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Gandhi ji A Practical Idealist

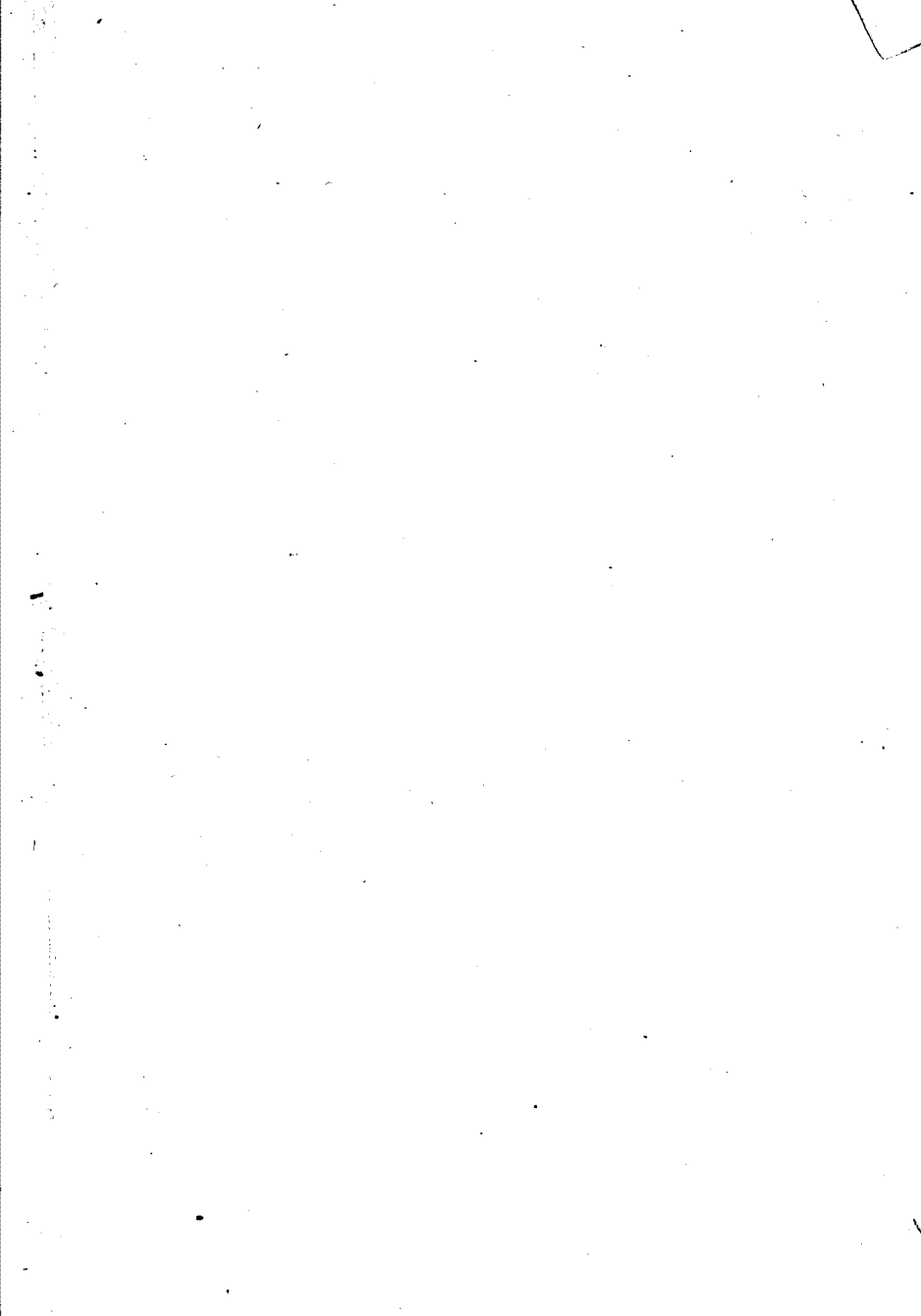
U. N. DHEBAR



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GANDHIJI

A PRACTICAL IDEALIST

By
U. N. DHEBAR



1964

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN
CHOWPATTY, BOMBAY

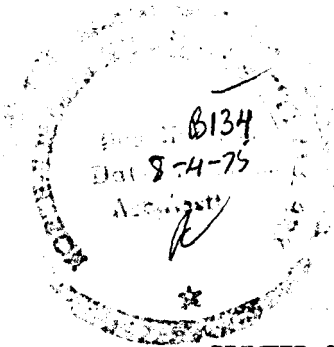
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First published in Bhavan's Series 1964

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Price Re. 1.00; Sh. 1/9; \$ 0.50



PRINTED IN INDIA

By P. H. Raman at Associated Advertisers & Printers, 505, Tardeo Arthur Road, Bombay 34, and published by S. Ramakrishnan, Executive Secretary, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay 7.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

These lectures have been delivered under a scheme of the Union Ministry of Education entitled 'Promotion of Gandhian Philosophy' and are printed in this volume with their permission. The Ministry are however not responsible for the accuracy of the material nor do the views expressed therein necessarily represent the views of the Government of India.



FOREWORD

Shri U. N. Dhebar, who had been a leading lawyer before he abandoned the legal profession and entered on his political career, is a well-known figure in Indian public life and one of the prominent followers of Mahatma Gandhi. He was Chief Minister in Saurashtra for six years and has enjoyed the great distinction of being elected on three occasions as President of the Indian National Congress. He has also served on important Governmental Committees.

At the Kurukshetra University he delivered three lectures on "Gandhian Thought" the scheme of such lectures having been outlined by the Government of India in order to illustrate the various aspects of Gandhiji's life and thought.

