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Mahatma Gandhi

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Date : Published May 11th 2012 (first published December 1st 1917)

ISBN :

Author : Mahatma Gandhi

Format : Kindle Edition 48 pages

Genre : Cultural, India, Nonfiction, History, Writing, Essays, Philosophy, Politics, Asian Literature, Indian Literature

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From Reader Review Third class in Indian railways for online ebook

Sonal Panse says

Gandhi writes well, and with good sense and humor.

Excerpts -

"In neglecting the third class passengers, opportunity of giving a splendid education to millions in orderliness, sanitation, decent composite life and cultivation of simple and clean tastes is being lost. Instead of receiving an object lesson in these matters third class passengers have their sense of decency and cleanliness blunted during their travelling experience."

"Too often do we believe that material prosperity means moral growth."

"I believe that our copying of the European dress is a sign of our degradation, humiliation and our weakness, and that we are committing a national sin in discarding a dress which is best suited to the Indian climate and which, for its simplicity, art and cheapness, is not to be beaten on the face of the earth and which answers hygienic requirements. Had it not been for a false pride and equally false notions of prestige, Englishmen here would long ago have adopted the Indian costume."

"I am sorry to inform Mr. Irwin and your readers that my esteemed friend Babu Brijakishore Prasad, the "ex-Hon. Member of Council," still remains unregenerate and retains the provincial cap and never walks barefoot and "kicks up" a terrible noise even in the house we are living in by wearing wooden sandals. He has still not the courage, in spite of most admirable contact with me, to discard his semi-anglicised dress and whenever he goes to see officials he puts his legs into the bifurcated garment and on his own admission tortures himself by cramping his feet in inelastic shoes. I cannot induce him to believe that his clients won't desert him and the courts won't punish him if he wore his more becoming and less expensive dhoti."

John says

Some great philosophical essays--except for the second-to-last one, in which I had no idea most of the time what Gandhi was even talking about. I especially liked his take on the Indian railway system. Having recently experienced it for myself, I can say with confidence that not much has changed over the last hundred years.

Roopkumar Balachandran says

Third Class in Indian Railways is the essays and letters written by Mahatma Gandhi in the year 1917. The six essays are :

1. Third class in Indian Railways
2. Vernaculars as Media of Instruction

3. Swadeshi
4. Ahimsa
5. The Moral basis of Co-operation
6. National Dress

Not much have changed about the hygienic condition in the railways. Gandhi mentions about bribes given by the passengers and their behaviour. He finally asks that the fares paid by third class passengers were not offered even 1/10th of what the first class passengers enjoy.

Apart from other essays I liked Ahimsa, Swadeshi, the moral basis of Co-operation and the National Dress (his dress been mocked by Irwin) the fitting reply he had given.

I like to quote from his book:

I do not believe that religion has nothing to do with politics. The latter divorced from religion is like a corpse only fit to be buried. (Swadeshi)

We, the educated classes, have received our education through a foreign tongue. We have therefore not reacted upon the masses. We want to represent the masses, but we fail. (Swadeshi)

Well, India is a country of nonsense. It is nonsensical to parch one's throat with thirst when a kindly Mahomedan is ready to offer pure water to drink. And yet thousands of Hindus would rather die of thirst than drink water from a Mahomedan household. (Swadeshi)

There is a verse in the Bhagavad Gita, which, freely rendered, means, masses follow the classes. (Swadeshi)

Our Shastras seem to teach that a man who really practises Ahimsa in its fulness has the world at his feet; he so affects his surroundings that even the snakes and other venomous reptiles do him no harm. This is said to have been the experience of St. Francis of Assisi. (Ahimsa)

Ahimsa requires deliberate self-suffering, not a deliberate injuring of the supposed wrong-doer. (Ahimsa)

I believe that our copying of the European dress is a sign of our degradation, humiliation and our weakness..(Reply to Mr. Irwin's criticism of his dress in the Pioneer)

Swateek says

Well, reading a book about what was the situation in India almost a hundred years prior to today was a fascinating, but it's more of a collection of papers written about various topics than anything else.

Read once for sure to have a picture of what pre-modern India looked like. You won't regret even if you skip this.

