty, the Treaty of Versailles. It made a provision for the establishment of an International Organization for Labour in Part XIII of the Treaty. Thus came into existence the International Labour organization (ILO) in April 1919. But, two more significant issues took place in India during the same time paving way for two different methods of resolution of industrial disputes. In the year 1918, in the months of February and March, immediately after the Champaran campaign, Gandhi led a strike of textile workers of Ahmedabad for increase of wages by 35% in Ahmedabad through Satyagraha and simultaneously trying for a settlement through arbitration. However, the Marxists refused to appreciate the significance of this model and also did not take any sympathetic view of it either. They considered the Gandhian model of agitation, Satyagraha, and the method of resolution of industrial disputes through arbitration etc., as “obviously at variance with that is universally followed in trade union movement.”⁶ “Desisting the workers and peasants from militant class struggle against the capitalists and landlords, promoting class peace and class collaboration and ultimately to perpetuate the existing society based on capitalist and feudal exploitation – these were what this novelty (of Gandhi) exactly meant. The ingenuity of Gandhian ideology thus lay in the innovation of such an absolutely retrograde theory.”⁷ In fact, many Marxists, as in the case of the present critique of Gandhi by Sukomal Sen, failed to understand that this Gandhian model of non-violence is no less militant than the model offered by the Marxists. The method of non-violent resistance is not ‘retrograde’ in any way as they thought, but only a way forward in the onward march of civilization, which slowly is rejecting the idea that ‘socialism’ or ‘equality’ can be achieved only through ‘revolutionary violence’.

In another incident, at Madras, B.P.Wadia, a Theosophist, and philanthropist, formed a trade union – “Madras Labour Union”, on 13th April, 1918 in the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills, popularly known as Binny and Company, and the Union resorted to strike. The owners of the Company filed a criminal case against B.P.Wadia and his Association alleging “Criminal Conspiracy” against the union, and employees, and also sought a restraint against their actions as interference in free trade or ‘*laissez faire*’ which resulted in imposition of Rs.75000/- on B.P. Wadia and his union as compensation to employer. B.P.Wadia along with his associates, because of their inability to pay the amount, was to be sent behind the bars. However, on the intervention of some other leaders, the powerful employers were persuaded to withdraw the case against B.P.Wadia only on the condition that B.P.Wadia and his associates not only leave the Madras City, but should give up the trade union activities also. This has, however, resulted as an eye opener, finally leading to Indian Trade Union Act, 1926. Thus two major methods of approach towards the resolution of the industrial disputes between the workers and employers emerged in India during 1918.

The Textile Labour Association, Ahmedabad, had its own different story. It owes its origin to a humble school established on 14th March, 1914 by an ardent social worker, Anasuyaben Sarabhai, the sister of a prominent mill owner, Ambalal Sarabhai. Incidentally, earlier in 1916, Gandhi had an occasion to visit the school and place on record his appreciation. Shankerlal Banker, who was working at that time on the suggestion of Secretary of the Home Rule League, joined Anasuyaben who extended the ambit of her activities and formed Mazdoor Mitra Mandal in 1919. Ambalal Sarabhai, the President of the Mill Owners’ Association, conceived that the existence of a well organized workers union would not only be in the interest of workers alone, but also of the mill owners too, for it would be easier for them to negotiate their problems with representatives of the Unions of workers instead of dealing with individuals. He, therefore, suggested to the members of the Mazdoor Mitra Mandal to come forward and establish craft-wise unions of workers in the Ahmedabad mills. As a result of this, seven or eight unions of workers were formed in the Ahmedabad textile industry. The confederation of these craft-wise unions was named as Textile Labour Association, called in Gujarati “Mazdoor Mahajan”. Thus T.L.A came into being and was

⁶ Sukomal Sen, Working Class of India, (1977, 1997) K.P.Bagchi & Company, Calcutta, p.133

⁷ Ibid, p.137

formally established on 25th February 1920. Gandhiji inaugurated the T.L.A. Ansuya Ben was elected as its first President.⁸

Then, how about the understanding of a clinical psychologist or psychoanalyst, trained in the Freudian method of Gandhi's intervention in 1918 Ahmadabad Textile labour struggles for wage increase? Considered as the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud compiled his treatise "Interpretation of Dreams"⁹ towards the end of nineteenth century. It is a result of his strivings into the unfathomable depths of human mind and to find a general theory to explain the 'dream' from his clinical experience in this area, as well the insights he acquired by free association with his own dreams – epochal in the development of psychological sciences. It is not that this theory was uncontested and in fact, was roundly debunked also by many of his contemporaries. Even today it is severely contested by many modern 'dream' theoreticians. Wittgenstein, a contemporary philosopher of Freud also questioned the authenticity of Freudian psychoanalysis. John M. Heaton¹⁰ quotes Wittgenstein from "Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief"¹¹ to say: "... a dream can show but not say; it can be contemplated and not interpreted." Alex Guilherme in his paper on "Wittgenstein and Freud: Philosophical Method vs. Psychoanalysis"¹² states that Wittgenstein claims to have found a therapeutic process analogous to psychoanalysis. Wittgenstein in fact questions the very method of Freudian symbols for dream analysis. Joy Dan Graves¹³ quotes Wittgenstein saying – "Psychoanalytic theory based on Freud's work, ..., necessarily falls into the realm of pragmatism. Its validity as a theory to which rigorous scientific criteria can be applied has not yet been convincingly validated." In "Moving Dream Theory Beyond Freud and Jung", G. William Domhoff¹⁴ contends that the scientific studies of dreaming and dream content that accumulated gradually over the past 50 years do not support any of the ideas about dreams that are specifically "Freudian" or "Jungian", but they do support the general notion that many dreams have meaning in the sense of coherence, correlations with other psychological variables, and connections with waking thoughts.

