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## **GANDHI'S GIFT**

### **About the Tragic and Triumphant Final Years of Mohandas K. Gandhi**

**Project Status Report, End of Year 2013**

**By Kell Kearns, Director, Co-producer**

Our feature length documentary will guide the audience through the climactic, last eight years and four months of Gandhi's life. We begin with onset of World War II when the consequences to the British empire of global conflagration sent Gandhi's decades-long leadership of the movement for a free India hurtling rapidly toward success. But at what price? In the end as many as two million would be slaughtered in inter-religious conflict, and a fractured India would emerge with Muslim nations to the East and West. Suspicion and discord between India and Pakistan continue to this day, both of which have armed themselves with nuclear weapons against those with whom they once shared the ancient power and wisdom of the Indian subcontinent.

And, Gandhi, The Great Soul, the Father of the Nation, who peered into the human heart and found no enemies and acted every waking moment for a unified, diverse India that would lead

the world into an era of peace and dignity for all nations, spent his last days in self-imposed exile from deciding the momentous events of partition and independence.

He believed that to tear India apart was to tear his own being asunder. For the children of Mother India to slaughter each other, he viewed as a personal failure his mission to raise Ahimsa to the level of a communal, organizing principle that would guide India to nonviolent nationhood. In his final years the leader of the greatest movement in history for peaceful social change found himself buffeted by great storms of violence, rushing from atrocity to atrocity, putting out the infernos of communal bloodshed, fasting, praying, speaking, offering his own life to bring love where there was hatred, peace where there was violence. His sacrificial efforts were amazingly successful in saving lives and teaching the way in which to live.

Death by assassination always had its hand upon his shoulder. He did not fear it. If one held to truth, love, and nonviolence, then death at the misguided hands of hatred would only bring forth the triumphant truth of an intimate oneness with all of life. His was a profound faith in humanity. Was he a tragic figure, or was his faith in us and the future justified?

Gandhi packed an enormous amount of living into every day of his turbulent times of tragedy edged with triumph. Staying the course of the quintessential Satyagrahi even unto his assassination as waves of fear, violence and hatred crashed upon the rock of his spiritual foundation, his last, heroic years will transfix the audience and provide ample opportunity for flashbacks to reveal his whole story.

There is hope. Gandhi would have been the last to abandon it. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the principles and practices he initiated on the planet continue to grow. He may be more important even than when he walked the earth. As we bring his story to a new century, we will show his relevance to our times. Therefore, our locations and interviews include not only scholars of history and first hand witnesses to his life, but the works and words of Gandhians who are, today, continuing and expanding his legacy to offer solutions to our local and global crises.

## **OUR SOURCES**

We are thankful to the Gandhi Foundation and the Serve All Trust, London for helping bring this project this far, as well as interfaith organizations, individuals and spiritual centers that make up our loyal funding sources in the United States.

We are especially grateful to the support we've received from the Gandhian community of India, most notably, The Sarvodaya International Trust and the Gandhi Research Foundation. They are indispensable to our efforts. Our decades of reading Gandhi, our eight nonstop weeks of filming the places of his life and extensive gathering of archival photos and film footage, are not enough. As Americans, reared in America, it would be impossible to understand the man Gandhi and the vast, profound sea of India out of which he came, without their help. We need them at every

turn, not just as fact checkers, but to help us interpret the nuances of Gandhi's reactions to events and relationships with friends and would-be enemies. We feel a great responsibility to get his story *right*. Our friends in India are our living connection to Gandhi.

## LOCATIONS AND INTERVIEWS

As did Gandhi we traversed much of India by train, filming as we went and capturing the feel of his own travel through his beloved homeland. The real stars of the film are the people of India, which we filmed in ways that transcend time, in all their vibrant colors, ancient wisdom, rich diversity of culture and religion, devotion, adherence to familial values, dignity even in poverty, joy, sorrow and, most of all, tenacious survivability.

### **Here are the locations we have filmed:**

#### **London**

1. University College, where Gandhi studied law.
2. The Houses of Parliament and government, a source of admiration and affection for Gandhi, even as he became the premier revolutionary in the world opposed to the policies of British imperialism.
3. India House, a center for Indian ex-patriot radicalism, where violence was often espoused. Gandhi spoke there of his unwavering belief in nonviolence.
4. Kingsley Hall, Gandhi's residence in London during the 1931 Round Table Conference.

#### **Wardha**

5. Sevagram Ashram, his home for the last decade of his life.
6. Heritage Building at Jamanlal Bajaj Central Research Institute Wardha (Gandhi's earlier residence in Wardha) and the place of Congress Working Committee meetings.
7. Anand Niketan School, founded by Gandhi, using his philosophy of Nai Talim or New Education.

