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## Continuing the Gandhi Legacy: An Interview with Arun Gandhi

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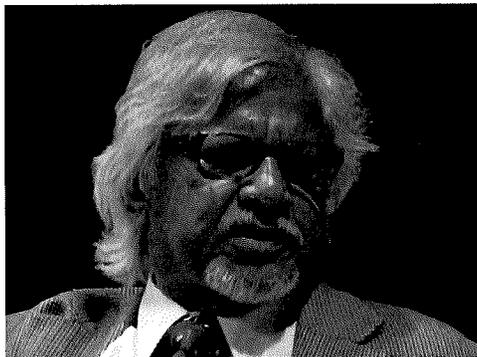
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## Continuing the Gandhi Legacy: An Interview with Arun Gandhi

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*Arun Gandhi, October 2010*

[Arun Gandhi (1934- ) is the fifth grandson of Mohandas Gandhi. Arun's father, Manilal (1892-1956), second son of Mohandas and Kasturba Gandhi, was sent by his father to run the Phoenix Farm ashram outside of Durban, South Africa, and this is where Arun Gandhi was raised. In his memoir *Legacy of Love: My Education in the Path of Nonviolence*, Arun Gandhi clearly recalls life in the ashram, his parents' adherence to Mahatma Gandhi's principles of nonviolence, his father's involvement in nonviolent resistance to apartheid (and his resultant fourteen years of imprisonment). In addition, he then focuses on how it came to pass that he was taken by his parents to India at age 12 (in 1946) to live with his grandfather at Sevagram Ashram, primarily, and receive close personal tutoring from him in the philosophy of nonviolence. That personalized mentorship offered by Mahatma Gandhi extended for eighteen months, from 1946-1948. Arun returned home to South Africa at the age of 14, and shortly thereafter his grandfather was assassinated in India.

Arun Gandhi recounts how, in Durban at age ten and within the span of just a few months, he was beaten first by several white teenagers, then by a gang of black youths. As he has often remarked, he was beaten first for being too dark, then for being too light. "...the scars will remain forever. It is now more than [sixty-five] years since

these incidents, but I can still see the hate-filled eyes of the young men, and feel the pain and anguish of every blow" (*Legacy* 58). His response at that time was to plan for vengeance:

As a youth, I naturally succumbed to the temptations to seek "eye-for-an-eye" justice. I was not endowed with the wisdom or the foresight to transform these violent racial experiences into positive action for justice. I simply buried the anger and humiliation deep inside of me and secretly vowed to someday get revenge. I joined a program of bodybuilding and weightlifting to prepare for the day when I would finally get my pound of flesh. (*Legacy* 62)

When his parents learned of his seething anger and his determination to avenge himself on his assailants, they decided it was time to approach his grandfather about the possibility of spending time with him in India. Despite his obviously heavy schedule and vast number of personal demands on his time, Mahatma Gandhi agreed to take in his grandson Arun.

Arun recounts many stories of the months with his grandfather, as well as the experience of growing up under his father. Two stories stand out for their poignancy. The first regards an indelible lesson in nonviolent parenting. Arun's father asked him (when Arun was seventeen years old) to drive him one day into Durban for a conference. Arun was free to spend the day largely as he chose, but was also asked to attend to various chores in the city, one of them being to take the car in for basic servicing. Manilal made it clear that Arun was to pick him up at the conference site at 5:00 pm. Arun decided to attend a matinee at the local movie theater, and he was especially thrilled because the theater was showing a John Wayne double-feature. After the first film, Arun felt it was too early to leave; he would need to leave half way through the second feature. However, he became so engrossed in the second film that he forgot to slip out, retrieve the car, and get his father on time. When he arrived an hour late, his father asked him why he was tardy. Too embarrassed to admit he had been watching a violent double-feature western, he lied and said the car was not ready on time. Manilal, who had called ahead and therefore knew that the car was ready on time, told Arun that as a father he *must* have failed; why else would his son need to avoid the truth? Consistent with the philosophy of nonviolence, he would thus undertake penance. Arun's father walked the eighteen miles home, in hard shoes, across the countryside, and mostly in the dark. Nothing Arun could say would convince his father to get into the car, so he was forced to drive behind him at a snail's pace, agonizing the entire time. "Not only is this incident still fresh in my mind, but I often wonder what my reaction would have

been if I had been punished. The penance that father did made me feel remorseful enough to promise I would never do it [lie] again. . . . I learned a lifelong lesson from it, a lesson in nonviolent parenting that I will never forget" (*Legacy* 105).

