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GANDHIAN MESSAGES TO A VIOLENT WORLD:
Mass Communication without Mass Media.
by Kusum Singh and Bertram Gross*

Foreword: Nelson Mandela (or Jean Bertrand Aristede or Vaclav Havel)
Preface: George Gerbner

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May 7, 1995

From **GANDHIAN MESSAGES TO A VIOLENT WORLD: Mass Communication without Mass Media**

By Kusum Singh and Bertram Gross*

1. Gandhian Communicators

> Generations to come, it may be, will scarcely believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth
>
> Albert Einstein
>
> How can I take a position on Gandhi? He had as many feet as an octopus.
>
> Mort Gilbert[1]
>
> Gandhi instigated, if he did not initiate, three major revolutions of our time, the revolution against racialism, the revolution against colonialism, and the revolution against violence. He lived long enough to see the success of his efforts in the first two revolutions, but the revolution against violence was hardly under way, when an assassin's bullet removed him from the scene.
>
> B. R. Nanda[2]

In our new era of post-cold war violence, one might hope that nonviolence might be "a common standard for achievement for all peoples and for all nations." * Yet most of what has been written or spoken about Gandhian nonviolence has been over-simplified, misunderstood or ignored. ~~And this in the so-called "information age~~!"

In 1939 Albert Einstein wrote about Gandhi in widely quoted words of admiration. He clearly recognized the power of Gandhi's example of unflinching courage on behalf of social justice and human freedom. Einstein himself set a courageous example in speaking out on behalf of peace and human rights, an approach rarely emulated by modern scientists. But he erred in tending to deify Gandhi, an approach often followed by Indian leaders who gave lip service to

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* These are the words used by the General Assembly of the United Nations to describe the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Gandhi's ideas but discarded his philosophy. Gandhi himself fought against the deification process, objecting to being called "Mahatma" (or "Great Soul"). Also, Einstein may not have known that long before 1939 Gandhi had inspired thousands of people in South Africa, India and elsewhere to risk their lives in nonviolent opposition to tyranny. Nor could Einstein have seen that, half a century later, new generations of Gandhians would in flesh and blood walk upon this earth. Nor could he have dreamed that the wealth of Gandhian ideas could be used not only in opposing tyranny, but even in serving as guidelines for the builders and leaders of constitutional democracy.

Unfortunately, the scope and complexity of Gandhian ideas have made their communication enormously difficult. In reviewing interviews on Gandhi's legacy, we recall the old story about the five blind men trying to identify an elephant. Four of them felt the legs and said, "This must be a tree." The fifth touched the trunk and called it a snake or a rope. A still better metaphor was used by science writer, Mort Gilbert, who compared Gandhi to an octopus. But an octopus has only *eight* feet. We find at least *nine* basic ideas among Gandhi's best known messages, apart from *ten* among the lesser known and *three* among the unknown. These twenty two, in turn, have many components and facets. Perhaps all great and shining ideas may be compared to diamonds. A "brilliant diamond" has 58 facets, of which 33 can be seen only from above and 25 are below, not easily noticed. . In the chemistry of human behavior, as with the chemists' Table of Elements, a finite number of elements can yield an infinity of permutations. [3] This complexity is rooted in the mysteries of the human soul, which

arises from the body, the mind and the non-human and cultural environments in which bodies and minds are born, live and die.

One of the most eminent Gandhi scholars in India, B. R. Nanda, has written many volumes to help rescue Gandhi from both deifiers and debunkers. His latest book portrays Gandhi's role in "major revolutions" against racialism, colonialism and violence. Unfortunately, each of these three evils are still alive and well. Racialism operates in many forms throughout the world. Old-fashioned colonialism has been replaced by oppressive systems often labelled "neocolonialism," "indirect imperialism" or "the first stage of truly global capitalism." Under these circumstances we see Gandhian ideas as far more relevant now than they ever were in the past.