#### **Mumbai**

8. Mani Bhavan, Gandhi's headquarters in Mumbai
9. Jinnah's Mumbai home, where crucial meetings occurred between Gandhi and the future first President of Pakistan.
10. August Kranti Maidan, where Gandhi delivered the "Quit India" speech.

11. Juhu Beach, where Gandhi went to heal, re-create and contemplate.

### **Pune**

12. Yerwada Jail, where he spent several years.

13. Aga Khan Palace, a place of Gandhi's incarceration during "Quit India", where Kasturba and Mahadev died and Gandhi fasted.

### **Ahmedabad**

14. Sabarmati Ashram, from which he began the Salt March.

15. Kochrab Ashram, where he first allowed "untouchables" as inmates.

16. Gujarat Vidyapith, the upper level school he founded using Gandhian educational principles.

### **New Delhi**

17. Gandhi Smriti, Birla House, the site of his assassination.

18. Gandhi Samadhi, Raj Ghat, the site of his cremation.

19. The Presidential Palace and halls of government, visited many times over the years as Gandhi negotiated the freedom of India.

20. Birla Temple, inaugurated by Gandhi on the stipulation that it be open to all people.

21. Sweeper's Colony, Gandhi's preferred residence, among the Harijans, or Dalits.

22. Sacred Heart Cathedral, Buddhist Temple of the Maha Bodhi Society of India, Gurudwara Bangla Sahib, Jami Masjid, filmed to display the religious diversity of India and Gandhi's support of it.

### **Alwar**

23. We filmed the lives, families and homes of the former scavenger women educated, given work and self-esteem, by Sulabh International. We filmed 40 of them, entering the temple together for worship, a feat that only a few years ago was forbidden.

### **Jaipur**

24. The Jaipur Foot Foundation, a perfect example of Gandhian appropriate technology used to uplift the poor and disadvantaged by making them self-reliant. Over a million have been given new feet and legs for free at the cost of \$40. apiece. Such prosthetics can cost up to \$10,000. in the US.

### **Kolkata**

25. Sodepur Ashram, the center of his operations in Kolkata.
26. Hydari Manzil, the residence where Gandhi stayed in a show of unity with Bengal Muslim leader Suhrawardy after “The Great Killings”; there he was mobbed, and fasted, and produced the “Kolkata Miracle”.
27. The Kali Temple, visited by Gandhi on his first trip there, where he decried the mass sacrifice of goats.

### **Shimla**

28. The Vice Regal Lodge, site of meetings between Gandhi, the Viceroy and Indian leaders.
29. The Manorville Mansion in Shimla, Gandhi’s residence there.

### **Dehradun**

30. Navdanya Farm, founded by Vandana Shiva to develop and implement practices designed to increase productivity and assure sustainability for the local, small farmer.

### **Kolhapur**

31. We filmed the heartbreaking conditions of women and children working and living at the brickyards, and Avani Schools, dedicated to the uplift and education of these erstwhile “untouchables”.

### **Palitana, Gujarat**

32. As part of our sequence on the religious diversity of India, we filmed Satrunjaya, a mountain covered with over 800 Jain temples, and documented a visit there by the **Dalai Lama**, where he conversed with Jain scholars on the subject of Ahimsa and inter-religious harmony.

### **Noakhali**

33. Our American-Bangladeshi hosts in Noakhali, who run an orphanage and school there, offered us lodging and transportation at an earlier date than we had planned. We were unable to obtain journalist visas in time to join them. If the budget allows we want to retrace Gandhi’s pilgrimage through Noakhali. As an insurance policy we spent a day filming southeast of Diamond Harbor near the India-Bangladesh border. Advisors familiar with Noakhali tell us that the people, villages, wetlands and forests match Noakhali. Indeed, the whole premise of Gandhi in going to Noakhali was that the people of East Bengal were the same on either side of the proposed border. Combined with the extensive photographs and film footage we have acquired of Gandhi’s pilgrimage, we can still effectively tell this poignant episode, which is emblematic of the courage of his final years.

## **Interviews conducted**

The greatest gift given us in making this documentary has been to come to know extraordinary human beings who devote their lives to Ahimsa, non-possessiveness, the education of self-reliance, and the courage to speak truth to power. Our interviewees have been unfailingly generous in offering their time and knowledge. Clearly there will not be time for all of these interviews even in a feature length film. Our choices will make up three categories: 1. Narrative interviews that carry the whole story and will be interspersed throughout the script. 2. Episodic interviews that prove strongest when applied to one aspect of Gandhi's life. 3. Those interviews which, regrettably, we do not have time to use, and must enfold the information they provide into the voice-over narration.