A second lesson of poignant significance involves his grandfather impressing on his grandson the importance of understanding and avoiding passive violence. The elder Gandhi went to great lengths to clarify the differences between active and passive violence, and to assist his grandson in seeing how our many acts of passive violence can serve as fuel for active violence from others. While grandfather and grandson were together in Pune, the young Gandhi, on his way home from school one day, threw a mere stub of a pencil into the bushes. When he arrived home and informed his grandfather that he would need a new pencil, his grandfather pressed him. Where was the pencil? Why had he thrown it away? Did it no longer write? He told his grandson to go back and find it. When Arun protested that it was a long way from home, the elder Gandhi told him he had better get started; since it was growing dark, he gave his grandson a flashlight. After searching in the roadside bushes for about two hours, Arun found the pencil stub and returned home. His grandfather then sat him down for an important lesson concerning passive violence. He lectured his grandson about disregarding and wasting natural resources, which is violence against nature. He also urged him to see that because labor was required for the pencil's production, tossing it away is an act of violence against humanity. Further, wasting or hoarding resources diverts them from people who have less; poverty may lead to resentment, resentment can lead to anger, and anger may express itself in physical violence. "Always remember that wasting anything is violence, and every action makes a difference somewhere in the world" (*Legacy* 109). "No small action in the cause of peace can be neglected," Arun reflects, as he considers the extensive exercises his grandfather led him through in order to realize that "if we eliminate passive violence in ourselves, and strive toward influencing others wherever we can, we will generate a considerable decline in the amount of violence that prevails in our societies today" (*Legacy* 111).

The gist of these two important episodes during Arun Gandhi's formative years helps to clarify the nature of his efforts in continuing the work, in his own ways, of both his grandfather and his father. Arun Gandhi has accepted the challenge of continuing the Gandhi legacy. While living in India he served as a reporter for *The Times of India* (1957–87) and became acutely aware of a range of issues. As he did so, he founded the *Center for Social Unity* together with his wife of fifty years, Sunanda (1932–2007). He then went on to establish the *M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence*, the *Gandhi Worldwide Hunger*

*Fund*, and the *Gandhi Worldwide Education Fund*. He has emerged over the years as a tireless advocate for nonviolent change in the world, as author, regular contributor of solicited blogs ("On Faith") to *The Washington Post*, and as a frequent speaker in many places across the world.

On October 11, 2010, I sat down with Arun Gandhi for a personal interview, focusing on some of his individual experiences, his current work, and his hopes for the future of seeing principles of nonviolence flourish in a contentious world.]

**Geoffrey Kain:** When and how has the Gandhi legacy proved to be a liberating force for you, on the one hand...and then on the other, how has it posed any personal challenges for you?

**Arun Gandhi:** There are many challenges involved in living up to that name, to live up to all of those expectations that people have of you. I found it to be very challenging as far back as when I was a teenager because I tended to be a little bit on the fat side. My friends used to kid me by saying, "You can't be Gandhi's grandson; you are so *fat*. I mean he is so thin and lean and you are so heavy. How can you possibly be his grandson?" All of those kinds of things played a little too much on my mind, early on, and one day I told my mother, "I don't know how I am going to go through life with all of these pressures put on me," and she said, "It is entirely up to you. You can either think of this legacy as a burden that will become heavier and heavier as you grow older, or you can think of it as a life that is illuminating the path ahead for you. That could make it easier for you to deal with it." So since then I have been trying to look at this legacy as a light, and I think in many ways it shows me the way. I feel kind of an inside voice, somebody directing me in the direction I need to go.