Barbarism, Not Civilization

> Reporter: Mr. Gandhi, what do you think of Western civilization?
> Gandhi: It would be a good idea.
> Judith Brown[4]
>
> In the past there have been many civilizations but never one world civilization.
> Humayun Kabir[5]

The word "civilization" has long had many meanings. The first human tribes branded as "uncivilized" or "barbarian" were any people who looked different and spoke differently. As powerful "civilizations" emerged, their ruling elites quoted holy texts selectively in proclaiming the divine right of rulers. Repressing humanitarian instincts, they acted on the axiom that "Might (or Male) Makes Right." Crippling mutual respect, they tyrannized women, poor people, colonies, foreigners, slaves and ethnic or religious minorities. They legitimated their right to do so by stigmatizing their

victims as "inferiors." By the nineteenth century, under the banners of a "Civilizing Mission," the industrial nations behaved like true barbarians. They fought each other savagely in establishing their rights to dominate--and "civilize"--people, cultures and economies in Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, Africa and Oceania. "Might, Male, Money and Light-Skinned Made Right."

In the last years of the twentieth century the world has been unified by the globe-spanning communication networks. It is truly one world-- but still far from civilized. Too many people of one culture, religion or ethnic group still brand others as inferiors or enemies. Laboring under patriarchical traditions, far too many men still regard women as inferiors. Despite accumulated wealth and awesome technologies, the twentieth century world has been--and still is--a cruelly barbarous place. The barbarisms include two World Wars, many regional wars, ongoing civil wars, the holocaust, and other holocausts. Just as barbarous are ethnic or religious "cleansing" and the superficialities of religious "fundamentalism." The technologies of an "information age" deluge us with dead data, "factoids," misinformation and disinformation. Although some of the deluge is educational or edifying, it also drenches us with "images that displace human communication and promote practices that drug, hurt, poison and kill thousands every day."[6] Only in the distant past have we, the authors, been personally close to deadly violence . Kusum can never forget the bloody days of the Pakistan-India partition (1947-48). Sitting with her sisters and father in a railroad train on the way from Delhi to Dehra Dun at the foot of the

Himalayas she heard shouts of hate and revenge outside. She also heard fearful bangings on the door of the train. Her father held a huge loaded revolver on his lap ready to save the virginity of his daughters by shooting them and then himself if the howling anti-Hindu mob should break into the car. Bert can never forget his first days {1953) as an economic adviser in Jerusalem. From the nearby walls of the Old City, soldiers of the Arab Legion in Jordon were shooting at the David Building at the foot of King George Street. Since there was no back door, he and his colleagues had to run out the front door and turn the corner at the right, on Jabotinsky Street, to escape being hit by a well-aimed bullet. Now, almost every night, television has been bringing. into our living room the carnage of Bosnia, Somalia, Ethiopia, Israel, Oklahoma City or the streets of other U. S. cities.

In the aftermath of the late (and often lamented) cold war, old fears of a nuclear Armageddon have been replaced by new anxieties.. Plagues of deep personal insecurity have been sweeping across the entire capitalist world. In "developing nations" un- and under--employment--together with perilous inflation--are catastrophic. In former communist countries, where unemployment had allegedly been abolished by putting most adults on payrolls, open unemployment is rapidly growing. Most countries of high technology capitalism are in openly-acknowledged recession or at some other point in persistent business cycles.

While the United States is in a mild "recovery for the few," real joblessness remains much higher than the official cover-up figures, and even officially estimated

poverty has been rising. In deep gulags of rural as well as urban depression millions of anxiety-driven people have been losing self-respect and confidence in the future. The result has been scapegoating, ethnic conflict, hate crimes, cynical inactivism, criminal violence, political apathy and indifference toward elections dominated by big money and by candidates who, while boasting about "moving forward," distract attention from the plagues or, when pressed, offer opiates only. Thus old- and new-style demagogues have risen to strategic positions of power in the divided corporate and government establishments. Some of these exhibit well-guarded tendencies toward " feel-good," "friendly" or "unfriendly" fascism." In other parts of the world religious fundamentalism , civil or ethnic wars and new forms of fascism stalk the stage.[7] People everywhere face the paradox of unmet basic needs in the midst of unused labor, localized mass depression in the midst of elite opulence, and massive insecurity despite gigantic spending in the name of "national security." While two thirds of the world's population live in poverty or insecurity, transnational corporate elites maintain this situation by measures to weaken (or destroy) organized labor, co-opt intellectuals and promote toleration of intolerable barbarisms

