FROM MOHANDAS TO MAHATMA: THE SPIRITUAL METAMORPHOSIS OF GANDHI

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Late in 1947, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi turned to his granddaughter, Manubehn, and told her, "I am a true Mahatma."[1] This statement was remarkable from a man who considered the title *Mahatma*—or *Great Soul*—to be a burden from the moment Rabindranath Tagore had bestowed it upon him shortly after his return from South Africa in 1915. Yet when one examines the personal accounts of Gandhi and his associates covering the last year and a half of Gandhi's life, one realizes that Gandhi had finally accepted his title of Mahatma and all that it implied. Along with the title, he accepted the responsibility for India's problems as his own; the myriad problems of the new nation became as much a source of his mental anguish during this period as any personal sin might be. Indeed, India's problems in a sense directly reflected the personal flaws of the Mahatma. Now every mistake he made became amplified, affecting the whole nation. By accepting the title *Mahatma*, great achievement became a possibility for Gandhi; but so did great failure.

The weight of this perceived responsibility was the cause of the

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1. Manubehn Gandhi, *Last Glimpse of Bapu* (Agra, India: Shiva Lal Agarwala and Co., Ltd., 1962), p. 234.

severe depression which Gandhi experienced in the last year and a half of his life. At this same time, his added responsibility was combined with a strong and still deepening belief in his work and in his God. Finally, Gandhi, as a Mahatma, was surrounded by an aura of death—his death. These three conditions combined to create a paradoxical personality: a man whose faith was strong and daily strengthening, who believed in himself and the role he had been given, yet who could not find a light to guide him, and was convinced of his impending death. One can resolve this paradox by realizing that by the very definition of *Mahatma,* Gandhi had to possess all three of these qualities.

Like everything else in his life, Gandhi's depression in 1947-48 was public knowledge; and he discussed it freely. At a prayer meeting in July of 1947, Gandhi mentioned that friends had complained to him about the depression apparent in his speeches. But Gandhi felt he had no other option. "As a Satyagrahi[2] wedded to the truth, he could never say what did not come from the depths of his heart."[3] He felt deeply subdued and depressed and the tone of his speeches had to reflect that quality. His secretary, Pyarelal, writes of this period, a bare six weeks before Gandhi's death:

> I found Gandhi to be the saddest man that one could picture when I rejoined him in the middle of December, 1947. In the midst of the pomp and pageantry of the capitol, surrounded by loving friends, and with his name on everybody's lips, he was spiritually isolated from his surroundings and from almost every one of his colleagues.[4]

Pyarelal was acutely aware of Gandhi's state of mind. Indeed, of all Gandhi's associates, Pyarelal is the most sensitive and articulate in describing these moods. This sensitivity grew from the long

2. One who practices Satyagraha, or "truth force," Gandhi's term for non-violent non-cooperation.

3. D. G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India) Vol. 8, p. 56.

4. Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase* (Ahmedabad, India: Navajivan Press, 1958) Vol. 2, p. 681.

relationship between the two, something which neither Manubehn Gandhi nor Nirmal Kumar Bose (who also served as Gandhi's secretary in these last years) could claim. At one point, Pyarelal agonizes, "I watched day after day the wan, sad look on that pinched face, bespeaking an inner anguish that was frightening to behold."[5]

Pyarelal was not alone in his observations; others noticed Gandhi's state of mind as well. Manubehn Gandhi, in her preface to *Last Glimpses of Bapu,* describes her recollections as a "vivid picture of the then state of India and of the agony and unrest in Bapu's Mind."[6] Nirmal Kumar Bose, Gandhi's only other companion besides Manu in Noakhali,[7] also provides numerous references to Gandhi's depression. Once, Gandhi told him, "I find that I have not the patience of the technique needed in these tragic circumstances. Suffering and evil often overwhelm me and I stew in my own juice."[8] Gandhi frequently described himself as being surrounded by darkness, as though the mental and spiritual had become tangible and physical. He once explained to a reporter why he had stopped talking of aspiring to the age of 125: "I have lost the hope because of the terrible happenings in the world. I don't want to live in darkness...."[9]

Gandhi's depression, then, was common knowledge; he spoke of it freely with co-workers, with reporters and at prayer meetings. Ample evidence of it is available covering the period from late 1946 until his death on January 30, 1948. The causes of this depression, however, are less easily discernible. For example, Gandhi occasionally made statements questioning his life's work and his beliefs. In 1946, he wrote to a friend who was constantly ill that he did not "understand how one of faith can be ill," and that this made

5. *Ibid.*, p. 686.