Shri Dhebar recently delivered, under the auspices of the Annamalai University, three lectures which elicited considerable interest. He has pointed out that a Chair has been instituted in the Harvard University to undertake research on non-violence and in his first lecture, Shri Dhebar outlines his interpretation of Gandhiji's doctrine of Ahimsa and discusses its adaptability to such new and dynamic situations as are now confronting this country. He insists that Gandhiji would never have contemplated surrender in the face of aggression. Analysing non-violence and its potentialities and technique, he describes 'life force' as the motive power for our actions, Gandhiji having demonstrated the strength and effectiveness of this force. In Gandhiji's own words, "non-violence does not mean meek submission to the will of a tyrant". The elements of fearlessness or Abhaya, of conscious suffering and of forgiveness, as parts of the programme of non-violence, are elucidated by Shri Dhebar with illustrations drawn from Gandhiji's own work in South Africa and elsewhere.

In his second lecture, Shri Dhebar concentrates on non-violence as a condition pre-requisite to human survival in relation to the realities of the present world situation and the technological achievements which have created a great dilemma for the human race. He insists that no man who has reposed his faith in truth has been let down by nature. He adds "we cannot face the problems of the nuclear age with the degree of faith that was adequate for an earlier age".

The third lecture gives a picture of the future economy of India in terms of Gandhiji's programme of village-reconstruction, Eastern and Western modes of production and social organisation. He stresses that, according to Gandhiji, the essential purpose of human life was not material acquisition but a search for truth through self-purification. Civilisation, in other words, consists not in the multiplication but in the restriction of wants. At the same time, Shri Dhebar points out that Gandhiji did not work for a primitive economy but sought to make it clear that industrialisation should, as far as possible, proceed on the basis of a maximum of decentralisation.