Whatever may be the arguments for and against the Freudian method of psychoanalysis, it remains a dominant discourse in psychoanalysis even today. Erikson's **Gandhi's Truth** is a clinical and psychoanalytical approach towards finding the origins of "non-violence." For Gandhi 'non-violence' was an inalienable pair with "Truth". It revolves around the analysis of the "**Event**" – Ahmedabad event, the strike of Ahmedabad textile workers for 35% increase in wages, and Gandhi's first invoking of Satyagraha in its fullest meaning. Erikson's search of the event reveals that "there is only one little paperbound pamphlet on the strike; it is less than a hundred pages long and costs 35 cents."¹⁵ In Gandhi's biographies and even in his Autobiography also, this first "fast" was even described as some what a mistake, a failure of nerve etc. "But, such a failure by no means diminishes a clinician's interest, claims Erikson: "... for how did Gandhi get into this situation in the first place? And if, indeed, he failed, why did he, or why did he think so? ..." were the questions that tormented the author which led to this study.

".....It was on the Ides of March of 1918, the year of massive mechanized slaughter on the front in France, the year when empires collapsed and new world alliances were formed, the year of Wilson and above all of Lenin. And here in Ahmedabad, one of the great charismatic figures of the postwar world was concentrating on a strictly local labor dispute, putting his very life on the line by fasting – *an event scarcely noticed even in India* at that time. That Mr. M.K. Gandhi chose to fast as part of a new method of civic and political leadership meant as yet nothing to anyone but a few

⁸ Khan and Khan's Commentary on Labour & Industrial Law, Asia Law House, Hyderabad, p.14

⁹ Sigmund Freud, "Interpretation of Dreams", 1900

¹⁰ John M. Heaton, Wittgenstein and Psychoanalysis, Icon Books UK (C) 2001, p.21

¹¹ Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief", Ed. C. Barrett, Blackwell, 1966, p.4548

¹² from 'Forum' in Practical Philosophy at <http://www.practical-philosophy.org.uk>

¹³ "Psychoanalytic Theory – A Critique" in Perspectives in Psychoanalytic Care, Volume 11, Issue 3, July 1973, p.114

¹⁴ Moving Dream Theory Beyond Freud and Jung", G. William Domhoff, University of California

¹⁵ Erikson's Gandhi's Truth, p.45

friends, and the immediate consequence did not call for national or world attention. In fact, a certain embarrassment seems to govern later accounts, – as though the Event itself had not proved quite worthy of the Mahatma’s subsequent career.”¹⁶ “But this kind of denial does not exactly serve to divert a psychoanalyst curiosity; and so – whether because it all happened in a city which had given him the first “feel” of India, *or because – I sensed that, there was more to the story* than the books allowed, I became fascinated with those months in Gandhi’s middle years.” Thus he decided to reconstruct what in this book he called the “**Event**” as focus for some extensive reflections on the origins, in Gandhi’s early life and work, of the method he came to call “Satyagraha”, or “truth force.”¹⁷

At the end of the work, he makes one peculiar observation: “**Gandhi’s and Freud’s methods converge more clearly if I repeat: in both encounters only the militant probing of a vital issue by a nonviolent confrontation can bring to light what insight is ready on both sides.**”¹⁸ . Psychoanalysis offers a method of intervening non-violently between our overbearing conscience and our raging affects, thus forcing our “moral” and our “animal” natures to enter into respectful reconciliation. He admits that “When I began this book, I did not expect to rediscover psychoanalysis in terms of truth, self-suffering, and nonviolence. But now that I have done so, I see better what I hope the reader has come to see with me, namely, that I felt attracted to the Ahmedabad Event not only because I had learned to know the scene and not only because it was time for me to write about the responsibilities of middle age, but also because I sensed an affinity between Gandhi’s truth and the insights of modern psychology.”¹⁹