6. Manubehn Gandhi, *Last Glimpses*, p. 2. "Bapu" is the familiar honorific for father, in Hindi.

7. The Noakhali District lies in Muslim East Bengal. Gandhi spent months in this district in 1946 and 1947 trying to calm the communal rioting, and to convince the minority Hindus to return to their villages.

8. Nirmal Kumar Bose, *My Days with Gandhi* (Calcutta: Orient Longman, 1974) p. 84.

9. Manubehn Gandhi, *Last Glimpses*, p. 284.

"short work of my learning."[10] Gandhi was dismayed because he always insisted that if one possessed faith, one would never be ill; his sick friend apparently contradicted his teaching. Such statements are rare, however, in relation to the number of times he reaffirmed his faith. It is safe to say that his life's work in the spiritual sense still provided him with direction.

The other aspect of his life's work, the Indian National Congress,[11] was a different matter. By late 1946, Gandhi made it clear that he would prefer to see the Congress dissolve. Pyarelal notes that Gandhi "was deeply worried over the growing corruption and the scramble for loaves and fishes in the Congress."[12] Gandhi did not hesitate to advise a radical solution to this perennial political problem: "I am convinced that no patchwork treatment can save the Congress. It will only prolong the agony. The best thing for the Congress would be to dissolve itself before the rot sets in further."[13] Gandhi must have felt at least a twinge of disappointment when he advised this action. He had served the organization for thirty years and knew its leaders well. The Congress had been the instrument through which he had begun to implement his Constructive Program[14] and the instrument with which he had led India to Independence. Watching what he perceived to be the growing rot and corruption in the leaders of his country certainly provided one cause of Gandhi's depression.

Gandhi was also confronted with the failure of his Constructive

10. Mohandas K. Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1982) Vol. 85, p. 404.

11. Founded in 1885, the Indian National Congress was the leading force in India's Nationalist Movement for Freedom from British Rule. As such it was responsible for organizing and carrying out Gandhi's non-violent resistance and it was the political group which came into power in India after 1947.

12. Pyarelal, p. 675.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Gandhi's Constructive Program was designed to prepare India for Independence by teaching the people self-discipline and self-sufficiency. The main points of this program included Hindu-Muslim unity, the boycott of British goods, production of homespun Khadi, and the uplift of untouchables and women.

Program. Untouchability had not been eradicated. Khadi[15] had become the victim of fraudulent shopkeepers who sold mill cloth as homespun. Indeed, the sale of mill cloth in the guise of uncertified Khadi was so rampant that Gandhi was forced, in a 1946 issue of his paper *Harijan,* to admit that inasmuch as Khadi production was concerned, "I am defeated."[16] The basis of the Constructive Program, Hindu-Muslim unity, was anathema to large portions of the Indian population. Without this unity, the rest of the Constructive Program was, quite literally, worthless. An independent, self-employed peasant population was of no benefit if communal rioting ruined their crops, killed their livestock and destroyed their tools. Promoting the equality of women was irrelevant when these women could still be kidnapped and converted by communalists. Without the unity fundamental to the Constructive Program, little else could be accomplished.

The communal problem caused Gandhi some of his blackest moments. Before beginning his Calcutta fast in September of 1947, he told India that "if he could not even make them purge themselves of the communal violence, he would feel that life was not worth living and he would not care to prolong it."[17] The communal violence and its contradiction of Gandhi's notion of Ahimsa,[18] or non-violence, were important factors in his severe depression in these last years.