Vaishali says

Six essays, the first of which is ... FUNNY ! Yep, never thought I'd read anything by Gandhi so witty and sarcastic, but there I was, laughing aloud in my seat. (The remaining five are ok)

Quotes :

“On the way, passengers got tea tannin water with filthy sugar... I can vouch for the appearance, but I cite the testimony of the passengers as to the taste.”

“Refreshments sold to the passengers were dirty-looking, handed by dirtier hands, coming out of filthy receptacles, and weighed in equally unattractive scales.”

“The compartment itself was evil-looking. Dirt was lying thick upon the wood work, and I do not know if it had ever seen soap or water.”

“The closets attached to these places defy description. I have not the power adequately to describe them without committing a breach of laws of decent speech.”

“At Sonepur, flies having failed, wasps came forth to warn the public and the authorities, but yet to no purpose.”

“At the Imperial Capitol, a certain third class booking office is a Black Hole fit only to be destroyed.”

“Is it any wonder that plague has become endemic in India? Any other result is impossible where passengers always leave some dirt where they go and take more on leaving.”

Sung-Gi Kim says

Quotes from the book

In neglecting the third class passengers, opportunity of giving a splendid education to millions in orderliness, sanitation, decent composite life and cultivation of simple and clean tastes is being lost. Instead of receiving an object lesson in these matters third class passengers have their sense of decency and cleanliness blunted during their travelling experience. Among the many suggestions that can be made for dealing with the evil here described, I would respectfully include this: let the people in high places, the Viceroy, the Commander-in-Chief, the Rajas, Maharajas, the Imperial Councillors and others, who generally travel in superior classes, without previous warning, go through the experiences now and then of third class travelling. We would then soon see a remarkable change in the conditions of third class travelling and the uncomplaining millions will get some return for the fares they pay under the expectation of being carried from place to place with ordinary creature comforts.

The question of vernaculars as media of instruction is of national importance; neglect of the vernaculars means national suicide.

If we have lost faith in our vernaculars, it is a sign of want of faith in ourselves; it is the surest sign of decay. And no scheme of self-government, however benevolently or generously it may be bestowed upon us, will ever make us a self-governing nation, if we have no respect for the languages our mothers speak.

After much thinking I have arrived at a definition of Swadeshi that, perhaps, best illustrates my meaning. Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote. Thus, as for religion, in order to satisfy the requirements of the definition, I must restrict myself to my ancestral religion. That is the use of my immediate religious surrounding. If I find it defective, I should serve it by purging it of its defects. In the domain of politics I should make use of the indigenous institutions and serve them by curing them of their proved defects. In that of economics I should use only things that are produced by my immediate neighbours and serve those industries by making them efficient and complete where they might be found wanting. It is suggested that such Swadeshi, if reduced to practice, will lead to the millennium. And, as we do not abandon our pursuit after the millennium, because we do not expect quite to reach it within our times, so may we not abandon Swadeshi even though it may not be fully attained for generations to come.

I have endeavoured to study the Bible. I consider it as part of my scriptures. The spirit of the Sermon on the Mount competes almost on equal terms with the Bhagavad Gita for the domination of my heart.

I do not believe that religion has nothing to do with politics. The latter divorced from religion is like a corpse only fit to be buried.

It is arrogance to think of launching out to serve the whole of India when I am hardly able to serve even my own family. It were better to concentrate my effort upon the family and consider that through them I was serving the whole nation and, if you will, the whole of humanity. This is humility and it is love. The motive will determine the quality of the act.

My patriotism is both exclusive and inclusive. It is exclusive in the sense that in all humility I confine my attention to the land of my birth, but it is inclusive in the sense that my service is not of a competitive or antagonistic nature.

In its negative form it means not injuring any living being whether by body or mind. It may not, therefore, hurt the person of any wrong-doer, or bear any ill-will to him and so cause him mental suffering. This statement does not cover suffering caused to the wrong-doer by natural acts of mine which do not proceed from ill-will. It, therefore, does not prevent me from withdrawing from his presence a child whom he, we shall imagine, is about to strike.

Ahimsa requires deliberate self-suffering, not a deliberate injuring of the supposed wrong-doer.