In the Epilogue, journeying a bit beyond the subject matter of inquiry, i.e., the Ahmedabad issue, Erikson attempts to grasp the essence of Dandi March – “March to the Sea” and at the end, a teasing anecdote is retold. “The salt Satyagraha had demonstrated to the world the nearly flawless use of a new instrument of peaceful militancy. May it only be added that after another stay in jail, Gandhi met the Viceroy for the famous Tea Party..... After some compromises all around, Gandhi was invited to talks with the Viceroy. ... But the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, has described the meeting as “the most dramatic personal encounter between a Viceroy and an Indian leader”. **When Gandhi was handed a cup of tea, he poured a bit of salt (tax-free) into it out of a small paper bag hidden in his shawl and remarked smilingly, “to remind us of the famous Boston Tea Party”.** Moniya and the Empire! ... ”²⁰ The Epilogue also ends with the letter written by Tagore to the Manchester Guardian in May 1930 that “Europe had now lost her moral prestige in Asia”. “Weak Asia”, he said, “could now afford to look down on Europe where before she looked up”. But Erikson, in contrast, constructs the probable Gandhi’s reaction more accurately while saying that Gandhi might have said it: “Asia could now look Europe in the eye - not more, not less, not up to, not down on,”²¹ which alone can lead to mutual recognition. It is no more the mighty versus the weak, and it is the mutual recognition of equals.

When Erikson visited Ahmedabad for the first time in 1962, the busting activity of the Textile Labour Association provided by far the most vivid and most sustained “echo” of Gandhi’s presence. The specific gains of labour relations seemed barely to rise above the very minimum of what the post-industrial West would consider decent working and living conditions. The justification for attempting the subject matter through psychoanalysis has been provided in “**A personal Word**” [from p.229-254], an imagined address in the form of a letter addressed to Mahatmaji, and also as midway reflection²² to Mahatmaji, in the midway of the book [this offers the central analysis of the book], by the author:

¹⁶ Ibid, p.10

¹⁷ Ibid, p.10

¹⁸ Ibid, p.439

¹⁹ Ibid, p.439-40

²⁰ Ibid, p.448

²¹ Ibid, p.448

²² Ibid, p.229

“Mahatmaji,

As far as I can gauge it, I am now about midway through this book....*My justification for approaching you would have been the conviction that psychoanalytic insights happen to complement your kind of truth by a strange reversal of the traditional roles of East and West: for you are now a model of activism in our culture, while Western thought has provided a new technique of introspection.*

....
...”

“*Sigmund Freud was, in fact, the only other man in our time* who offered to the reading world such candid descriptions of small events in his life as you revealed of yours, and this is not in the now-fashionable form of literary self-exhibiting, but strictly for the sake of a theory and a technique of truthfulness..... Now, I should like to point out in all brevity why I believe that *the psychoanalytic method* itself, by dint of always being a self-analysis paired with an attempt to understand another man’s inner conflicts, *is a counterpart to your Satyagraha*, because it confronts the inner enemy nonviolently. *Both you and Freud* knew (as did other great confessors who expanded man’s awareness) that human insight begins in oneself: and as you in your “Experiments” probed your own motivations, so Freud began by dealing “scientifically” with his own dreams as well as those of his patients.”²³

“*In studying your method of Satyagraha, I have become increasingly convinced that psychoanalysis*, not if judged by its physicalistic terminology and theory but if understood as it is practiced and lived according to the rules and the intentions of its originator, amounts to a **truth method**, with all the implications which the word truth has in Satyagraha...”²⁴ “... And this doctor (**Freud**) in his consultation room **made a decision analogous to the one you made in your South African proving ground**, namely, that the instrument of enlightenment to be forged by him would have to include self-analysis, that is, **the acceptance of himself as a person who shared his patients’ inner mechanisms**: the truth could cure the patient only insofar as the doctor had faced the corresponding truth in himself.”²⁵ “On some occasions of despair and illness you too, Mahatmaji, unknowingly came to join the Freudians in the conclusion that you should stop terrorizing yourself and approach your own body with nonviolence. Indeed, in many ways you were always very undogmatic and, in fact, antidogmatic in your judgment of various moralisms; the Old Testament with its violently “jealous” God did not suit you at all ... **No life history has ever illustrated this better than your own**, But you, Mahatmaji, were one of the rare men who could overcome the impotent counterviolence aroused in his childhood by combining tradition and personal fate, religion and politics, in a method scrupulously – and sometimes tortuously – nonviolent.”²⁶ “Somewhere, Mahatmaji, you report with stark suddenness that a Protestant minister once asked you whether you believed in original sin and that you answered, “Yes, I do.”²⁷ “Clinically, so to speak, there can be little doubt that ideas of basic sin may be very much aggravated by personal fate and historical circumstance, and are rarely faced existentially ... Yet, none of us has a right to foreclose as evil, sick, or doomed what we have not confronted in a radical spirit of risk and experiment: **for this, in fact, you have offered the model of Satyagraha for some areas of life, as Freud offered psychoanalysis for others**...”²⁸