At this point in his life, Gandhi completely despaired of ever demonstrating the power of the true Ahimsa of the brave in India. For this reason, he placed a much stronger emphasis on the simple cessation of violence than on non-violent resistance. As he told a prayer meeting in Noakhali, "for the time being, he had given up

15. Khadi is homespun cloth but the word also came to represent the entire movement to boycott British cloth in favor of Indian cloth. In its loosest sense, it can refer to the Constructive Program.

16. M. K. Gandhi, *Collected Works*, Vol. 85, p. 492.

17. Tendulkar, Vol. 8, p. 186.

18. "Himsa," is the Sanskrit term for harm or violence, "ahimsa," then becomes non-violence. For Gandhi the term had the additional meaning of maintaining one's personal integrity through adherence to non-violence to other beings.

searching for a non-violent remedy applicable to the masses."[19] His uncertainty about the value of Ahimsa is apparent in his letters and speeches. In Noakhali, he wrote on November 20, 1946:

> I find myself in the midst of exaggeration and falsity, I am unable to discover the truth. There is terrible mutual distrust....Truth and Ahimsa, by which I swear and which have, to my knowledge, sustained me for sixty years, seem to fail to show the attributes I have ascribed to them.[20]

In this period of intense self-examination, Gandhi nonetheless invariably reaffirmed his basic beliefs. He did not reject non-violence, for example. He decided that there had never been an example of true non-violence in India; the people had won independence through simple passive resistance, the tool of the weak.[21] In a letter to his son, Ramdas, he questions whether he had been "nurturing only weakness in the name of non-violence?"[22] Non-violence was not wrong and it had not failed; rather, the Indian people had failed to use Ahimsa, and Gandhi had failed to properly demonstrate it. This sense of personal failure stems from the burden of responsibility Gandhi's acceptance of his role as a Mahatma implied. This haunting responsibility led him into disillusionment and depression.

Another source of Gandhi's anguish was his declining power as a leader of India. Having finally accepted the idea and the role of a true Mahatma, this lack of real followers must have rankled. N. K. Bose argues that Gandhi came to feel he could not influence, much less lead, India.[23] Another close associate of Gandhi's, Acharya Kripalani, made the same point when asked why he did not support Gandhi's stance on partition.

> It is because I feel that he has as yet found no way of tackling the problem on a mass basis. When he taught us non-violent

19. Bose, p. 91.
20. M. K. Gandhi, *Collected Works,* Vol. 86, p. 138.
21. Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power: Indian Politics 1915-1922* (Cambridge, The Cambridge University Press, 1972) p. 233.
22. M. K. Gandhi, *Collected Works,* Vol. 86, p. 355.
23. Bose, p. 208.

non-cooperation, he showed us a definite method which we had at least mechanically followed. Today he himself is groping in the dark.[24]

This groping was reflected at his prayer meetings, where Gandhi frequently told people with complaints that the Congress government would surely solve their problems. He was referring to the same Congress Party which he wanted to see dissolved! Here one senses Gandhi's impotence as a leader in the different environment of Independence. Having lost the people's mandate, he could do nothing to lead them. This rejection of his leadership certainly dealt a blow to the mental state of the man who had freed India. "Sometimes he asked himself, had India free no longer any need of him as it had when it was in bondage?"[25]

However, the most significant cause of Gandhi's depression was within himself. Here we find the most convincing evidence of Gandhi's acceptance of his role as Mahatma. Gandhi accepted the responsibility for India's communal problem in a manner roughly similar to Christ taking on the sins of mankind. Although this is a loose analogy, it does offer perhaps the best explanation for Gandhi's depression during this period. Once he had accepted this responsibility, he had to be successful in saving India. To understand Gandhi's feelings, one need only imagine the desolation of Christ if he had failed to provide any salvation for Mankind. It was this type of desolation which Gandhi was experiencing. In his diary he wrote that "God's grace alone is sustaining me. I can see that there is some grave defect in me somewhere which is the cause of all this."[26] Pyarelal, explaining this particular passage, remarks that he heard Gandhi muttering, "Where could I have missed my way? There must be something terribly lacking in my Ahimsa and faith which is responsible for this."[27] At another moment, speaking of the communal violence in Noakhali, Gandhi admits that "I am