This is not the world that Gandhi and Kabir visioned. We now see that Kabir--like many others--was really writing about *many cultures, not about civilizations*. To restate Kabir's comment there have been many cultures but never, in the sense of transcending barbarism, a true civilization.

The Many Kinds of Gandhians

I will not still call myself a Gandhian because I am very disappointed with the professional Gandhians and how they are compared to Gandhi's

> own thinking.
>
> Rajni Kothari[8]

> Any Czech intellectual would know that the conception of Gandhi is very closely connected with President Masaryk. . . It's about two years ago that the film "Gandhi" was here in Prague. As somebody told you, it was an extraordinary success, not only but political. People were standing up and applauding. By then, we all became Euro-Gandhians.
>
> Jaroslav Sabata [9]

Gandhi once remarked that recorded history was a story of "every interruption o f the even working of the force of love"[10] This was a way of suggesting that the violent behavior of slave masters, monarchs and warlords was only a small part of the entire - but mostly unrecorded - story of human life on the planet.[11] To the extent that this is true, most people have been nonviolent for most of their lives. By the same token, millions of people have been Gandhians without carrying that label, or even consciously dignifying their actions with Gandhian philosophy. In 1960, for example, African American students fought segregation by sitting down at a lunch counter in Nashville, Tennessee. Some of the people who marched in their defense were, like the Reverend James Lawson, students of Gandhian techniques. Diane Nash, the Fisk College student, who confronted the mayor of Nashville, was not. She was just doing what came naturally.

Other people have been up-front in calling themselves Gandhians. We have found self-styled Euro-Gandhians in Prague, Asian-Gandhians in Japan and Indonesia, and Latino-Gandhians in Brazil. Strangely, in India, many Gandhian ideas have become a part of the general culture. The "professional Gandhians" who disappoint

Rajni Kothari often fail to practice what they preach. And their preaching itself is rather narrow.

In our work, we have not made a detailed study of officially recognized Gandhi centers or institutes. Nor have we attempted the impossible task of tracking down the hundreds of thousands of Gandhians who have taken part in movements for civil rights, human rights and the prevention of violence in the home and neighborhoods, at the workplace, or in the broader arenas of national and international behavior. Rather, we have tried to extract essential ideas from the writings and practice of a few well known leaders who have made major contributions to the practice of nonviolence. These include Corazon Aquino, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Ralph Bunche, Vaclav Havel, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Nelson Mandela, Andrei Sakharov and Lech Walesa . Of these, five rose to the position of Chief of State: Aquino, Aristide. Havel, Mandela and Walesa. Aquino, Havel and Walesa , however, lost positions of formal authority. In contrast, Mandela and Aristide confront the enormously difficult task of reconstructing societies long devastated by tyranny. We therefore give them some extra attention.

And, of course, we focus on Mohandas Gandhi. He lived longer than any of the others, and his activities spanned more than half a century in two countries: South Africa, from 1893 to 1914, and India from 1914 to his assassination in 1948. In doing this we abstract from the many specific challenges faced by Gandhi--whether pass laws in South Africa or the untouchables in India. Similarly, we do not focus on the variety of situations confronting Martin Luther King Jr., Ralph Bunche, and the others on our list.

Reluctant Embraces

> For every thing there is a season. . . .a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing.
> Ecclesiastes 3:1-5

It usually takes a long time for people to embrace Gandhian ideas. Many people have been "put off" by all sorts of minor objections to the Gandhians in our list. Some of these are rooted in calumnies propagated by adversaries, the obvious defects found in people who have suffered from being deified or in some unavoidable facts in these people's lives. For example:

Corazon Aquino: She rose to prominence because of being the widow of the assassinated Benigno Aquino and her ties with the Philippine's landed aristocracy prevented her from being an effective president.