“At the end, your candid revelations about your temper, in relation to your wife and children, only express concretely and nakedly an ambiguity inherent in all genius and, may be, especially so in religious genius... *in being zero, you aspire to be everything for everybody; and, by the same token, in trying to be free of all familial bonds, you usurp motherhood along with fatherhood...*” “**But all this, God help me, is not by way of an accusation or even a clinical judgment. I can only view with awe a man who** (making himself more transparent than any of the saviors and saints of the mythological past) **improvised every item in the inventory of saintliness** – nakedness, poverty, silence, chastity, and charity – without being baptized or ordained in any traditional investiture; and who attempted to apply the power of that position in every waking minute to the Here and the Now as lived by the masses of men. The sacrifices which you imposed on yourself and on others devoted to “national service” made you, on your return to India, ready for the masses **as no man in history had been or has been since**. So, I can only humbly accept what you wrote on your return, to Mr.

²³ Ibid, p.244

²⁴ Ibid, p.244-5

²⁵ Ibid, p.245

²⁶ Ibid, p.247-8

²⁷ Ibid, p.249

²⁸ Ibid, p.250

Lazarus, your and the minors' 'long-suffering' host in New Castle: Games.... May have their place under certain circumstances. But I feel sure that for us who are just so fallen, they have no room."²⁹

The main actors in this unfolding drama, apart from Gandhi, are Anasuya Ben, the sister and philanthropist, Ambalal, the Mill Owners' representative and the counterplaeyr, Shankerlal, Indulal Yagnik, the firebrand trade union leader, Sraladevi, Ambalal's wife, the workers and some companions of Gandhi such as Patel. "Gandhiji?" Anasuya exclaimed, "Oh! he was my mother" "Gandhiji"? Ambalal, sitting behind his big desk, said without a moment's hesitation, "Oh! he was like a good night's sleep." But the most universal answer to question as to what one felt around him was: "*In his presence one could not tell lie*". But a psychoanalyst studying an historical event could naturally mean to the participants in the enquiry that a clinician is looking for neurosis in the greatness of a man and searching for case history among his followers – case histories in which he could find verification of Freud's theories or his own. So there was a lot of "resistance" from surviving witnesses in the initial stages of inquiry. But the term 'resistance' was, in fact, adopted by Freud not as a moral opprobrium, says Erikson, but as part of the physicalist vocabulary of his time: some "resistance" is in the nature of all response to inquiry.

The 'player' and the "counterplayer" in this unfolding story of re-narrating the "Event" in terms of psychoanalysis, however, were Gandhi and Ambalal Sarabhai. The relationship of Ambalal and Gandhi is somewhat warped in some secrecy. There is some discreet reference to Ambalal in Gandhi's Autobiography: "One morning (this must have been in late 1915 or early 1916 and thus well before the strike) shortly after Mangalal had given me warning of our monetary plight, one of the children came and said that a Sheth who was waiting in a car outside wanted to see me. I went out to him. "I want to give the Ashram some help. Will you accept it?" he said.

"Most certainly", said I. "And I confess I am at the present moment at the end of my resources."

"I shall come tomorrow at this time", he said. "Will you be here?"

"Yes", said I, and he left.

Next day, exactly at the appointed hour, the car drew up near our quarters, and the horn was blown. The children came with the news. The Sheth did not come in. I went out to see him. He placed in my hands currency notes of the value of Rs.13,000 and drove away."³⁰

In any psychoanalytical study, understanding the past is the key to understand the present. It is an attempt to retrace some major steps in Gandhi's life from Moniya's (childhood) friskiness to Mohan's gloom (adulthood) and from the unsure student days in England to young man Gandhi's firm house-holdership (middle age) in South Africa. An attempt in seeking the clues as to how the boy and the man grew into this historical role, and inquire into the origins of militant violence, was the main endeavor of the researcher. The examination revolves around the nature of an aging man's "experimentation" with his own childhood. Later in this book, he comes to review again the whole question of the relationship of an "original" man to the man who originated him and to "Him whose offspring" they both are. "Here we are concerned with the reconstruction of a man's childhood as part of what he became. For what a man adds up to must develop in stages, but no stage explains the man."³¹

In case histories, psychoanalysts have learned to trace the beginnings of human conflict further and further back into childhood and this the author explains it by another technical term "Originology", the habitual effort to find the "causes" of a man's whole development in his childhood conflicts. By this "originology" he means that beginnings do not explain complex developments better than do the ends, and originology can be as great a fallacy as teleology. In addition, the psychiatric approach allows them to think in traumatological terms, that is, to discern not only origins but traumatic ones, trauma meaning an experience characterized by impressions so sudden, or so powerful, or strange that they cannot be assimilated at that time and, therefore, persist from stage to

²⁹ Ibid, p.253

³⁰ Ibid, p.71, from Gandhi's Autobiography P.293

³¹ Ibid, p.98

stage as a foreign body seeking outlet or absorption and imposing on all development a certain irritation causing stereotypy and repetitiveness. “Gandhi does not make such circumspection easy. **In case of Freud and Gandhi, contemporaries, we must look at the self-inspection practiced by such men in public** as part of an “evolutionary” trend in man to break through the new kinds of awareness.”³²