24. Tendulkar, Vol. 8, p. 19.
25. Bose, p. 250.
26. M. K. Gandhi, *Collected Works*, Vol. 86, p. 302.
27. *Ibid.*

responsible for all this. I have made a mistake somewhere in weighing the pros and consof non-violence....It is well that I have awakened to my mistake at the fag end of my life and can see it now."[28]

B. R. Nanda, in his biography of Gandhi, argues that such a sense of responsibility was natural in light of Gandhi's long involvement and leadership in Indian politics.[29] In a general way this is true, but one must remember the nature of Gandhi's involvement in politics. He claimed the right to lead only through his superior moral conduct; his leadership consistently followed moral principles. Gandhi had always felt sadness at the failure of Indians in non-cooperation movements; but in these last years, he now claimed the responsibility for their failure himself. Previously he had taken responsibility only for inciting India to a non-violent movement to which it could not adhere. Since Gandhi's political career was spiritual in nature, both in public and private terms, Gandhi's sense of responsibility was also spiritual in nature. The Mahatma now accepted his responsibility for the sins of India; he saw himself, quite literally, as her soul.

However we might explain this sense of guilt, Gandhi was certain that he was responsible because he was flawed. He was never able to discern what the flaw was. Ironically, it was often the very depression which enveloped him which he suspected of being the culprit. Gandhi often claimed that his lack of emotional detachment was the probable cause of his failure. In late 1946 he wrote, "I have not yet developed detachment to a sufficient extent. The happenings in Noakhali succeeded in upsetting me, for there are moments when my heart gives way to anxiety and anger."[30] In a diary entry he notes that "anger–heart-searching continues. Hard to maintain detachment of mind in midst of the raging fire."[31] Without the equanimity which detachment provides, Gandhi could not

28. Manubehn Gandhi, *Last Glimpses*, p. 81.

29. B. R. Nanda, *Mahatma Gandhi* (Beacon Hill, Boston: The Beacon Press, Inc., 1948) p. 500.

30. Bose, p. 93.

31. M. K. Gandhi, *Collected Works*, Vol. 85, p. 355.

adequately cope with the problems he faced; paradoxically, he had to face those problems because of the identification with the nation demanded by his status as Mahatma.

The fact that Gandhi felt he was flawed is emphasized by his declaration that he no longer aspired to live to be 125 years of age. He believed he had lost his path and would not find it again. As he explained to a reporter,

> If I had the impertinence openly to declare my wish to live 125 years, I must have the humility, under changed circumstances, openly to shed that wish....This has not been done in a spirit of depression. The more apt term perhaps, is helplessness.[32]

Whatever Gandhi's feelings about his flawed character, it is most likely that the flaw he perceived was the narrow gap between saintliness and godliness.

However deep Gandhi's sense of failure and depression, and however hopeless and helpless Gandhi felt, the overwhelming conviction of his beliefs remains impressive. Despite his anguish, he was never so desolate as to abandon his path, his beliefs, or his God. Gandhi continued to defend his own idiosyncratic path. "I ask nobody to follow me. Everyone should follow his or her own inner voice . . . Millions like me may fail to prove the truth in their own lives—that would be their failure—never [the failure] of the eternal law."[33] Though his own path might fail, he would not give up hope for India. When asked by a reporter whether he had despaired of saving India, Gandhi replied, "I cannot, so long as I have faith in that living Power which is more with us than we know."[34]

Gandhi was not refuting the seriousness of India's situation, nor implying that he knew what to do. He was reiterating what he had believed all his life: he sought the Truth, he was following the path to God, and this path was never wrong. A general in the Indian army asked Gandhi in December of 1947 how one could solve India's