In its positive form, Ahimsa means the largest love, the greatest charity. If I am a follower of Ahimsa, I must love my enemy. I must apply the same rules to the wrong-doer who is my enemy or a stranger to me, as I would to my wrong-doing father or son. This active Ahimsa necessarily includes truth and fearlessness. As man cannot deceive the loved one, he does not fear or frighten him or her. Gift of life is the greatest of all gifts; a man who gives it in reality, disarms all hostility. He has paved the way for an honourable understanding. And none who is himself subject to fear can bestow that gift. He must, therefore, be himself fearless. A man cannot then practice Ahimsa and be a coward at the same time. The practice of Ahimsa calls

forth the greatest courage. It is the most soldierly of a soldier's virtues.

Mahavira and Buddha were soldiers, and so was Tolstoy. Only they saw deeper and truer into their profession, and found the secret of a true, happy, honourable and godly life.

The fact is that I wear the national dress because it is the most natural and the most becoming for an Indian. I believe that our copying of the European dress is a sign of our degradation, humiliation and our weakness, and that we are committing a national sin in discarding a dress which is best suited to the Indian climate and which, for its simplicity, art and cheapness, is not to be beaten on the face of the earth and which answers hygienic requirements.

Sidharth Vardhan says

A collection of essays in which Gandhi shares his views on different subjects. He appears to be much more human than he is made out when you read him directly - a down-to-earth in search of truth with all intellectual honesty. But his idealism seems to be abstract, too far away from reality; than he is defending some oppressive systems like caste system and I, personally, never like politicians who ask sacrifices from innocent masses.

Available on Livrivox.

Shabana Mukhtar says

I knew he wrote, but I had only heard about 'Experiments with Truth'. This one, I just found on Amazon, and liked it instantly.

The first of the six essays, after which the book is named is most hilarious one. Almost entire essay was worth highlighting, I would share only two.

Is it any wonder that plague has become endemic in India? Any other result is impossible where passengers always leave some dirt where they go and take more on leaving.

the Viceroy, the Commander-in-Chief, the Rajas, Maharajas, the Imperial Councillors and others, who generally travel in superior classes, without previous warning, go through the experiences now and then of third class travelling. We would then soon see a remarkable change in the conditions of third class travelling and the uncomplaining millions will get some return for the fares they pay under the expectation of being carried from place to place with ordinary creature comforts.

Other essays were okay too, but not as good as first one. I particularly like the tone of the narrative, cuz I like to write the same sarcastic and cynic way. These essays give a glimpse of the man himself, a side of him that I was unaware of.

It is a short-read. I would say it is a must-read, the first essay at least.

Abhijeet Jain says

Collection of 6 essays by Gandhi, reflecting condition of Indians in the colonial India & his ideology. Essays are filled with Gandhi's wit, also most of them were written when he wasn't famous.

The essay on Indian railways reflects his concern for the fellow Indians & "Ahimsa" essay clears the doubts raised by others on his ideology.

Glad that I read this book.

Sunil says

Gandhi was forty five when he returned to India - the land he had left as a teenager, the land that was now completely alien to him. As the hero of the South Africa he was extended several invitations by the Congress to join the nascent 'national freedom struggle'. He politely refused them; instead he chose to travel. He travelled extensively throughout the subcontinent, mostly on trains. The main purpose of such a venture, as he had said himself was 'to get a grasp of the life' in India.

During these jaunts, it is believed he made very elaborate entries on his 'first' impressions of India. When I picked up this book (free ebook lying in some corner of the net) I was hoping to find his journal entries during these travels. But as it turned out this book is a compilation of six essays/ media articles/ speeches between 1915 – 1918, after the major chunk of his travels were done.

Enriched by his travels, and the success at Champaran, he started giving shape to his ideas - on a social, cultural and a political level. These essays were his initial arguments, where he is still somewhat ambivalent, where he still comes across considering their pros and cons than being conclusive about them. These ideas would later gather momentum, evolve much more powerfully to eventually enter the national consciousness as the core 'Gandhian' values.

The first essay is actually about the travel in third class in Indian trains. He describes the hopeless conditions of the third class in India and as always with Gandhi, makes a case for their improvement. These passages are perhaps one of the earliest documentation of reverse culture shock by an Indian. Consider this one, and imagine the comment section if the following passage for published in an Indian web portal:

Not during the whole of the journey was the compartment once swept or cleaned. The result was that every time you walked on the floor or rather cut your way through the passengers seated on the floor, you waded through dirt.

