

emphasis on agricultural communities than on the growth and development of urban industrial centers.¹¹⁹ Moreover, he championed the "self-governing," self-sufficient village¹²⁰ with its emphasis on individual dignity and collective values as a model of communal organization.

PERSONALITY, VIRTUE, AND SAINTLINESS

Gandhi's greatest contribution to India's political life was his ability to provide Indians with a sense of national identity rooted in Indian history and cultural traditions. He did so by restoring pride in Indian culture and reaching out to the alienated members of India's educated westernized elite. Both the goal and the manner in which he pursued it account for much of his politically unorthodox style as well as his reputation and success. Furthermore, this approach made it possible for him to cast himself in the role of "a man engaged in politics but aspiring to saintliness,"¹²¹ while at the same time capitalizing on his charismatic leadership, his communication skills, and his ability to employ "symbols and images" that were readily accessible to an Indian audience.¹²² When properly orchestrated, the popular enthusiasm and genuine support generated by one of his campaigns could extend, as it did in South Africa, for more than six years without the benefit of a steady stream of financial support.¹²³

Gandhi's reputation in large part evolved through the saintly behavior of a gentle, diminutive man, who made his way through the world clad in a loin-cloth and sandals and armed with nothing more than a walking stick in his hand. Not all his reviewers, however, were of the same mind. For example, when Gandhi succeeded in obtaining an interview with the British viceroy of India in February 1931, Winston Churchill—who remained a stalwart defender of the British Empire and a "relentless opponent of Gandhi and India nationalism"¹²⁴—Churchill described Gandhi, making his way up the steps of the viceroy's palace clad in his loincloth, as a "half-naked fakir." Churchill's remarks were designed to cast Gandhi in the unsavory role of an ascetic Hindu monk or common mendicant. But the result of Gandhi's encounter with the viceroy was that future meetings of the Round Table Conference in London would include the congress, with Gandhi serving as a representative.¹²⁵ While in London, he gave numerous public lectures and addresses outlining his desire to see India achieve dominion status within the empire.¹²⁶ The political outcome, however, was not exactly what he had envisioned. Returning from London, in his words, "empty-handed," he and other members of the congress leadership were imprisoned for obstructing the writ of the British government and trying to set up an alternative political authority.¹²⁷

Ever true to his inner self, Gandhi insisted that in discarding European dress and manners "we all feel the freer and lighter for having cast off the tinsel of civilization."¹²⁸ His simplicity, saintly manner, and democratic instincts contributed to his personal appeal in the same way his courage and commitment magnified his public personality. Gandhi's followers frequently recalled the

"mystical," "godlike" quality of a man who was able to control vast crowds simply by raising his finger.¹²⁹ In many ways his courage was also his most distinguishing characteristic, since its strength lay not in force but in love and conscientious civil disobedience.

Standing only five feet, five inches, tall, Gandhi's big ears and, later in life, his naked gums accentuated the unattractive aspects of his face. His meticulous attention to his diet, his devout commitment to daily exercise, and his staunch advocacy of nature cures and home remedies¹³⁰ also contributed to his eccentric image. As regimented and disciplined as he was on the inside, he was equally and totally committed both internally and externally to peace and the peaceful pursuit of India's independence. He also condemned "the mad race for armaments" around the globe¹³¹ and insisted that his message of peace and love was by no means passive, but assertive in its truth. As an activist who found both frustration and comfort in trying to turn his message into political reality, he held firmly to his commitment to his fellow man and to his belief that "God could be realized only through service" to all humanity.¹³²

At the root of Gandhi's beliefs stood the unremitting, unforgiving practice of *brahmacharya*, meaning self-control or "conduct that leads one to God" through sexual self-restraint and self-denial.¹³³ In Gandhi's words: "*Brahmacharya* means control of the senses in thought, word and deed."¹³⁴ The most provocative form of this practice was the vow of celibacy, which Gandhi took at age thirty-seven and observed for forty-two years until his death,¹³⁵ contributing in large measure to the public's perception of his ambivalent attitudes toward sex. Gandhi even reflected upon his own ambivalence in his *Autobiography* when he described how a friend once took him to a brothel, which turned out to be less than a pleasurable encounter for a young man of Gandhi's sensitivity, preoccupied as he was with "carnal desire," lust, and feelings of his own guilt and moral depravity.¹³⁶ Gandhi also believed that sexual intercourse was purely a religious duty, whose sole purpose was to provide for the procreation of the human race.¹³⁷ He did, however, confess in his *Autobiography* to being "wedded to a monogamous ideal" and committed to marital fidelity as "part of the love of truth."¹³⁸ Having declared his commitment to sexual abstinence, Gandhi's life became "an open book" in which he mingled freely and openly among his friends and disciples wherever he worked, ate, and slept.¹³⁹