**GK:** I am aware of some of the many directions you have gone in pursuing that light, and in shining that light for others along the way. Thinking in terms of a direct line of transmission, have you had any specific expectations of your own son? Have you focused on continuing the lineage by trying to implant the ideals of nonviolence in your own children?

**AG:** Well, I know that my own parents did not have any specific expectations of us as their children [regarding nonviolent political action], but they lived the life themselves, and so we grew up with that, and when you grow up seeing your parents doing certain things it makes, it easier for you to learn from them. So I think it has come naturally to me. Even in their relationship with us, it was always

nonviolent, peaceful, and respectful. So I try to do the same thing with my children, and I am very happy that it seems to have had the same effect on them as it did on me. Both my son and daughter have grown up to be wonderful, and in their own way they are carrying on the legacy. I have followed my father's example. My father never told me to go ahead and do this kind of work; they left it entirely up to me to decide what I would want to do.

**GK:** Do you see that as an example of nonviolence, as you describe it? That is, not imposing an expectation but teaching by example, then retreating and hoping that the ideals will have taken root?

**AG:** Yes. I think it is part of the philosophy of nonviolence. You know, when we as parents put our hopes and ambitions on our children, they may very well not have the same hopes and ambitions. That becomes then a burden to live up to that kind of thing. Leave it to them to decide for themselves and learn from their experiences with their parents. I think that is much more powerful. It is kind of like being a leader in any situation, whether it is in corporate or in social life, or whatever. If the leader is telling people what to think or what to do, then it is like leading a herd of sheep. Quietly they need to follow you, no matter what. The kind of leadership example my grandfather offered is that he empowered the people. He did not tell them what they needed to do, but broadly gave them guidance. He empowered the people to find their own way into the struggle. He was able to make people feel that what they could accomplish would come from them and that they are very much a part of this thing. I think that that kind of attitude needs to be nurtured.

**GK:** Since there were certainly other ideas at work regarding best methods to achieve Indian independence—including violent means of achieving that goal—how confident do you think your grandfather was that the masses of people would move more in his direction than in the direction of physical, revolutionary violence?

**AG:** I think he was quite confident about it because he lived it, he practiced it, and the people saw him and were moved to follow him. Of course he very, very clearly made the point that violence is part of the evil system we exist in, so if we participate in that we only sink deeper into that whole evil system. The right thing to do is to change the whole system, and the way to do it is through nonviolence. People began to see the wisdom in his method, and they decided on their own to join with him. This is something I have been asked a few times: If nonviolence was so effective, why is it that the Tibetan people and the

Dalai Lama have not been able to use it so effectively against the Chinese? My reply has been that there is a difference in the leadership that the Dalai Lama offers and the leadership that my grandfather offered. The Dalai Lama is held by his people as a godly figure, and he cannot be seen as someone who is going to suffer humiliation or suffer imprisonment, be tortured or be beaten, or anything like that. He is above these things, whereas my grandfather was simple. He was one of the people. He led all of the movements from up front. If he wanted the people to go to prison, he was the first to go into prison. If he wanted the British laws to be defied, he was the first to defy the laws. So what I am trying to say here is that in a nonviolent struggle, the leader has to lead from up front. You can not sit in the comfort of your home or your office and tell other people that you have to go and do this or do that. And this is really what happens with the Dalai Lama. In absentia he tells people that they need to behave nonviolently or protest using nonviolence, but he is not there, in person, to lead them. And that makes a very big difference.

**GK:** Regarding imprisonment, I am aware that your own father was imprisoned for fourteen years in South Africa. What was the impact of that on you, personally, on your family, on your mother?

**AG:** Well, it was not actually fourteen years consecutively; it was off and on over time. It was obviously traumatic to see your dad being incarcerated and even tortured. When he would be released from prison he used to be in awful health, and we could see it in him. The other side of it is that we also felt proud that he was standing up for his beliefs, doing the right thing, and sometimes that means suffering the consequences.