### **Here are the people in *The Hero's Journey of Mahatma Gandhi*:**

**1. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi**, who, obviously we do not interview in person, but whose words will suffuse the film. He published over 9,000 pages of his own writing. No one is better than the Mahatma in communicating the deepest truths of himself, his people, his times and the potential of Ahimsa to transform the world. One of our remaining tasks is to find the person who will become the voice of Gandhi.

**2. Dr. Rajmohan Gandhi** is a historian and recently retired Research Professor at University of Illinois, author of "Gandhi: The Man, His People and The Empire", an exhaustively documented, unvarnished history of his grandfather. We interviewed Dr. Gandhi for four hours in his university office. He gave us a thorough overview of Gandhi's life at times combined with his own vivid childhood memories of Bapu in the weeks leading up to his assassination.

**3. Narayan Desai** is the son of Gandhi's longtime beloved secretary, Mahadev Desai. Narayan grew up in Gandhi's ashrams and had regular contact with the Mahatma. At Bapu's request he taught the younger children in the ashram using Gandhi's revolutionary educational techniques. Now in his late 80s, Desai proved in our two-hour interview that his memories are strong and passionate. He is the author of the acclaimed 4 volume Gandhi biography, "My Life is My Message," written with the aid of his father's day-by-day diaries of living and working with Gandhi.

**4. D.R. Mehta** is the former chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission of India, former Deputy Chairman of the Reserve Bank of India, recipient of many awards for a lifetime of altruism. He is a true Gandhian. We interviewed him at the headquarters of Bhagwan Mahaveer Viklang Sahayata Samiti in Jaipur. Under his leadership, it has become the largest organization for the handicapped in the world, providing artificial limbs/calipers and other aids and appliances for free to over a million people. Our interview revolved around Ahimsa (the pure form of Gandhi's nonviolence), inter-religious harmony, the karma of compassion, and the Gandhian value of austerity. In an aside that says much about Mehta's daily life, he allowed us to accompany him to the temple he built on the grounds of his foundation. There we filmed his prayers.

**5. Pascal Alan Nazareth** is retired from the India Foreign Service; he held the post of Ambassador in many countries. He is the author of “Gandhi’s Outstanding Leadership”, and the Managing Trustee of the Sarvodaya International Trust which has as its task the spread of Gandhi’s story, values and activism globally. Nazareth’s book weaves examples of Gandhi’s thought and action as a political and spiritual leader with many examples of ways he has influenced history, thinkers and activists since his death. The premise aligns with our film. His excellent interview is central. Nazareth’s insights flow nonstop and stand out all the more because of his easy laugh and penetrating humor.

**6. Dr. Chandrashekhar Dharmadhikari** is a retired Justice of the High Court of Bombay. He joined Gandhi’s “Quit India” movement from its outset at the age of 14. His parents were dedicated to Gandhi and arrested many times during the freedom movement. Dharmadhikari is a respected author and speaker. He chairs commissions on matters such as justice for women rape victims, the death penalty, the plight of the poor, and animal welfare. He gave a riveting interview full of memories of Gandhi at the Sevagram Ashram, where he accompanied the Mahatma on daily walks. Gandhi was a close friend to his family of Satyagrahis. When jail became a mentally devastating hardship for his mother, Gandhi offered to nurse her to health. In a wide-ranging interview Dharmadhikari offered a sharp analytical, Gandhian perspective on today’s events, as well as his vibrant memories.

**7. Dr. MP Mathai** is a world-renowned Gandhian scholar, author and activist. He speaks with the passion and knowledge of someone deeply rooted in the life and message of Gandhi and totally conversant on how to apply that life and message to our generation and the future. Our conversation ranged from his reflections on many aspects of Gandhi’s final years, to the work that still needs to be done as regards de-centralization and village self-sufficiency, his teaching of Satyagraha in Mexico designed to alleviate the drug wars, and the direct action he has joined in India to bring attention to the plight of the farmer and the establishment of nuclear power plants.

**8. Dr. Bhavarlal H. Jain**, founder of The Gandhi Research Center, and Jain Irrigation Systems. Our interview took place at the monumental educational facility, research center and museum Jain has built in dedication to the life, ministry and global impact of Gandhi. His interview was filled with deep and wide-ranging insights, including the basic tenets of Gandhi’s spiritual philosophy, a description of Gandhian economics and how it applies to the conduct of business, his determination to provide affordable irrigation for the small, self-sustaining farmer in line with Gandhi’s concept of local agriculture, and the great tragedy and courage of Gandhi’s final years.