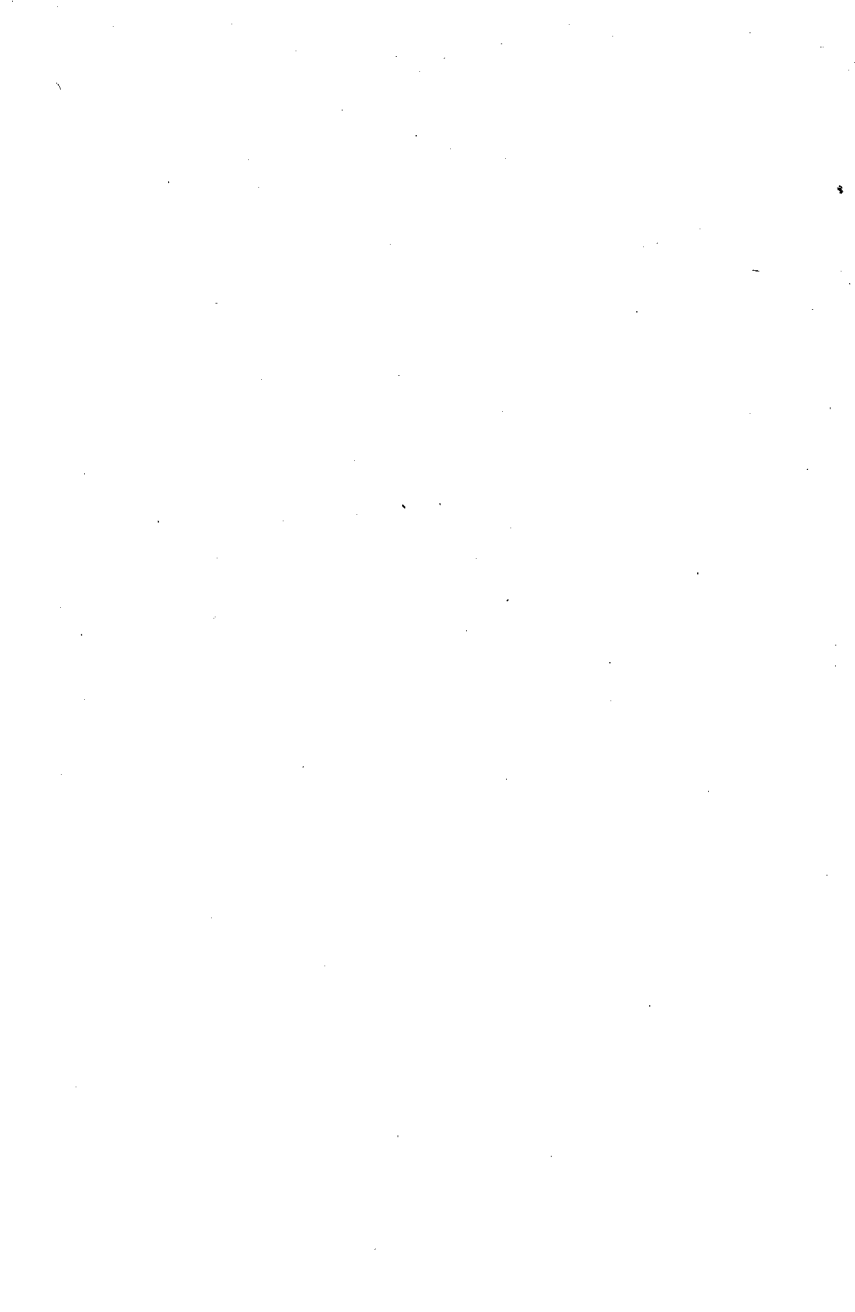
These lectures furnish a clear perspective of the Gandhian outlook on life and life's problems and are specially valuable as emanating from a fervent and talented disciple of Gandhiji.

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Vice-Chancellor.