**GK:** I have read your reflections on what you learned from your grandfather about anger, about harnessing and channeling anger into constructive pursuits, but I have to wonder about your feelings at seeing your father taken away, repeatedly. How strong was your own anger then, and how did you handle it?

**AG:** Yes, when I was younger I used to feel angry and feel very frustrated, and I wondered when these people would learn to eradicate these prejudices and behave in a more civilized way. But as I grew older and absorbed better the lessons my parents showed me in how to deal with this anger and make it more constructive, I began to change my attitudes.

**GK:** Can you offer an example of a situation when your father was arrested? Was it typically during a public protest, or exactly what was it that would spur the authorities to make that move?

**AG:** In South Africa it was very simple to get arrested [*chuckles*]. There are many things that non-white people were not allowed to do: for example, entering a main railway station through the front gate. Non-whites were of course not allowed to enter through that gate, and if the white police officer saw you, you could be arrested for that. Or sitting on a park bench; it would be clearly labeled "For Whites Only," and if a person of color sat there, you may well be arrested. So it was very easy to be arrested, especially because my father followed my grandfather's principles. When he defied the apartheid laws, he did not do it quietly, he announced it. He told everybody from the city mayor down to the police department . . . or wrote them letters . . . that on so-and-so date at such-and-such a place I am going to defy your apartheid laws. So there were always police waiting for him to come there and a crowd waiting there. He would come and sit there (or whatever) and they would immediately arrest him and take him away.

**GK:** Regarding segregation laws and racism, when you came to the United States in the mid-1980s, you established yourself at the University of Mississippi to compare racism/segregation in the southern US, India, and South Africa. Did you perceive any surprising differences, or did you find a striking similarity or uniformity of injustice across these borders?

**AG:** The differences I found mainly were that in South Africa the segregation was color-based. It did not matter which place you came from or which race you belonged to. Sometimes they took it to the ridiculous extent that even white people when they got a deep suntan would be considered to be "non-white"; such people temporarily would not be admitted into hotels or be able to sit on those park benches or have other privileges reserved for whites only because they were suspect, they were dark skinned . . . until they could (later) prove they were in fact white. This is what I mean that it was strictly color based and race did not, in fact, matter at all.

In India it was against our own people, against people where there were no physical differences. If three or four of us were sitting together, you may not know who is upper class who is lower class—we all look very similar. But we certainly found ways of defining this and discriminating against the low-caste people.

And then in the US I found that prejudice/discrimination was directed against a whole group of people, though I wouldn't even say

against an entire race. A lot of the people who came here from Africa after slavery are more acceptable to some white Americans than are those who have come out of slavery. I have found that a lot of the African American people realize this, so they might take the opportunity when serving in Germany or somewhere in Europe, for example, to acquire an accent from there, and they would then return here and use this Europeanized accent and everyone might think they did not have their roots in slavery.

These were the differences I found, but the practice of discrimination, the way we discriminate, the things we did to people were basically the same kind of thing, the same humiliation, the same difficulties. I found also that in all three cases the common factor was that all three have their roots in economic exploitation. At some stage or another in some situation we needed a pool of exploitable labor and we created that pool by this system.

**GK:** During this comparative study did you also travel to the north in the US, and if so, what did you find? More differences? Or more of the same?

**AG:** I traveled a bit in the north and I did study that and I found what has been referred to by another eminent author (whose name escapes me at the moment), but he also said the same thing, that in the north they love the community but despise the individual, whereas in the south they love the individual but despise the community. Even today I find some vestiges of racism still persist and prejudices still persist. I feel it sometimes myself, for example when I am traveling. The airline stop, and all that. I notice this when we are boarding a flight. Usually the airline attendant is standing there and greeting everyone as they board the flight, and then sometimes when I walk by they become silent, but then they start greeting the white people coming behind me. I wonder why this happens. It must have to do with color prejudice, or with race prejudice. It does happen.

**GK:** Keeping in mind separation, but also returning to the topic of your grandfather . . . we all know that he was vehemently opposed to the partition of India. Given the range of conflicts we have witnessed since then, along with the current entanglements of the US, Pakistan, Afghanistan, of course Kashmir. . . . Could you extrapolate or project how perhaps your grandfather might respond to current situations in the broader region? Would you be willing to imagine, for example, if he were able to sit now with Jinnah . . . what might the substance of that conversation be, some sixty years later?