Jean Bertrand Aristide: At one time he seemed to have called for the assassination of his opponents.

Ralph Bunche: He was a member of the black bourgeoisie without ties with the majority of African Americans.

Vaclav Havel: He was more of a playwright and an essayist than a popular leader.

Martin Luther King Jr.: Apart from being a well known "womanizer," he was attacked by younger African Americans as "de Lawd."

Malcolm X: Before his trip to Mecca, he demonized all white people.

Nelson Mandela: Because he had headed the sabotage work

of the African National Congress, and Amnesty International refused to defend him as a "prison of conscience."

Andrei Sakharov: He strongly supported atomic energy plants as a source of energy without recognizing the enormous dangers created by nuclear wastes.

Lech Walesa: Apart from being an undereducated electrician, he was tainted with the anti-Semitism, long present in Polish culture.

People have found many more reasons to refrain from embracing the ideas of Mohandas Gandhi. Not only in the Western world but even in India, his own country. Nature had not meant Gandhi to belong to the distinguished galaxy of "politically attractive" leaders. He was funny looking, with "his ears flared out from his oversized head like the handles of a sugar bowl." When Kusum was a very young child, a funny looking visitor at her father's house in Narsingarh pinched her nose. This was a message of affection that she did not appreciate. [12] Nor has she ever appreciated his dedication to celibacy (in Hindi, *brahmachariya*) as a way to conserve physical as well as spiritual energy.

Gandhi was also a premature vegetarian before modern nutritionist launched their campaign against eating animal fat. He was a premature anti-communist, long before the widespread disillusionment with communism. He was a premature feminist , long before anyone thought that a woman would become India's ambassador to the United Nations or Prime Minister. He was a premature environmentalist, while India's elites were still deeply enamored with many forms of Western technology that proved

environmentally destructive.

We have spoken with many people who, before understanding the full scope of Gandhi's ideas, have voiced such negative statements as these:

1. "Gandhi was an abstract moralizer."
2. "He was a cunning politician."
3. "His kind of non-violence led to violence."
4. "He was against modern technology."
5. "He was an instrument of the ruling classes."
6. "He refused to support peasant rebellions against oppression."
7. "His ideas would never have worked against the Nazis."
8. "He was too much of a pacifist."
9. "His non-violent strategies worked against the British only because of their economic losses during World War II or because of their decency."
10. "His strategies would never work in today's information-dominated culture."

While in due course, we shall deal with each of these propositions, we now find that many who felt doubtful in earlier years have recently been changing their minds about Gandhi. Some have even learned to call him by his correct name "Mohandas" rather than "Mahatma." Gandhi himself did not relish being called the "Mahatma," meaning "great soul," a designation given him by some admirers. "I am not a great soul," he would say, "I'm an ordinary man--of the earth, earthy." Yet no matter what they call him, there has been a tendency to deify Gandhi. They have tended to regard his teachings as *the* truth, forgetting that he saw his life as "experiments with truth," and

in the process making many errors.

Let us confess that when we first read *Experiments with Truth*, we too were misled by the title. Kusum then feared that he was propagating the truth. Bert then thought that any good experiment had to be "scientific," with all the paraphernalia of ruling out "exogenous factors" through control groups. We have more recently come to realize that most human experimenting does not take place in a scientific laboratory. Gandhi was merely trying to write down, in the words of Erikson's book, *Gandhi's Truth* (1969). We now realize that in our daily lives human beings everywhere are conducting some kinds of experiment. While trying to learn about the experiments of others, we have also been conducting on-going experiments of our own. This book is our latest experiment.