CONTENTS

	Page
I NON-VIOLENCE AS THE LAW OF HUMAN SPECIES	1
II NON-VIOLENCE AS A CONDITION ESSENTIAL FOR HUMAN SURVIVAL	16
III SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF NON-VIOLENCE	33



I

NON-VIOLENCE AS THE LAW OF HUMAN SPECIES

Gandhian Lecture Series have now become an annual feature in most of our Universities. It may, perhaps, be known to some of you that the Harvard University has founded a Chair to undertake research on non-violence. Pitirim A. Sorokin, the Director of the Research Centre in Creative Altruism in the Harvard University, has “reverently dedicated to the deathless Mohandas K. Gandhi” his great work on “Reconstruction of Humanity” using non-violence as the main theme. Two of the eminent thinkers of the world—Sir Bertrand Russell and Dr. Martin Luther King described Gandhiji’s message as the only hope for human survival. Gandhiji, apart from the fact that he is revered as the Father of a nation comprising a sixth of the human race, has become a symbol of the aspirations of the down-trodden people of the world and of humanity’s longing for peace and harmony.

Interpretation of Gandhiji—A stupendous Task:

To interpret Gandhiji is a stupendous task. My mind goes back to a day in April 1919. I was studying in the fourth form in a Bombay High School. My elder brother took me to witness a procession. Processions are now the order of the day. In those days they were rare. The day was called the Black Sunday. Gandhiji had given a call to the Nation to observe it as a day of fast, to hold public prayers, processions and meetings and to protest against the Rowlatt Act—a repressive measure enacted to suppress the few civil liberties that existed then and suppress the demand for freedom which was getting louder and louder. We were all

II

NON-VIOLENCE AS A CONDITION ESSENTIAL FOR HUMAN SURVIVAL

We discussed what constitutes non-violence and the elements constituting the technique of non-violence as evolved by Gandhiji. Now, I come to a controversial issue of war and futility.

Humanity has entered the nuclear age. It is a culmination of far-reaching advances in the field of science and technology. Man has already reached a stage of affluence in relation to his material wants in a third of the globe. He has also acquired means to banish poverty from the rest, if he so wills. Man's interests are now not confined to the globe alone. He is reaching out to the space surrounding, the space beyond and the sister planets that move with his own. It is certainly a glorious period in the history of mankind. Every human being can take justifiable pride in the attainments of his fellow men. Man is proving the worth and value of his immense latent powers and potential.

Some Realities of World Situation:

But side by side is developing another picture. Affluence is accompanied by mental and moral sickness. Racial tensions are mounting. Society is getting divided into two polarised units armed to the teeth. Each is afraid of the other as seldom man has been before. Nuclear bombs threaten to destroy a bulk of the human species. 'Fall out' from the nuclear tests is already poisoning vegetation on which man sustains himself and is endangering posterity.

Efforts are under way to handle the situation. The United Nations has been striving for peace. But its efforts have met with limited success. Korea, Indo-China, Kash-

III

SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF NON-VIOLENCE

We take up another controversial subject. Lives of great men have always something in their approach which is of permanent value. It is for the individual studying their lives to sort out that permanent part. He should be rational enough to understand that many things that they said or did had only temporary relevance. The programmes for instance that they formulated as well as the policies they enunciated could be effective only at the time because they fulfilled the needs of the particular occasions. It would be wrong to consider all of them to be applicable at all times. If an attempt were made to apply them when they neither fitted the needs of the situation nor of the demands of time, that would result in a total fiasco. Woollens, lovingly knitted by a mother for a child of one, are good for it when it is a year old. It would be ridiculous to expect the child to put them on when it grows into a teen-ager. All that Gandhiji did during the days of struggle was so very important at the time. But what will continue to be of permanent importance to an Indian and to India is the dynamic medium of non-violence for building up or developing human relations on the essential spiritual basis of truth and justice. Similarly, we may defend ourselves militarily as we are doing today. But what is of permanent importance is to realise that wars and violence have extremely dangerous implications. They have produced contradictions which only a non-violent approach can resolve. This is being realised by great men all over the world. It is so very necessary that we realise this also and not rely on the capacity of wars and violence to solve our disputes.