**AG:** Well, naturally I think that my grandfather would likely say, "See, I told you that this would go on and on, festering, and wouldn't be resolved." Jinnah hopefully would have seen the wisdom of his mistake, or realized the mistake that he had made. However, he was actually urged on by Churchill. When it became apparent that the British would have to leave and give independence to India, he made a statement in Parliament that he would make them sorry for breaking up the British Empire. He encouraged Jinnah to insist on the partition of the country, and Jinnah like a fool fell into that trap, insisting that partition should take place. Now we are paying the price. Exactly what Churchill wanted to happen, and he did it.

**GK:** More imaginings: . . . Reading *Hind Swaraj*, for example, and seeing your grandfather's insistence throughout on agrarianism and a village-centered India, on purging the country of any western influences such as mechanization, mass production, mechanized mass transportation, competition, commercialism/materialism, etc. If he were to return today, what would he think of contemporary, independent India?

**AG:** I think he would be very unhappy with the change of direction in India, not because of industrialization but because we have ignored a vast portion of the population and caused division so that half the population lives in poverty and the other half lives in relative affluence. And he saw this happening. You know, one thing we need to remember is that we tend to take his writing, such as *Hind Swaraj*, which he wrote in 1908 in different circumstances and in a different mindset, and he at that point came to the conclusion that nothing that the West can offer will help us, that we need to help ourselves, that we need to reject everything Western. I think it was that sudden and cruel realization that the British were not all that they were made out to be. Until 1908 or 1909 he really admired the British. Then he saw that they really did not stand for their word, their word did not mean anything; they would say one thing and do something else, and that is when he was so disgusted with them . . . he registered his disgust with them in this book. He often said that truth keeps changing, and I have to change along with the truth. So to accept dogmatically what he wrote at that time and that that is relevant for all time to come is really shortsighted.

I think he would certainly have evolved over the years, and I think he would have wanted India to accept industrialization along with agriculture, simultaneously. Basically what he was concerned about was that at the time of independence in 1947, India had a population of nearly 350 million people. Eighty percent of them were living in 760,000 villages; only twenty percent were living in cities, and these

people had more advantages in terms of education and all of that than the eighty percent who lived in villages. They did not come so close to the British and gain some of the advantages the city people might possibly enjoy, and so he said that when you get independence, if you continue to develop the cities in the way the British did and ignore the population in the villages, you are going to create an imbalance. That will mean that all of these poor people in the villages are going to flood into our cities and the cities will choke to death. And that is what is happening now. Every city is choking to death with population because so many poor people continually flood into the cities—but in a democracy, how do you stop people from coming to cities and seeking survival? If you do not offer them anything in the villages, and if the alternative is for them to die there of hunger and nobody seems to care . . . then they are going to come and squat in the cities and try to get something.

Now the mindset is changing a little bit in the cities, and they have come to the conclusion that these people are fated to be impoverished, that that is what their life means, so we can now use this as a source of slave labor and exploit them. So in households throughout the city there may be two, three, four domestic servants to do all kinds of domestic chores for you. We pay them the least amount of salary and give them the least amount of benefit. I do not know if you have read this recently, but in the last ten years or so a lot of the Indians living in the United States who have made a lot of money here are now going back to India and living there because with this movement of industries, outsourcing boom and all of that, they can still get their American salaries in India and work in India where the cost of living is so low. So they see the benefits of that and they have created townships made for NRIs (nonresident Indians coming from the West), and these are model townships taken from the West and transplanted there, with malls and all of these facilities you find in a township in the United States. All that right there . . . but in a gated community. Now, outside the gate there are slums, and they encourage that because these people in the slums provide them all the domestic help that they need.

**GK:** You have referred to hunger. Can you comment on the Gandhi Worldwide Hunger Fund, as well as the Gandhi Worldwide Education Institute: origins, goals, participants, that sort of thing?