When he took the vow of *brahmacharya* in South Africa in 1906, Gandhi, who also suffered from chronic constipation, began his dietary experiments with fruit, nuts, goat's milk, and simple spiceless foods. His wholehearted embrace of self-denial and self-renunciation led to his adoption of fasting as an additional form of rigorous "self-restraint"¹⁴⁰ and as a means to curb "the carnal mind[s] . . . lust for delicacies and luxuries."¹⁴¹ Although the internal personal struggle was intense and "the path of purification . . . hard and steep,"¹⁴² Gandhi openly described how he slept surrounded by women who felt safe in his presence. In attempting to capture the impact of Gandhi's exceptional personality, Ved Mehta recalls how Gandhi on one occasion invited his distant cousin,

Manu, to test their ultimate purity by sleeping naked together.¹⁴³ As late as 1939 he proudly professed that if he "were sexually attracted towards women," he would "have courage enough, even at this time of life, to become a polygamist."¹⁴⁴ His critics, however, viewed his long massages and daily baths administered by young women as but "a cloak to hide his sensuality."¹⁴⁵ Nonetheless, drawing from his rigid sense of social justice and his own sexually abstemious perspective, Gandhi did condemn the notion that women were born to serve merely as "a plaything" for men,¹⁴⁶ and he viewed any reference to women as "the weaker sex" as patently libelous.¹⁴⁷ He even called upon American women to lead by example by activating their potential power and "ceas[ing] to be the toys of men's idle hours."¹⁴⁸ He also viewed women as "altogether nobler than men" because of what he viewed as their greater giving, self-sacrificing nature.¹⁴⁹ As a "champion" of social justice, he wrote as early as 1918 in favor of the "political and social emancipation of women" and supported the attempts of Indian women to secure equal status before the law and the right to vote.¹⁵⁰ His traditionalist values, however, led him to condemn abortion as a crime and to oppose granting women the right to own property, since property had already "led to the spread of immorality among men."¹⁵¹

Closely aligned with self-discipline and self-denial was the practice of *ahimsa*, which stressed nonviolence and the force of love in human relations. As the architect of a new political message, Gandhi was the first to extend the doctrine of nonviolence to the level of human and social relations.¹⁵² For Gandhi, *ahimsa* and truth were inextricably intertwined, with nonviolence serving as the means and truth as the end. He even restated the Machiavelian proposition that the ends justify the means by asserting that "the means are after all everything" and declared his own uncompromising opposition to the use of violent methods in human and political relations.¹⁵³ Gandhi would later describe nonviolence as "the greatest force at the disposal of mankind."¹⁵⁴ He did not, however, view nonviolence as passivity or cowardice but rather as the soulful manifestation of courage in the face of tyranny. He also maintained that the armed man is more of a coward than the man who rejects the use of force, because "Possession of arms implies an element of fear, if not cowardice," while "true non-violence" is unequivocally fearless.¹⁵⁵ His political goal was "to convert the British people through non-violence, and thus make them see the wrong they have done to India."¹⁵⁶ To do so, however, meant that "as one must learn the art of killing in the training of violence, one must learn the art of dying in the training for non-violence."¹⁵⁷ Ironically, it was Gandhi's quest for truth and justice through nonviolence that led him to politics and his contention that "those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means."¹⁵⁸ It is also what led him to believe that "the religion of nonviolence," which stood at "the root of Hinduism," would enable India to discard the European model based on force of arms and embrace a form of liberty in keeping with its own cultural traditions.¹⁵⁹

In India, Gandhi's kind, caring manner led his followers, and later almost an entire nation, to call him *Bapu* (father). His deep religious convictions reflected his belief that "religion was simply an ethical framework for the conduct of daily life."¹⁶⁰ His spiritual outlook also inspired his personal piety and tolerance for all religions, which are all "at the bottom . . . one and . . . helpful to one another."¹⁶¹ He believed in his search for truth that "Truth is God"¹⁶² and that man could combat despair and achieve internal peace through faith and love.¹⁶³ Gandhi also attributed his "irrepressible" optimism to his religion and to the power of God,¹⁶⁴ which enabled him to overcome his personal doubts and find meaning in his struggle for truth and justice. Although he clearly understood the nature of poverty and human suffering in India, he could not move beyond general references to the need for equal and equitable distribution of India's wealth and resources.¹⁶⁵ Nor could he embrace socialism and the idea of class warfare, preferring instead to promote nonviolence and envision a trusteeship of the rich who would learn to act on behalf of the poor.¹⁶⁶