The closet was also not cleaned during the journey and there was no water in the water tank.

Refreshments sold to the passengers were dirty-looking, handed by dirtier hands, coming out of filthy receptacles and weighed in equally unattractive scales. These were previously sampled by millions of flies. I

asked some of the passengers who went in for these dainties to give their opinion. Many of them used choice expressions as to the quality but were satisfied to state that they were helpless in the matter; they had to take things as they came.

Subsequent essays are values one usually associates with Gandhi. Ideas like 'vernaculars' and 'The Moral Basis of Co-operation' are just of historical relevance now. Few others, like the chapter on 'Ahimsa' are perhaps still valid? The one titled 'Swadeshi' is penetrative where he espouses how religion and politics in India are inseparable. (which is true, contrary to liberal opinion even to this day). Gandhi's arguments are times warped, at times too vague but it does reflect something unique for that time – one man observing the world, preparing a ground report, and suggesting solutions.

The writing is typically colonial replete with waxing and waning of humility and excessive consideration. Personally, as far as the ideas are concerned, nothing written was new to me; I was looking to find a personal voice, something more direct that would reflect on the writer himself. But Gandhi writes in a very impersonal tone. Even in the article 'National Dress' where he defends against personal attacks (Irwin who had criticized Gandhi for choice of desi clothes against European attire) he remains rather circumspect.

What the book reaffirms to me is what Naipaul had written long back about Gandhi –

No one, no one had understood India like Gandhi had.

As an aside here's Gandhi writing about Banks and credit system in 1917. See if it rings any bells?

The credit which is becoming the money power of the world has little moral basis and is not a synonym for Trust or Faith, which are purely moral qualities. After twenty years' experience of hundreds of men, who had dealings with banks in South Africa, the opinion I had so often heard expressed has become firmly rooted in me, that the greater the rascal the greater the credit he enjoys with his banks. The banks do not pry into his moral character: they are satisfied that he meets his overdrafts and promissory notes punctually. The credit system has encircled this beautiful globe of ours like a serpent's coil, and if we do not mind, it bids fair to crush us out of breath. I have witnessed the ruin of many a home through the system, and it has made no difference whether the credit was labelled cooperative or otherwise. The deadly coil has made possible the devastating spectacle in Europe, which we are helplessly looking on.

The entire book, first published in an Indian Lahore, is now available for free online. Suggested for light reading may be as a break in between heavy books. Obviously for readers interested in Pre-independent India and Gandhi.

Sugan says

This book is a collection of six essays by Gandhi. They are

1. THIRD CLASS IN INDIAN RAILWAYS
2. VERNACULARS AS MEDIA OF INSTRUCTION
3. SWADESHI

4. AHIMSA
5. THE MORAL BASIS OF CO-OPERATION
6. NATIONAL DRESS

The first essay is about poverty in India, especially when Gandhi traveled in trains across India. The second essay is about the importance of Indian vernacular languages. The next three essays are about Swadeshi, Ahimsa and Co-operation. In the essay national essay he response to an author about his dressing style.

Sandeep says

3.5/5

Anil Swarup says

How relevant are these writings of Mahatma even today. The cramped and unclean existence in a third class apartment is true of the railways even today even though some improvements have indeed come around. However, what is more remarkable is the conviction with which these articles have been written. This conviction emanates from what he personally experienced. He shares these experiences in an extremely simple manner so that anyone can understand and relate to what he wrote.

Gandhi makes a strong case for "swadeshi" as he defines this concept as "that spirit in us which restricts us to the use of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote". His inimitable sense of humour is also evident in his writings as he has no qualms in admitting that "India is a country of nonsense."

Majenta says

I'm glad I read it, especially for "Ahimsa."

Ninad says

An apt comparison of India in the early 20th century to the then third class compartments of Indian Railways. This book is about the similarities in the plight of people travelling in the railways to the plight of people in British Ruled India, and how can they use Gandhi's ideology to move above it and also create sustenance and growth for the nation. This book stands true for today's times too.