“If Gandhi selects, even from his childhood, events which could qualify as moral experiments, I will apply to them the theory that **a man like him is early and painfully conscious of a special mission**, a direction which must lead to all or to nothing.”³³ “A child like Gandhi (and since there are so few “like” him, I should say that I have in mind **such men as St. Augustine, St. Francis, and Kierkegaard**) in all his early vulnerability seems to involve the very persons he must depend on in an intimate struggle in which he attempts to wrestle from them all possible strengths without losing any of his precocious inviolacy; and he will painfully early, reverse positions and become the giving and judging and, in fact, the *parental agens*.”³⁴ “If, as we shall see, the teasing of people and animals in childhood was one of the outstanding ways in which Moniya tested his family and the world of Porbandar, we shall recognize many somberly reported stories of his later life as animated by a subtle teasing perceived by all those present at that time. We shall then see little Moniya and his father reappear in the story of how the Mahatma teased the British Viceroy. “Outstanding also, all his life, was Gandhi’s locomotor restlessness and energy. It is said even of men and women whose greatness was grounded in the contemplative life (such as **St Francis or Kierkegaard**) that nobody could keep up with their locomotor velocity and vigor. Gandhi’s enormous perambulatory vigor in later years is well known [*that he could outwalk anyone has also been said of Freud*].” Though Gandhi claimed “shyness” as his reason for not participating in organized games, yet he did not hesitate to take the role of peacemaker when the playmates quarreled among themselves. This, Pyarelal says, was the “Passion of his Life.”³⁵ But Erikson understands it in a different way. That, “indeed, from his childhood in Rajkot to his maturity in Indian politics, he would never “play” unless he was in a position of such moral dominance that he could convince himself and others that the power game of his mediatorship was “for their own good”. And (not unimportantly) it turned out to be just that.”³⁶

Let us now recall how the two important women compatriots of him, Anasuya Ben and Manubehn Gandhi described him – Anasuya screaming “**Gandhiji?, Oh, he was my mother!**” and Manubehn’s writings on Gandhi - “**Bapu – My Mother.**” “Even to begin to understand the child and the youth who was going to be Gandhi and the Mahatma ... it is necessary to assume that he emerged from the love and care of his relationship with his mother as one given to one intense relationship at a time and this a relationship of service, nay, salvation of the other. When, as all children must, he had to abandon the fusion with his mother ... he could only relive, in line with his personal growth, a series of equally intense and yet “experimental” encounters with a selected cast of primary counterplayers: father, wife, and boyhood friend. ... and if Gandhi later transferred such insistence to corporate counter players – India, the Empire, mankind – this is by no means a mere matter of “transferring” infantile energies and goals onto a widening reality of concerns. A crank, a fanatic, a psychotic can “transfer,” *but only a political genius can master the minute and concrete interplay by which he succeeds in arousing from powerful collectivities responses fully as unique* as those which he had established in a smaller circle at home.”³⁷ “One should not rush, then, to interpret such notions as mere products of a personal and neurotic quirk. The question must be recognized as an age-old one: For the sake of what goals, and by what methods, will man learn to contain his excess of instinctual activity? And interestingly enough, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, no less than *The Interpretation of Dreams*, assumes that in order to make sexuality amendable to mastery by

³² Ibid, p.98-99

³³ Ibid, p.100

³⁴ Ibid, p.101

³⁵ Pyarelal, Mahatma Gandhi, The Early Phase. P.198

³⁶ Ibid, p.109

³⁷ Ibid, p. 114-5

either “experiment” or “analysis,” a man must confront his childhood and, above all, give an account of his conflicts with his father.”³⁸

In the transformation of Moniya to Mr. M.K. Gandhi, in his life in England, the main issues were his ‘vows’ made to his mother on wine, women, non-vegetarian food, his endeavors to be committed to the ‘vows’, the main contestants for Gandhi’s lasting identifications were his Mother, Father, and Evil other.” “... His Scylla and Charybdis was the choice between breaking a vow and filling himself up with Brussels sprouts boiled *a l’ anglaise*. ...”³⁹ “He left England having learned much that he could rely on later in adapting to the best in the British; but above all he left England an augmented Indian, and that means a stronger man as well as his mother’s son ...”⁴⁰ After his most problematic encounters in South Africa, and on his return to India permanently in 1915, however, he was no more Mr. M.K. Gandhi of England. He had already undergone the discrimination, the ‘Cooli Barrister’ in South Africa. He is now middle aged with a baggage of all his experiments, successes and failures in South Africa and now in a wire message to Winston Churchill he said his endeavor was to be “as naked as possible.”⁴¹