Of the many divisions plaguing Hindu society, the caste system in particular constituted the single most pervasive form of social injustice and the main barrier to progress and reform. The system was made up of four principal castes containing myriads of subdivisions, with Brahmans at the top and the untouchables or "outcastes"¹⁶⁷ relegated to a nonstatus outside the system. The boundaries of social stratification within the system were rigid; the lines of admission carefully drawn; and once born into a caste, one remained within that caste for life. The first caste, the Brahman caste, was made up of priests and scholars; the second, the Kshatriya caste, of warriors and nobles; the third, the Vaisya caste, of farmers and traders; and the fourth, the Sudra caste, of manual laborers.¹⁶⁸ In Gandhi's case the name Gandhi, which means grocer, indicates that he was a member of the Modh-Bania subcaste of the third or Vaisya caste made up of farmers and traders.¹⁶⁹ Gandhi's own personal odyssey led him to move from his initial ambivalence toward the caste system and his upholding of in-caste marriages to his complete break with the system in 1935, when he published a piece entitled "Caste Has to Go" and accepted intercaste marriages and eventually the more explosive practice of caste-outcaste marriages. Unlike his early, ambiguous stand vis-à-vis the caste system, Gandhi remained "unequivocally" opposed to untouchability, which offended his moral sensibilities.¹⁷⁰ He also condemned the social practices of child marriage and child widowhood as examples of "ancient horrible belief[s] and superstitious practice" that he "would sweep" away "if [he] had the power."¹⁷¹

When the British attempted to introduce separate caste electorates in 1932, Gandhi rose in protest, seeing the proposal as an attempt to divide Hindu India in the same way they had divided the Hindu and Muslim communities within India. At the time of the announcement, Gandhi was still in prison in Yeravda jail after his arrest returning from the second London Round Table discussion. Gandhi's circumstances hardly diminished the strength of his conviction, and he protested directly to Downing street against the "statutory separation . . . of the

Depressed Classes . . . from the Hindu fold."¹⁷² Receiving no satisfaction, Gandhi, whose acquired name Mahatma means Great Soul (his birth name was Mohandas), unleashed what he described as his "fiery weapon" of choice and began to fast for the soul of India.¹⁷³ When asked by an American missionary if his fasting constituted a form of coercion, Gandhi replied, "Yes . . . the same kind of coercion which Jesus exercises upon you from the cross."¹⁷⁴ Gandhi's sublime presence prompted Nehru to describe Gandhi as "a magician . . . [a] little man sitting in . . . prison," who "knew [how] to pull the strings that move people's hearts."¹⁷⁵ Through his fast Gandhi managed to stalemate British policy, address the impasse between Brahmans and the untouchables, whom Gandhi referred to as "Harijans or children of God,"¹⁷⁶ and promote his social message of improving the pitiable conditions of India's impoverished masses. His actions also lent new meaning to his publicly professed desire to return as an untouchable, if he were to be reborn.¹⁷⁷

As a leader Gandhi freely admitted that he drew inspiration from great spiritual and historical figures such as Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammad.¹⁷⁸ In the West his gentle personality and reputation as a holy man inevitably led to comparisons with Jesus Christ, whom Gandhi admired as "a great world teacher."¹⁷⁹ Gandhi, who described himself as "a poor mendicant,"¹⁸⁰ was by no means immune to such religious comparisons, and he freely identified with the trials of such saintly figures as Francis of Assisi.¹⁸¹ It is, however, interesting to note that in 1927 he wanted to support "a Bill to make it criminal for any one to call me mahatma and . . . touch my feet."¹⁸² As late as 1946, he spoke with similar disdain of a project to build a statue in his honor as "a gross form of idolatry."¹⁸³ Nonetheless, despite his protests, his desire to be "always in the service of somebody or something that *needed* him" contributed to his holy image.¹⁸⁴ And while he enthusiastically embraced Jesus Christ as a religious figure, he rejected orthodox Christianity for abandoning the message of the Sermon on the Mount and becoming "the religion of kings" and war in the West.¹⁸⁵ He also extended that perception to all of Western civilization which, unlike the East, was "predominantly based on force."¹⁸⁶ When he received news of the atomic blast at Hiroshima, he recalled that he did not move a muscle and "said to himself 'Unless . . . the world adopts nonviolence, it will spell certain suicide for mankind.'"¹⁸⁷ Nehru later recalled, when he apprised Gandhi of the enormity of the blasts in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the deadly capacity of the nuclear bomb, that it appeared as if Gandhi resolved to make it his holy, God-given "mission to fight and outlaw the bomb."¹⁸⁸

PARTITION, BETRAYAL, AND SACRIFICE

At the outbreak of World War II Gandhi gave Britain and its allies his moral support. Churchill, however, did not mask his disdain for Gandhi, who in Churchill's view professed love for the British Empire while working to destroy it. In his stentorian declarations to preserve the integrity of the British