Plan of Book

Inevitably, this book deals with the past. For us, history is a large and well-tilled collection of many gardens in the midst of larger expanses of the uncultivated savannahs, forests, rivers, and oceans of unrecorded history. Roaming through the garden of historical records, we have tried to uncover some of the mystery that usually surrounds records. Through both viewing and interviewing, we report on a few parts of previously unrecorded history. In doing this, we go beyond "his story" and, with the help of feminists of both sexes, been able to uncover at least part of "her story" and thereby offer a more challenging, perhaps even truer, story. We draw on many discussions with students and other colleagues. We use materials from close to 200 interviews already conducted on nonviolence and violence with people from various

walks of life in India (some in Hindi), the United States, and the former Czechoslovakia and a few in Japan, Brazil and the Netherlands.

Our general ideas are linked to many concrete cases. These include the Gandhi-led campaign for India's liberation from the British empire, recent human rights movements in India, and the various movements in the United States on behalf of civil rights, women's rights, environmental rights, and the new human rights regimes in South Africa and Haiti. This kind of synthesis will draw on the perspectives of Gandhian studies, peace studies, communication studies, women's studies, political science and history. We are particularly impressed by the dogged and conscientious researches over the years by Gene Sharp on the long history of full or partial successes of non-violent civil disobedience. Thousands of people have been energized by his pioneering work.[13] We also use the pioneering studies by David G. Barrow, Joan Bondurant, Taylor Branch, Joan Brown, and Dennis Dalton . We have been inspired by the ongoing work by James MacGreger Burns and Gary Wills on leadership, Mihaly Csikszmihalyi on spirituality and wisdom, Riane Eisler on male-female partnerships, George Gerbner on the cultural environment and J. Ann Tickner on gender in international relations. We have been enormously helped by many Indian authors whose work is too little known outside India and many women authors who seem neglected every where.[14]

Like many of our interviewees and authors, we are unabashed futurists. Without bowing to disciplinary boundaries or traditions of compulsive citation, we look forward to a future in which many others may use some of our work in their own experiments

with truth. While we suggest some principles wew recognize, as we think Gandhi did, that all principles have exceptions with the single exception of the principle that all principles have exceptions.

In "The Best Known Messages" (Chapter 1) we briefly set forth the best known elements in Gandhian thought and practice. In so doing, we have broken into many components the concept of "civil disobedience." We have also included elements often unrecognized or neglected by some practitioners of civil disobedience.

"The Lesser Known " (Chapter 2) projects many additional meanings inherent in the activities those whom we call Gandhians.

"The Unknown Messages " (Chapter 3) breaks popular taboos (and some icons) by dealing "justifiable force," the power of the United Nations, and "living wages and jobs for all."

"Communication Miracles" (Chapter 4) explains how despite exclusion from the mass media of their countries, Gandhians have often been able to achieve mass communication.

In "Action-Research Vistas for the 21st Century" (Chapter 5) we recognize the inevitability of deadly violence because of its roots in instinctive drives and forms of human organization and inventiveness. Against these forces, we stake out the possibility of progress through integrated nonviolence and the strange arts of the improbable. We conclude with our interpretation of Gandhi's "oceanic circle" as a path toward true civilization.

We have undertaken this work at a time when, in Max Kampelman's words,

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humankind is "entering new worlds" in which a fundamental challenge is "what societies and peoples might do to resist evil." [15] Resisting evil,, we think, requires both high ideals, without which power is barbarous, and pragmatic power, without which ideals are futile. In these pages readers will meet scores of people whose life has been devoted to linking ideals with power. In the words of W. H. Auden, we see their messages as "ironic points of light" that bring and create Good News "wherever the Just exchange their messages/ [and] Beleaguered by the same/ Negation and despair/ Show an affirming flame."

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Notes

1. Science writer. Interview by Bertram Gross, July 26, 1992

2. B. R. Nanda, *Gandhi and His Critics.* Oxford University Press, 1993

3. As observed by the *New York Times* in a scientific and poetical editorial "Infinity in a Flake" (January 23, 1987): "The snowflake is the product of nothing but water, dust and changing air. Yet from this prosaic mix come structures of intricate designs and patterned beauty. . . No one has ever found two snowflakes that are exactly alike.. . . the snowflake's permutations seem endless."

4. Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope,* Oxford University Press, 1990

5. Humayun Kabir, "Human Rights: the Islamic Tradition and the Problems of the World Today," UNESCO, *Human Rights: Comments and interpretations* Allen Wingate, London, 1947.

6. George Gerbner, "Prospectus," *Cultural Environment Movement*, December 1992.

7. Bertram Gross, *Friendly Fascism: the New Face of Power in America.* South End Press, 1982. Although this 1982 analysis is in some ways out of date, one can still maintain as Bert does in the paperback Preface, "The New Bill of Frights," that five

battalions are now marching against whatever democracy we have and whatever stronger democracy we are trying to create.. The first are the open extremists, some of them dispensing the superficiality of so-called "fundamentalism.". The next three are still more powerful. Number Two: the battalions of transnational corporations. Number Three: the machismo militarists, still continuing to defend excessive military spending despite the cold war's end. Number Four: the opponents of universal human rights. The Fifth Column is the most dangerous of all. It resides in people's minds. The best illustration of this is the current taboo on the idea of claiming decent jobs as a human right, a right that is negated by almost all varieties of modern capitalism.

8. Interview in New Delhi, June 1990.

9. Member of Charter 77 and Federal Assembly. Interview through translator, August 29, 1991

10. Nanda, p. 153.

11. Kenneth Boulding on peace as being more normal than war

12. Only decades later did Kusum she learn that the visitor, Mohandas Gandhi, had come to investigate charges as prime minister her father had tolerated serious violations of human rights. . Gandhi then wrote an article in his paper, *Harijan*, clearing Jagdish Singh of all charges. As a result, the British concluded that Singh was somewhat unreliable. They removed him promptly from his high post as the Prime Minister of an important state and demoted him to the rank of a magistrate in Delhi.

13. Sharp, Gene. 1973. *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (3 volumes). Boston: Horizons Books; "Pragmatic Nonviolent Struggle: A Better Solution to Acute Political and Ethical Conflicts?" Paper presented at the conference held by Department of Ethics, Institute of Philosophy, Academy of Sciences of the USSR and the National Association in Moscow. November 27-30, 1989; "The Historical Significance of the Growth of Nonviolent Struggle in the Late Twentieth Century," Paper presented at the Institute of World History of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR in Moscow, November 21-23, 1989.

14. Among these are the following: Usha Bala. 1986. *Indian Women Freedom Fighters: 1857-1947.* New Delhi: Manohar Publications. M. Chatterji. 1983. *Gandhi's Religious Thought.* Macmillan. Neera Desai and Vibhuti Patel. 1990. *Indian Women: Change & Challenge.* Bombay: Popular Prakashan Private Limited. Diana Eck and Devaki Jain. 1986. *Speaking of Faith: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Women, Religion, and Social Change.* New Delhi: Kali . S.K. Ghosh. 1987. *Communal Riots in India: Meet the Challenge Unitedly.* New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House. Press, 1982.

Raghavan Iyer. 1973. *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi.* New York: Oxford University Press. Madhu Kishwar. 1986. *Gandhi and Women.* Delhi: Manushi Prakashan . P. R. Rajgopal. 1987. *Social Change and Violence: The Indian Experience.* New Delhi: Vikas Publishing. Ram Rattan. 1972. *Gandhi's Concept of Political Obligation.* Calcutta: Minerva Associates. Sibnarayan Ray, ed. 1970. *Gandhi, India and the World: An International Symposium.* Melbourne: Hawthorn Press. J. D. Sethi. 1989. *Gandhian Critique of Western Peace Movements.* Delhi: Chanakya Publications . Krishnalal J. Shridharani. 1962. *War Without Violence.* Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. 1943. *My India, My America.* Halcyon House: Garden City, New York.

15. Max Kampelman, Entering New Worlds. Harper-Collins, 1991.