The author is not preparing the reader for an interpretation that Gandhi’s identification with his mother was any more “important” than that with his father - ... But there was a strong maternal aspect to Gandhi’s creativity, and it is not unimportant, therefore, to attempt to spell out what his special characteristics of ambivalence toward his mother and to motherhood in general may have been. Gandhi’s biographers, of course, usually deny him the right to harbor even as much ambivalence as is any human being’s birthright, and Gandhites go to unbelievable lengths to speak of their master as totally loving – so much so that one often yearns for an inkling of that ambivalence which makes love meaningful – or possible. “**No doubt Gandhi, like Socrates, came to regard a real death** (that is, relief from rebirth) **as a cure from life.**”⁴²

Gandhiji always felt a typical kind of deficiency of a proper ‘Guru’. In fact, his autobiography, and as well several other biographies and books on Gandhi give evidence to the fact that he was in constant search for a ‘guru.’ “If the Mahatma concludes all this with the remark that “the throne” of guru had “remained vacant” even up to “Moksha” time, one could be tempted to follow the throne imagery in his life, from the way back in Porbander when little Moniya had sat himself in the place of Thakoji’s picture.”⁴³ As a psychoanalyst, Erikson considers this anecdote as a symbolic act of pretending to be his father’s master and to all the real or symbolic thrones and top jobs he would come close to, in one context or another. “It would appear that he never occupied one and yet never bowed down to one either. Any throne, or for that matter any prime ministership, was too sedentary a place for a pilgrim.”⁴⁴

Satyagraha is the name Gandhi has given to his mode of action, which in literal translation means – “Truth Force.” However, as the term has nowhere come close to having the power of a slogan in the West, “**Militant nonviolence**” (the term, according to Erikson, preferred by Martin Luther King) is at least descriptive of the attitude and the action of the Satyagrahi, but it fails to suggest the spiritual origin of non-violent courage in Gandhi’s “truth”.

“**The Event**”: The “event” is the central theme of the Erikson’s work, with the “past” in its backyard, as psychoanalysis performs its trial of Gandhi. The event is the strike of textile workers of

³⁸ Ibid, P.123

³⁹ Ibid, p.145

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.152

⁴¹ Ibid, P.153

⁴² Ibid, p.155

⁴³ Ibid, p.108 [It is relating to an incident in Gandhi’s childhood which goes like this: there was an image of the ruling Prince Thakoji’s in whose court Gandhi’s father functioned as Minister placed on a customary stool, and on some occasions, when Gandhi’s father was not at home, Moniya used to remove the image and was himself sitting in its place].

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.163

Ahmedabad for wage increase. His biographers and even the editor of the Collected Works, Swaminathan, claim that Gandhi was ‘drawn’ into the scene of his first skirmish “more or less” accidentally. An anonymous, yet ubiquitous Raj Kumar, a peasant who suffered under the “tinkathiya” system in Champaran, Bihar (by which the farmers were bound by law to plant “three of every twenty parts” of their best land with indigo, to be delivered at fixed prices to their landlords) has persuaded Gandhi, relentlessly moving after him, wherever, he had gone, and ultimately getting Gandhi’s promise to visit the Champaran. Thus, in a minor cause on the outskirts of an empire, a number of future national workers were recruited, Babu Rajendra Prasad, the future President being one among them. ‘While Gandhi was still deeply involved in Champaran, he received disquietly news of labour conditions in Ahmedabad. Anasuya Sarabhai had written Gandhi of her increased involvement in textile labour problems and had, apparently asked him for advice and sanction.’

The persons who were examined under various categories as witnesses, companions, survivors, and counter-players constitute a major part of the enquiry. “...When I asked Ambalal, he suggested that the basis of his and Gandhi’s friendship was first of all a common passion for abolishing caste and other inequalities within Indian society and a joint interest in ending British domination ...” But in the ‘event’, which is the central theme of this work, they are counterplayers. Now the Moniya in Gandhi was teasing Ambalal about how much “better human being” his wife was than he, and Ambalal chuckled about it fondly. This, too, is typical: some men whose friendship with Gandhi survived his initial attempts (and failures) to influence their home lives and private styles remember Gandhi’s humorously vindictive remarks, as if, by those words they had been knighted, and one has a feeling that **Gandhi abidingly respected these men for their capacity to remain counterplayers rather than becoming followers**. There was then, a sense of equality between the two men, notwithstanding the fact that he was to become a mahatma. “... *such counterplayers were usually men who might be called – up to point – political or philosophical Gandhites, but who would never become professional Gandhians* in the sense that they would join Gandhi’s daily way of life.”⁴⁵

It is in this process of this evolving ‘event’, for the first time Gandhi explained the idea of Satyagraha in a letter to Shankerlal⁴⁶ quite succinctly: “*Satyagraha and arms have both been in use from time immemorial ... Both these forms of strength are preferable to weakness, to what we know by the rather plain but much apter word “cowardice”. Without either, Swaraj or genuine popular awakening is impossible. Swaraj achieved otherwise than through resort to one or the other will not be true swaraj.* Such swaraj can have no effect on the people. Popular awakening cannot be brought about without strength, without manliness.”