**AG:** It all started modestly, with nearly nothing in my hands. Some friends of mine and I got together; I had been doing a lot of work with poor people in India during the thirty years that I lived there. When I came to this country and decided to settle here, some friends here also said, "Why don't we do something because you feel so strongly about

all these issues?" So we launched the World Hunger Fund with nothing, basically, just the idea and these friends, and we got the help of some fundraisers in California. They have enlarged the scope and have units in many countries in Europe and we are trying to raise funds from them and feed the hungry people.

I told them that my concept is not just to feed these people but to create opportunities for them so that they can stand on their own feet because when people live in poverty they very quickly lose their self respect and self-confidence. Then they come to believe that they cannot do anything in life, and they are dependent on society to feed them and sustain them. When we do that by soup kitchens and simply giving them food, we are encouraging in them the wrong concept. What we need to do is that while we address their immediate needs, we also need to discover what their strengths are that we can use to make them realize that they can live on their own and do things for themselves.

**GK:** And how can this be done? Do you have any examples of this method working?

**AG:** We did this in India on a smaller scale. I lived in Bombay, and there were millions of people living in slums or right out in the open on sidewalks. The families would be living without any proper shelter or anything right on the sidewalks. So we brought together about 600 people—we could have gotten more, but we thought that would be a manageable number of people—one common factor was that they all came from the same area of southern Maharashtra, from the same group of villages. So we sat and talked with them for a long time; it took several months before we could really understand their strengths, their weaknesses, and where they came from, and what they would like to do. We had to find the level where they would open up and speak to us like friends and not look at us as some "saviors" who were here to help. We told them that we are here to help you break this cycle of poverty, we are not going to hand you anything on a platter, you will have to participate in solving this problem and become part of the solution.

They were desperate enough to accept anything we gave them. They said, yes, whatever you say, we will do. So we said OK, we want you to save a coin every day . . . collectively, all of you together. Save a coin every day and create a fund, and from that we will see what kind of an economic program we can create with you. Now, it seems ridiculous on the face of it for people who did not know where their next meal was going to come from to save a coin every day. But we said, "We don't know how you are going to do it. You have to decide if you are going to work extra hours, or are you going to sacrifice

something that you do but don't need to do, like smoking cigarettes or drinking tea, or whatever it is—you decide individually. Just save a coin, each of you, and put it aside collectively, all of you together." And they took up this challenge, and in about two years they came back with about the equivalent of \$11,000. This happened in 1970.

With that money we bought them ten second-hand textile machines, power looms to make textile cloth. That region of Maharashtra is cotton rich, so they could use that cotton to make cloth. We installed these machines in a little tin shed in their village, and we sent back about 80 of them to run this factory around the clock so that all the people who had contributed to the fund could then live on the earnings of the factory. They did not know anything about marketing, or money management, or production, or anything like that. We had to help them. While helping them, we trained them. When they became confident enough to take charge of the situation, we handed it over to them.

Now that factory is running beautifully. They have about five different units and more than a thousand textile looms. They also continue with that small savings habit. In 1978 they opened their first cooperative bank in Bombay city, and that bank now has assets worth nearly two million dollars.

This was achieved by people who were considered to be useless, mindless, and destined to live in poverty. But by giving them that kind of helping hand, encouragement, and training, we were able to change their lives.

**GK:** Is this the same area in which you have built a school in your late wife's name? Has it opened yet?

**AG:** We have a small school that has started. We have about 45 children that we rescued from employment. Because there is a building boom in that area, there is a tremendous demand for bricks, so that area has started brick making as a cottage industry. On almost every street corner you find a little factory making bricks, and they employ all these poor people, and they employ basically children and women, and then men. I have seen very small children, no older than five or six, carrying stacks of bricks on their head, and going maybe a hundred yards or more and stacking them up. And for a whole day's work a little kid like this might be paid one dollar. So, where's the justice? And these people are so deeply rooted in that poverty they have no hope of coming out of it, generation after generation. They are just going around in circles.

