

FOREWORD TO *AFRICAN ELEMENT IN GANDHI* BY ANIL NAURIYA (NEW DELHI, 2006)

Many books have been written on Gandhi's twenty-one years in South Africa, the birth of Satyagraha and the transformation of Gandhi from a lawyer-servant of the Indian community to a Mahatma. But, unfortunately, there is not a single book on the interaction of Gandhi with the African people and their leaders, and on the lasting impact of his life and philosophy on South Africa.

Gandhi himself is largely responsible for this omission. He said little of his discussions with African leaders of his time. He wrote in *Harijan* (July 1, 1939): "I yield to no one in my regard for the Zulus, the Bantus and the other races of South Africa. I used to enjoy intimate relations with many of them. I had the privilege of often advising them." Who did he advise and what was his advice? We do not know from his writings. It may be that he was concerned that the racist rulers would use any publicity to those discussions to allege a conspiracy against the racist order.

When Gandhi arrived in South Africa, the Africans had been defeated and virtually enslaved. Indian indentured labour had been treated as semi-slaves. The authorities had begun to break the promises made to them about land and freedom after indenture, and to harass the free Indians in order to force all but the workers under contract to leave.

The Europeans, and even many educated and Christian Africans, treated the Zulu masses as barbaric and uncivilised, calling them *kaffirs*. Little was known of the culture and civilisation of the Africans. In countering arguments of the whites that Indians were uncivilised like the Africans and hence not entitled to civic rights, some of the early memoranda by Gandhi contain statements reflecting the current prejudices.

But as he came to know the Africans, he overcame the initial prejudices and developed great love and respect for the Africans. In 1908 he spoke of his vision of a South African nation in which "all the different races commingle and produce a civilisation that perhaps the world has not yet seen".

His experiences in South Africa - his awareness of the savagery of the Anglo-Boer War, the heroism of the Boer women and the brutality of the white settlers in Natal during the Bambata rebellion against a poll tax - may well have inspired him to discover satyagraha as much as any books he had read. In turn, African leaders were inspired by the satyagraha in South Africa and the campaigns of civil disobedience in India led by Gandhi.

In 1946-48, when Gandhi was deeply distressed by the communal riots in India, as if his life's work had been in vain, the Indian community in South Africa was engaged

in a great passive resistance campaign, with the support and solidarity of the African and Coloured people. He was encouraged that the spirit of satyagraha survived in the land of its birth, and guided the leaders of the resistance, Dr. Yusuf Dadoo and Dr. G. M. Naicker. When white hooligans brutally attacked non-violent resisters, including women, he declared: "I would not shed a single tear if all the satyagrahis in South Africa were wiped out. Thereby they will not only bring deliverance to themselves but point the way to the Negroes and vindicate the honour of India".

Leaders of the African National Congress were impressed by the sacrifices and the organisational ability of the Indians. In 1952, the ANC, in cooperation with the South African Indian Congress, launched the "Campaign of Defiance against Unjust Laws". Within a few years, the African-Americans, under the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., began mass non-violent resistance against racism in the United States. These great movements, which drew inspiration from Gandhi, shattered the myth that Africans were incapable of non-violent resistance. Active non-violence spread around the globe in colonial revolutions and the peace movements.

Mandela became a mass leader in 1952 as Volunteer-in-Chief of the Defiance Campaign, with Moulvi I.A. Cachalia, son of a close associate of Gandhi, as his deputy. The South African liberation movement since then has been honoured by Nobel Peace Prizes to three African leaders – Chief Albert Luthuli, Bishop Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela. That provides a fitting reply to those who criticised Gandhi for not venturing to lead the Africans but encouraging them to develop their own leadership.

I believe that Gandhi had an impact not only on the oppressed people of South Africa but also on the whites, and that the legacy of Gandhi was one of the factors which made possible the miracle of reconciliation which helped transform South Africa in the 1990s from a racist state to a non-racial democratic state.

Mr. Nauriya has made a thorough study of the letters, articles and speeches of Gandhi, and other available evidence, to produce this booklet on the evolution of his friendship and love for the African majority in South Africa. It is a valuable contribution for understanding Gandhi.