



RAJNI BAKSHI

GANDHI IN 2020

**His was a creative resistance that acknowledges
and also transcends past hurts**

In 2020, MORE than usual, it is vital to cultivate freedom from resentment. This is what made Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolence possible.

We now live in a time when a wide variety of political mobilizations are driven by the need to allay historical wrongs and related hurt. Consequently, much of the conflict between competing groups tends to mired in minute historical detail. For instance, those who have learnt to denigrate Gandhi emphasise specific "wrong" actions in his prolific political life- not his fundamental insights. This is as true for those who denounce Gandhi for being anti-Hindu as those who are convinced that he was a racist.

For all such critics, it may be worthwhile to revisit Gandhi's famous life-defining moment on that train journey in 1893 from Durban to Pretoria. Gandhi was forcibly evicted from the first-class compartment because he was a "coloured" man. The bitter cold night that Gandhi spent on a lonely railway station in a strange country could have become a life-long trauma. As he shivered through the night in the station's waiting room, Gandhi did consider running back home to Rajkot. But eventually, he began to think of his duty. The real culprit, Gandhi realised, was not that particular man who had him thrown off the train. That man's behavior was merely "a symptom of the deep disease of colour prejudice." Therefore, resentment towards his offender was a waste of time and energy. By contrast, trying ".....if possible, to root out the disease and suffer hard ships in the process" seemed truly worth while. Gandhi, later, described the incident the railway station as a "creative experience" that changed the course of his life. He said "My active nonviolence began from that date." This sequence of action and reaction illustrates powerful and universal truths.

It is commonly argued that resentment must be nurtured, as a form of energy of righting old wrongs. The opposite of this, it is fearfully assumed, must be apathy or indifference. Gandhi's life has epochal implications precisely because he showed this to be a false assumption

- morally and empirically.

As individuals and as members of an identity group most people have some experience of hurt, humiliation or unfairness. This common experience leads to a fork in the journey of life. Does a person, or group, choose the path of resentment or of creative resistance?

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Resentment latches onto, and indefinitely expands, the experience of hurt. A life, or indeed a politics, based on resentment must keep finding new reasons to feel belittled. Even when it is dressed up in revolutionary fervor, resentment remains rooted in memories of powerlessness. This is why it feeds a desire for vengeance, for settling scores.

By contrast, creative resistance of the Gandhi Kind arises from the ability to depersonalize the hurt and insult. This releases creative energies which are exponentially empowering and enable renewal. It is only on this track that one can seek to right old wrongs through restorative justice- process which heals wounds of both victims and perpetrators.

Acknowledging this truth is relatively easy. The difficulty lies in accepting that it applies to all of us regardless of our political preferences. This is what makes Gandhi Jayanti in 2020 particularly poignant.

This is the year when the Ram Janmabhoomi movement was officially granted its moment of triumph. This movement was based on Hindu resentment about destruction of temples in the past. Its far-reaching success lies in persuading enough Hindus to ignore the violence and politics of vengeance, which led up to the construction of a new temple. Freedom from resentment could be the counter-magnet that persuades them otherwise, attracts them to a different space.

However, the onus for this lies with all us who opposed the Ayodhya movement. Just now it is advocates of "sarva dharma sambhav", equal respect for all faiths, who are experiencing a "thrown-off-the-train" moment. We can respond with resentment and deepen the cycle of conflict. Or we can demonstrate creative resistance, which both acknowledges and transcends past hurts.

How is this to be done? There are as many answers to this question as there are individuals engaged in exploring it. We could, each one of us, experiment in the very next argument in the family on these issues. Regardless of the specific issue or dispute-freedom from resentment promises to be a winner a leveller.

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