Ahmedabad had seen unprecedented agony of the attack of plague from late nineteenth century and the early periods of twentieth century due to basically sanitation issues. Ambalal and his wife Sarla Devi did all they could, even by converting their mansion into a temporary hospital. The mill owners also on their part offered ‘plague bonus’ to help the workers and contain their migration. However, a labour dispute arose owing to the fact that the five hundred warpers in the textiles mills-Brahmans, Baniyas and Muslims were not paid this plague bonus, because they were a relatively better paid elite among the workers and were too well settled in their urban homes to be tempted to flee the city, and now they demanded a 25 percent “dearness allowance”. Anasuya, from her work among these people, knew that this was a justified demand and suddenly stepped into the role of leader on their behalf. The mill owners requested Ambalal to discipline his rebellious sister. Ambalal, however, upheld the right of his sister to pursue her own ideals. Paradoxically, however, a very much bigger issue arose when the plague began to subside. The mill owners announced their intention to simply disallow the bonus (up to 75% of their wages) which had been given to the weavers while the plague raged. Gandhi was ‘drawn’ into the dispute at the instance of Anasuya, according to many of Gandhi’s biographers, but Erikson doubts this possibility.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.300

⁴⁶ Ibid, P.308, Letter dated September 2, 1917, Reprinted in CWMG, XIII, 517-520

Gandhi created new methods to the requirements of this particular Satyagraha. For one, over the name of Anasuya, he issued daily leaflets. Furthermore, every evening Gandhi would gather the workers around him under the famous Babul Tree on the banks of Sabarmati outside the Shapur Gate. Though about sixteen leaflets were released in course of this agitation, some significant issues were raised in some. In the fourth leaflet, he concluded that "... *the employers have adopted the Western, or the modern, Satanic notion of justice*" – an indictment which lumps **the capitalist and the communist conception of labour dispute** together in one devilish, western, modern trend: **class warfare**. The sixth leaflet begins with the concept of "*pure justice*". He interrupted and admonished an enthusiastic worker singer who ridiculed the machines and called them "empty showcases." Here we can see a wonderful comparative narrative with Marx's disapproval of Luddites, who considered machines as their enemies in the early phases of industrialization and even attempted to destroy them. In the eleventh leaflet he bemoans that "It is a miserable thing for a working man to be without a job." This again correlates with the present day concept of right to employment as a part of right to life. In the fourteenth leaflet he says ... 'if the worker did not work, the world would come to an end.' But by the time the event was taken cognizance of by the press, a fully recovered Gandhi had already chaired a meeting in Ahmedabad on the situation of indentured labour in the Fiji Islands, had on 22nd March inaugurated the Kheda Satyagraha by addressing 5,000 peasants in Nadiad and had travelled to Delhi to meet the Viceroy's Private Secretary in order to discuss the release of the Ali Brothers. This then is the difference between a case history and a life. His 'locomotor restlessness and energy' and 'perambulatory vigor' is on display again!

Psychoanalysis is a set of theories and therapeutic techniques related to the studying of the unconscious mind, which together form a method of treatment for mental disorders, which basically considers that – a person's development is determined often by forgotten events in early childhood. "Transference" is the key term, whereby patients relive their infantile conflicts by projecting into the analyst feelings of love, dependence and anger. Dreams and their analysis is also of significance for psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis as an independent therapeutic system and theory of personality and behavior of a human being emphasizes the role of unconscious mind and early childhood experience, as evolving defense mechanisms of ego. Freud claimed that there are two innate forces or instincts behind human behavior, namely Eros and Thanatos ('life instinct' and 'death instinct' respectively). Life instinct – life force of sexual drive, death instinct – aggression towards ourselves or / and others. The idea is that unconscious part of mind can perceive things without conscious awareness. It also emphasizes the sexual drive, as the prime motive force.

In the chapter on 'Aftermath': "... exactly one year later, on the Ides of March 1919 ... Hundreds of thousands of Indians of all regions and religions would be on the move; the British Empire itself would be the principal counterplayer and world opinion - the awed onlooker. But at least Ahmedabad will prove to have been a real, a craftsman like rehearsal, in spite of a few devastating shortcomings such as earnest rehearsals bring to light..."⁴⁷ But when Gandhi decided to offer help and assistance to the British empire during the First World War by personally recruiting one lakh volunteers as soldiers, many of his followers abhorred this idea. Gandhi understood that his idea of 'Satyagraha' had not yet been understood by his countrymen. As Gandhi now noticed with horror and contempt, not one of his Satyagrahis refused to go to war because of a reluctance to kill: clearly, they simply did not wish to die."⁴⁸ Once he saw this, he recognized it "in depth". Ahimsa, he realized, had not been invented by meek or defenseless people, even as in Western civilization Puritanism was the way of life not of "repressed" people, but of essentially lusty ones: "*Ahimsa* was preached to man when he was in full vigour of life and able to look his adversaries straight in the face."⁴⁹ From this emotional base line, then Gandhi began to see and spread the truth as he then felt it: "With this cowardly fear in us, how can we be the equals of the British?"⁵⁰ He comes to the