However, from my past experience I realized that just taking a child and giving that child an education will not help the whole family because children like that, after getting an education, are often so

ashamed of that poverty in which the family is living that they break away from the family and make a life of their own, usually in the city. We do not want this to happen. We do not want families to break up.

So this school that we are building now is going to be unique in the sense that we are hoping to lift the whole family out of poverty, instead of one child. The children from that family will be given the training in the school, the parents will be given some vocational training as well as some ability to read and write, adult education, and hopefully that will help the whole family come out of poverty.

We will try to provide the parents with some work on the campus. Our idea is that we will have some land where there will be some agriculture so that the fruits and the vegetables grown there will be used to feed the children. We will have a daily operation so that we will have fresh milk. In all of these things, the parents can work there and also spend a few hours every day learning in the school, in the evenings or whatever.

It will be, I think, one of a kind. I have not yet seen that kind of school anywhere in India . . . although that was the concept my grandfather had in mind.

**GK:** So, considering the tale you often repeat that was given to you by your grandfather,<sup>1</sup> is this the kind of seed you hope to plant so that others might learn from it, emulate, and spread the excellence?

**AG:** Hopefully, if we get lucky and we get enough funding, we can then start a string of these schools, not just in India, but in Africa and in other places where the problem is basically the same. Poverty is the same everywhere.

**GK:** Is all of that consistent with the work done through the M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence, or do you consider these efforts to be distinct?

**AG:** No, it is consistent, although when I started the Institute for Nonviolence, my idea at the time, because there was so much interest in young people in the United States in this philosophy of nonviolence, was to provide informal education to students *here* and to show them in what ways we can practice nonviolence and how we can live a nonviolent lifestyle. Now that I am out of there and have branched out into a new field, I went into this direction.

**GK:** But the Institute is still active?

**AG:** Yes, the Institute is still active.

**GK:** Do you still consult with or for them?

**AG:** Well, they would like me to, but they said I must do it by the back door, and I said I do not do anything by the back door. If you want me to come and advise and consult, it must be open, public knowledge. And they cannot really afford to do that.<sup>2</sup>

**GK:** How much of your own approach do you feel you bring to issues and challenges and programs, aside from or independent from what you might anticipate to have been the response from your grandfather? How much do you feel you have developed independently?

**AG:** I think quite a bit of it is independently developed. As my grandfather had said, "My life is my message." He also said just before his assassination that "I hope when I die that all the literature and everything that I have written will be burned with me on the pyre." And the reason he wanted all of it burned was that he said, "I don't want to leave behind a dogma or an ism." So it is very wrong for us to approach Gandhi as a dogma or a Gandhism. That leads to a lot of misunderstanding and misinterpretation of him and his philosophy; you can get bogged down in that. Today a lot of the Gandhians in India keep harping on the issue that if you wear *khadi* like Gandhi said, all the problems will be solved. This is ridiculous. He said what he said about *khadi* at that particular time because of the circumstances then, but that does not mean that wearing *khadi* will solve the rest of the problems of the world. That kind of dogmatic approach has actually caused more misunderstanding and that is why many people have come to feel that the philosophy is irrelevant today, but it was OK in his time.

What I am trying to do is make it more relevant today, to kind of modernize the philosophy. One thing that people have never talked about: everybody has used nonviolence only as a political tool to get justice, to get freedom on a large scale—in this country to get civil rights, in India to get freedom, in other places it was used for the same reason. So it seems everybody has come to the conclusion that nonviolence is just a tool for this kind of problem. And I am saying no, it is individual. If we do not live nonviolently we cannot really practice nonviolence. We cannot subscribe to a culture of violence and expect to be able to use successfully the philosophy of nonviolence. If we want to practice nonviolence and understand the philosophy of nonviolence, we have got to change the culture of violence that dominates our thinking and our relationships and everything.

So that is my current work. To bring out that aspect of his philosophy: how can we be the change that we wish to see in the

world? If we do not become that change, then there will not be change for better in this world.

**GK:** In this culture, marked by intensive individualism and materialism, how optimistic do you feel about progress in the effort to work toward a culture of nonviolence?