32. Tendulkar, p. 144.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
34. M. K. Gandhi, *Collected Works*, Vol. 86, p. 72.

problems with non-violence. Gandhi assured him, "I am still groping in the dark for the answer. I will find it and I will give it to you someday."[35] Confidence appears elsewhere as well; in a letter he assured a friend, "I am here on a difficult mission. Though there is darkness, I am not worried."[36] Writing to one of his sons in late 1946, he is more explicit about the magnitude of the problems, but he still retained a positive attitude. "I do not remember to have experienced such darkness in my life ever before, and the night seems long. My only consolation is that I have not accepted defeat or given way to despair."[37] In light of the tremendous communal difficulties he was facing in Bengal and Delhi during this period, the unflagging hope which Gandhi exhibited reflects the ideal of a Mahatma. One's belief in God must be firm to face stoically the darkness and still remain convinced that the light will someday appear.

The severity of India's problems throws Gandhi's faith into sharp relief, yet no fundamental change occurred in his attitudes and beliefs. He still believed that "a beginning is always made by a few, even one."[38] Pyarelal best describes this saintly quality of hope.

> By an almost superhuman effort of the will he was able in the midst of all this to preserve his balance and even his good humor....He seemed to have access to some hidden reservoir of strength, optimism, joy and peace, which was independent of other circumstances.[39]

The Gandhi which Pyarelal described was not a new man; the serenity had been with him since his early years. It was only more apparent at this juncture, when it was maintained in the face of tremendous difficulties.

Gandhi's work in the Noakhali District of Bengal during 1946 and 1947 provides a good example of the Mahatma's delicate balance between despair and the faith of a saint. As he began his stay in Noakhali, he told a prayer meeting that "today I am going through

35. Pyarelal, p. 524.
36. M. K. Gandhi, *Collected Works*, Vol. 86, p. 217.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 198.
38. Tendulkar, p. 203.
39. Pyarelal, p. 685.

the greatest test of my life. I am now to find if the road I follow is really the true road for the people of this country."[40] The test of Noakhali brought Gandhi a combination of comfort and despair, for even as he realized the failure of the people to practice Ahimsa, he recognized the truth and power of non-violence.

This testing of Ahimsa was intimately bound up with Gandhi's testing of himself. Implicit in this process was Gandhi's acceptance of his saintliness. Now he was not simply a votary of Ahimsa, but the representative through which this Ahimsa worked and through which it could be tested. A reporter questioned the significance of the Noakhali experiment. Gandhi replied,

> This question would not arise if you knew that I was going to a village for my own sake, that is, to test my Ahimsa....If I have the requisite courage and capacity to undergo a comparatively hard life and to encourage inner Ahimsa, I should expect to affect both Hindus and Muslims in the right manner.[41]

Non-violence was so vital to Gandhi's existence that it became almost a part of him: it became his Ahimsa. At a prayer meeting, Gandhi confessed that "his technique of non-violence was on trial. It remained to be seen how it would answer in the face of the present crises. If it had no validity, it were better that he himself should declare his insolvency."[42]

Gandhi was not so bold as to declare himself the sole possessor of the truth. He maintained his humility; without it he could not have aspired to such heights. He told his followers, "if an imperfect man like me can try to practice Ahimsa, all of you can also do so." To this he added a more ambitious footnote, "I have come here with the determination to put my Ahimsa to the test and in that process either succeed or perish."[43] He was careful to explain the personal implications of failure. "Even if my mission here should fail, it will not be the failure of Ahimsa itself. It will be the failure of my Ahimsa."[44] Gandhi firmly believed that he was following God's

40. M. K. Gandhi, *Collected Works,* Vol. 86, p. 329.
41. *Ibid.,* p. 133.
42. *Ibid.,* p. 65.
43. *Ibid.,* p. 239.
44. *Ibid.,* p. 368.