⁴⁷ Ibid, P. 364

⁴⁸ Ibid, P. 372

⁴⁹ Ibid, P.373

⁵⁰ Ibid P.373 – 374

conclusion that the problem of untouchability which pervaded India, repeated itself on the level of the Empire, with all of India in the role of the untouchables. In an answer to Esther Faering's anxious question – he stated the case from the Satyagrahis's point of view: "What am I to advise a man to do who wants to kill but is unable owing to his being maimed? Before I can make him feel the virtue of not killing, I must restore to him the arm he has lost. ... A nation that is unfit to fight cannot from experience prove the virtue of not fighting ..."⁵¹

"Whether or not the Mahatma ever integrated these insights with his basic beliefs, he has not ceased to amuse the intellectuals and the politicians, who demand that he be "consistent" in his utterances. But as we saw and will see again, such truth, to him, would have to be revealed in action and in conflict, not in text-books ... Gandhi's consistency was always in the continuation of "the experiment": ... *the utterances of this period show how uninformed are the casual criticisms with which even some of the best educated among us declare Gandhi to be so one-sided and visionary as to be irrelevant; ...*"⁵² On February 24, 1919, almost on the anniversary of the Ahmedabad campaign, Gandhi composed a new Satyagraha pledge. It was made against a law that (like the law which had committed him to resistance in South Africa) was to be known by the name "Black Act," the Rowlatt Act. "... We can discern once a trace of Moniya in the letter Gandhi sent to the Police Commissioner"⁵³:

*Laburnum Road, Gamdevi, Bombay
April 7, 1919*

Dear Mr. Griffith,

May I send you a copy of the unregistered newspaper issued today by me as its Editor?

*Yours sincerely,
M.K.Gandhi.*

We may say that to have faced mankind with nonviolence as the alternative to these aberrations, of the nineteenth and twentieth century, which were more infested with the notions of 'war to end all the wars', and unbridled violence in the name freedom, equality, international brotherhood, democracy etc., marks the Mahatma's deed in 1919. "In a period when proud statesman could speak of a "war to end war"; when the super-policemen of Versailles could bathe in the glory of a peace that would make "the world safe for democracy"; when the revolutionaries in Russia could entertain the belief that terror could initiate an eventual "withering away of the State" – during that same period, one man in India confronted the world with the strong suggestion that " ... a new political instrument endowed with a new kind of religious fervor, may yet provide man with a choice."⁵⁴ "May be the most prophetic was Gilbert Murray's reference of Gandhi, in the Hibbert Journal of London in July 1918, to "*a battle between a soul and a government*". Gandhi, he predicted, would be "a dangerous and uncomfortable enemy, because his body, which you can always conquer, gives you so little purchase upon his soul."⁵⁵

We, Indians, are more accustomed to hagiographies than truthful accounts or critical biographies. More so, we look towards investigations by psychologists or psychoanalysts into the subconscious realms of historical figures or spiritual leaders with an eye of suspicion and doubt. We consider such studies as exposing our gurus to their unfathomable neurosis, unwarranted infirmities etc, which may cause some disquiet and unease in our already formed and fixed opinions. Though I am also in agreement with many dissidents on the supremacy or exclusive expertise of this subject matter called 'psychoanalysis' in exploring the human mind and some of its exaggerating claims, Erikson's work on Gandhi's Truth transcends many of our mainstream concerns. We recently

⁵¹ Ibid, p.374, Letter dated June 30, 1918, CWMG XIV, 462-463

⁵² Ibid, P. 377

⁵³ Ibid, P. 387 from CWMG, XV, p.195

⁵⁴ Ibid, P. 391

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.391

celebrated the “Hundred Years of Champaran Movement”, and “**The Event**” which forms the basis of Erikson’s work to understand the origins of militant non-violence also deserves to be remembered on this occasion with some moral urgency not only as one in of a series of experiments (Satyagraha) made by Gandhi, but also as one offering alternative model for hitherto ‘conflict’ oriented industrial relations. The history of trade union movement has seen several ups and downs, victories and setbacks, and in this process learnt several lessons. Here is one authentic research of a great psychoanalyst and scholar into the deeper origins of ‘militant non-violence’ employed by Gandhi in March 1918 at Ahmedabad, in industrial relations for the first time with greater intensity, now ready for centenary memory. On this occasion, Erikson’s analysis offers several answers to our skeptical approaches towards this “**Event**”. This alternative is no cowardice, and not unmanly, but yet another alternative to the human civilization, comparable in intensity and militancy on par with the known conventional methods of dispute resolution. It offers challenge to the opponent, provokes, and exchanges grievance and guilt by transference.