**9. Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak** is perhaps the premier Gandhian social reformer in India devoted to the integration of former untouchables into the mainstream of Indian life, and the improvement of sanitation practices throughout the country. A Brahmin of the highest caste who has devoted himself to lifting the lives of those of the lowest caste, there may be no one better in India to talk about Gandhiji’s struggle to end untouchability. We discussed the schools he has founded to give former untouchables new vocations and self-esteem, the 640 towns in which he has completely eliminated scavenging (the demeaning job description of carrying head loads of human

excrement from residential areas), and the more than 54 million public toilets he has built throughout India.

**10. Dr. Arun Gandhi** accompanied our camera to significant Gandhi sites such as Mani Bhavan, Gujarat Vidyapith, Gandhi Smriti, and Raj Ghat. He reflected upon his grandfather and shared personal memories of the lessons Gandhi taught him at Sevagram.

**11. Mairead Maguire** is a Nobel Peace Laureate from Northern Ireland. She talked with us about nonviolence as a global tool for transformation of individuals and societies.

**12. James W. Douglass** is nonviolent Catholic activist and author of many books such as “The Nonviolent Cross” and “The Nonviolent Coming of God.” His latest is “Gandhi and the Unspeakable”. Our interview dealt with Gandhi’s concept of the sacrificial, victorious death of the Satyagrahi and belief that unearned suffering is redemptive, with various examples from throughout his life of how Gandhi dealt with the possibility of his assassination.

**13. Smt. Sushama Sharma** is the Director of the Anand Niketan School, founded by Gandhi next to Sevagram Ashram. She eloquently describes Gandhi’s philosophy of Nai Talim or New Education and its relevance to our 21<sup>st</sup> century world, emphasizing the cornerstone principles of absolute equality and non-exploitative, cooperative relationships with each other and the environment. She gave us a tour of the School, where “new individuals” are being nurtured.

**14. Malti Deshmukh** is a current Sevagram ashramite of 14 years. She describes the discipline, joys, and challenges of life in a Gandhi ashram. We see her in the ashram kitchen as she prepares hearty, healthy meals for the inmates with fresh ingredients from the ashram garden. Her face reflects her life of compassion, peace and service.

**15. Neelam Narayan Mahajan** is the Curator of Aga Khan Palace. Having worked on the premises and studied its history for 32 years, Neelam Mahajan conveys an expert enthusiasm for Gandhi's life, his imprisonment at the Palace and those with whom he shared those tragic 21 months. She is detailed in her description of the dark times when Gandhi lost the two people to whom he felt closest, his beloved wife and personal secretary.

**16. Kapilaben Vankar, Jyoti Macwan**, The President and General Secretary, respectively, of the SEWA, the Self Employed Women’s Association, a community of over 4 million women practicing Gandhian principles of local sustainability and women’s equality.

**17. Dr. Vinod Kumar Blatt**, Director, Navdanya Farm, explained the continuation into the 21<sup>st</sup> century through the experiments at Navdanya of Gandhi’s efforts at village and small farmer self-sustainability by way of local agriculture and the use of inexpensive appropriate technology.

**18. Anuradha Bhosale**, Director, Avani Schools, Kolhapur, rose from her beginnings as the orphaned daughter of a scavenger to become a social activist and educator. We talked of her background, her adherence to Gandhi educational principles and her life’s work on behalf of the

poorest, least educated women and children living in the horrid conditions of the brickyards of Kolhapur.

## **STOCK FOOTAGE AND PHOTOGRAPHS**

We have selected and acquired 125 archival photos of Gandhi and the Independence movement. We have acquired archival film footage of Gandhi in Noakhali, but need more from other times in his life. In our own archives we possess much footage of Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement and will include some of it in a segment on the most famous usage in the US of Gandhi's philosophy of social change. We wish to acquire a small number of scenes from the many other examples of the triumph of nonviolent direct action around the world.

## **WE NEED YOUR HELP**

We have now moved into the most critical part of making a documentary biography of this importance and magnitude –post production writing and editing. After two years of concentrated work on ***Gandhi's Gift***, our production grants have been put to good use but are depleted. We need your financial help to give this film to the world.

Please go to our website if you want to know more about the global distribution of our past works. Know that just as our earlier films have been broadcast 1000s of times on television in the US, and screened at theatres and interfaith and peace conferences around the world.....that Gandhi's story, so essential for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, will reach and, we hope, inspire and educate even more people.

With your help ***Gandhi's Gift*** can be completed by the end of 2014. Contact us, please, about our budget and remaining funding need.