Divine Will, and that therefore he was the proper person to test the principle of Ahimsa. But he admitted that a failure in Noakhali would have to mean that he was wrong; it would be Man, not God, who erred.

Gandhi's proposal to test his Ahimsa was a confident one. From the available evidence, it is clear that the possible failure of his Ahimsa was not one of his serious fears.

> I am fully conscious that my views are not shared by others and I am the only one who holds them, but these views cannot be changed now. The more I reflect upon them the greater conviction they carry with me.[45]

The tension between doubt and confidence arose because Gandhi had progressed so far in his experiments with truth that it was almost inconceivable that he might fail. It seemed impossible then, as it does today, that he might be wrong. Gandhi may have felt this as well, but his humility forced him to contemplate the possibility of both success and failure. His conviction triumphed, and Gandhi offered an explanation of why this was so. "Life is an aspiration. Its mission is to strive after perfection, which is self-realization. The ideal must not be lowered because of our own weaknesses and imperfections."[46] Life is an aspiration, not an achievement. By this definition perfect success can never be attained, and is not to be expected. The only attainable perfection is a state of constant striving; this the Mahatma could not fail to achieve.

Perhaps his greatest strivings in his last years were the Calcutta and Delhi fasts which began on September 1, 1947 and January 13, 1948, respectively. Gandhi set his goal in Calcutta as follows: "I have to find peace in the midst of turmoil, light in the midst of darkness, hope in despair."[47] A man could not possess a higher aspiration. Fasting would help attain this goal. It was Gandhi's response to tension in New Delhi. He explained his decision in the following manner:

45. Manubehn Gandhi, *Last Glimpses*, p. 233.
46. Pyarelal, p. 587.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 765.

> My impotence has been gnawing at me of late. It will go immediately once the fast is undertaken....The final conclusion has flashed upon me and it makes me happy. No man, if he is pure, has anything more precious to give than his life.[48]

During the fasts Gandhi was at his happiest. Pyarelal writes of the Delhi fast: "With the launching of the fast Gandhi passed from tumult into peace....Never had he appeared so cheerful and care-free as immediately after the commencement of his fast."[49] The peace came from this "striving after perfection;" Gandhi was aspiring to such great deeds that he was willing to give up that inspiration which he had called "life." Like the ecstasies of the saints, only through suffering could Gandhi experience true joy, for it was only through suffering that he could serve his fellow man. The inner peace was shattered as soon as the fasts ended, as Gandhi indicated in a letter after the Delhi fast: "From calm, I have entered storm."[50]

In reading about Gandhi's last years, one experiences a sense of urgency and of impending doom; one is aware that the end is approaching. Yet Gandhi also felt this sense of urgency, and at times it seems he had premonitions of his death. Gandhi had always believed that death was not to be feared, because ultimately all would die. He did fear, however, the manner of his death. He once wrote to a friend in 1946, "There is an art in dying also. As it is, all die, but one has to learn by practice how to die a beautiful death."[51] One must be ready for death, to look towards it every moment with a sense of joy and faith in God, to prepare for dying a beautiful death. Gandhi's life of Ahimsa had been his practice to this end. He had prepared himself from his years in South Africa to be willing to die for his cause. He admitted to Manubehn that if he were to die a violent death at the hands of an assassin, he would be a true Mahatma.[52] He was prepared not only to die, but to die the beautiful martyrdom of a Mahatma.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 702.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 705.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 734.
51. M. K. Gandhi, *Collected Works*, Vol. 86., p. 6.
52. Manubehn Gandhi, *Last Glimpses*, p. 252.

Pyarelal advises us that, in December of 1947, Gandhi "was literally praying that God should gather him into his bosom and deliver him from the agony which life had become." [53] Gandhi also expressed the desire to be killed by an assassin. He told Manu, shortly before his death, that

> If I die of illness, you should declare me a false or hypocritical Mahatma. And if an explosion took place, as it did last week, or somebody shot at me and I received his bullet on my bare chest, without a sigh and with Rama's name on my lips, only then you should say that I was a true Mahatma."[54]

His desire for a martyr's death is significant. He had accepted his public and spiritual role as a Mahatma, and he realized that only death at the hand of an assassin would finally complete and confirm his life's work.