**AG:** Realistically, there is not any tool to measure the success of what I am doing. I am not even interested in measuring. My feeling is that all I can do is go out and plant seeds, and then it is up to individuals. Do they want to nurture those seeds, or do they want those seeds to perish? I have done my work, and the responsibility is left to them. One thing that encourages me is that over the years the number of people who come to my talks has been consistently increasing. I have had instances when people have come fifty or sixty miles, and I find a mixture of students and community people, maybe they have heard me speak earlier and they still want to come back. Little things like that are very encouraging. For example I was in St. Louis three or four months ago, and in this university they had originally planned this event in a small auditorium (with a capacity of 350 or 400, I think), and two or three days before the lecture they had received so many calls that they decided they would need to move to a bigger venue, with a capacity of 800. The day we went to that auditorium, it was overflowing. They were not able to accommodate everyone; some had to be turned back. It is the message. They are interested, and that is encouraging.

**GK:** Finally, as a grandfather do you find that you consciously emulate the lessons or example that your grandfather provided for you?

**AG:** No, I do it my own way. You cannot really emulate him. He was a charismatic person. But in my own way I have been trying with my own children and grandchildren to pass on the legacy as best as I can.

### Notes

1. As he recounts the tale in *Legacy of Love*, there was once a king in ancient India who became curious about peace. He asked many notable individuals the true meaning of peace, but none returned a satisfactory answer. Eventually the king was directed to an old wise man, "an old recluse," who gave the king a grain of wheat and told him to look there for his answer. The king locked the grain away in a gold box, and occasionally opened the box to see if he could decipher the grain's message. There was no change. Eventually a wandering sage explained to the king that the meaning was simple: if you keep the

grain hidden, it will rot away. If you plant it, it may flourish and multiply (12—13). Arun Gandhi indicates in the introduction to *Legacy of Love*, that after debating whether he should "come out" and become a public figure in the shadow of his grandfather, he realized his grandfather had shared this story with him for a reason.

2. Gandhi is obliquely referring here to the controversy surrounding his *Washington Post* blog on January 7, 2008, when he was asked to write on the "Jewish Identity," offering "Jewish Identity Can't Depend on Violence." Consistent with the larger philosophy he espouses, he indicated that for peace to be possible in the future, Israel would need to become less focused on the catastrophic wrongs perpetrated through the Holocaust and focus instead on constructive accommodation. He lost his position at the University of Rochester following this publication, but continues on the staff of *The Washington Post*, in the same capacity. The M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence is housed on the campus of the University of Rochester.

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## A Note on Kipling's Lahore: Real and Unreal

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Sara Suleri's 1986 essay "Amorphous India: *Questions of Geography*" offers a curiously comparative yet emphatically judgmental statement with reference to the western adventures through 20<sup>th</sup> century narrative space: "For it is Forster rather than Kipling who initiates the Western narrative of India" (*Southwest* 390). And then Suleri goes on to justify how the "failure of [Western] representation transformed into a characteristically Indian failure" (389) and how "the reality of India," reinforced in "a text like *Kim* [by Kipling]" gets translated "into an image of profound unreality" through texts like *A Passage to India* [by Forster], initiating and promoting, what Suleri claims to be singularly the "Forster's paradigm."<sup>1</sup> On a similar yet more specific judgmental note, Kipling's portrayal of the socio-political and literary reality of his time was already the topic of Elliot L. Gilbert's 1971 *The Good Kipling*. Gilbert observes:

One of the great problems of Kipling criticism is to find a way to discover and reveal this coherent voice of "the good Kipling," a way to explain, that is, how Kipling the brutal realist can *simultaneously* be Kipling the man of compassion, how Kipling the mournful nihilist can *simultaneously* be Kipling the winner of Nobel Prize for his "idealistic tendency," how Kipling the romantic imperialist and believer in order can *simultaneously* be Kipling the late-Victorian doubter, [and] how Kipling the political man can *simultaneously* be Kipling the artist. (10)<sup>2</sup>