Gandhi had a strong suspicion that he would be killed, which naturally increased after the January 20th, 1948, bomb explosion at his prayer meeting in New Delhi. The accuracy of his premonitions is uncanny. On January 28th, two days before his death, Gandhi told Manubehn:

> If I am to die by the bullet of a mad man, I must do so smiling, God must be in my heart and on my lips. And if anything happens, you are not to shed a single tear.[55]

On the morning of the 30th, as Manu was preparing some throat lozenges for the night, Gandhi chided her, "Who knows what is going to happen before nightfall or even whether I shall be alive? If at night I am still alive you can easily prepare some then."[56] The same morning Gandhi told a co-worker to "bring me my important letters. I must reply to them today, for tomorrow I may never be."[57] Finally, on his way out of Birla House to go to the prayer meeting,

53. Pyarelal, p. 685.
54. Manubehn Gandhi, *Last Glimpses*, p. 298.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 280.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 287.
57. Tendulkar, Bol. 8, p. 287.

moments before his death, Gandhi gave two co-workers a message to relay to two men who were waiting to see him. "Tell them to come after prayer; I shall then see them—if I'm alive."[58]

These statements and their timing are certainly startling. One biographer, B.R. Nanda, "wonders whether he had a presentiment of an early end, or whether these remarks were no more than occasional glimpses of the torture of mind and spirit which he suffered during this period."[59] There is no clear answer to Nanda's question. Gandhi was aware of the hostility directed against him and could not expect to be safe from the violence surrounding him. One might say Gandhi thought it a "good bet" that he would be assassinated. It is unlikely that these were merely morbid outbursts of a person overwhelmed by despair, in view of Gandhi's relatively positive attitude toward death, and his refusal to be wholly overcome by his despair. He believed in his truth, and in his being a Mahatma. Accepting himself as a Mahatma, the only death he—like any other saint—could reasonably expect would be martyrdom.

Assassination, then, was the death that Gandhi both expected and desired. He was correct in believing that death at the hands of an assassin would validate his life's work, to prove it was not the work of a "false" Mahatma. N. K. Bose ponders this idea in the conclusion of *My Days with Gandhi:*

> But that martyrdom which brought his life to a finale which is comparable to the Greek tragedies acted as the touchstone which gave new meaning and new significance to the words which had so long sounded commonplace or strange in our heedless ears....India is blessed because she gave birth to one who became Gandhi, and perhaps, blessed again that, by dealing him the blow of death, we endowed his life with an added radiance which shall enrich the heritage of humankind in all ages to come.[60]

In retrospect, Gandhi's violent death is the only logical culmination of his life's work, and especially of his last years. During his last phase, Gandhi accepted himself as a true Mahatma, and

58. Pyarelal, p. 772.
59. B. R. Nanda, p. 509.
60. Bose, p. 252-53.

thereby accepted the responsibility for India's fate and for her sins. An introspective, depressed state of mind is concommitant with the carrying of such a burden. At the same time, the depth of his conviction that his path was the right one, and that God would show him the light, was also to be expected. Without such beliefs, the burden he carried would have crushed him. Only a man of intense spiritual conviction could attempt to face the communal problem as Gandhi did.

The final phase of Gandhi's life marked yet another step in his progress along the path of truth. Perhaps Tagore had envisioned Gandhi's future glory when he called him *Mahatma,* but Gandhi had known that only a lifetime of service would carry him to this height of achievement and make him a true Mahatma. In his last years he acknowledged that he had achieved this height, that he was indeed a Mahatma. The realization was not sudden: it had come slowly and steadily as Gandhi pursued his truth. With this acceptance came the burden of India's problems, relieved only by the power of his beliefs and, finally, by his death. "Life is an aspiration," he had said. In life he aspired to suffer for India. It was fitting that his death should complete that suffering.