



# Inspiration

Mahatma Gandhi, Father of the Nation, was one of the earliest livelihoods thinkers in the previous century. Gandhian livelihoods thought inspired many and continues to inspire many of us.

The three principles, part of Gandhi's essential philosophical underpinning and livelihoods thought, adopted from Ruskin Bond's *Unto This Last*, are:

- The good of the individual is contained in the good of all.
- All works have the same value, as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.
- A life of labour is a life worth living.

These principles led to his famous Sarvodaya, Swadeshi and Satyagraha.

For Gandhi, **Sarvodaya** and Antyodaya, well-being of every individual and well-being of the last individual, was an important concern and a philosophical position. Society must strive for the economic, social, spiritual and physical well-being of all, not just the majority. He favoured a holistic approach to individual well-being, and a total approach to community well-being.

Gandhi advocated **Swadeshi**, local self-sufficiency - the locus of power situated in the village or neighbourhood unit. There should be equitable distribution of resources and communities must become self-sustaining through reliance on local products. People, by making goods for local consumption, become interdependent within each locality. Small local industries help each individual to be gainfully employed and live a self-sufficient fulfilled life. For him, Swadeshi means - buy local, be proud of local, support local, uphold and live local, and decentralised local interdependence and employment for all.

**Satyagraha** (non-violent direct action) is a way of life, not just absence of violence. Satyagrahi needs to be disciplined, entailing the important element of self-restraint in respect of all the sensory urges and consumptions. It also entails respect for all beings regardless of religious beliefs, caste, race or creed, and devotion to the values of truth, love and responsibility.

Gandhi knew "Earth has enough to satisfy everybody's need but not anybody's greed" and called for replacing greed with love. Gandhi is, now, a source of inspiration and a reference for those fighting against discrimination, oppression, war, environmental degradation, lack of freedom and human rights and for those fighting for a better world. Gandhi is, therefore no longer an individual, a symbol of all that is the best and the most enduring in the human tradition. And he is also a symbol of the alternative in all areas of life - livelihoods, growth, education, organization, etc. He is a man of the future, to be shaped for the survival of human race and progress on the path of evolution.

Gandhi strove to awaken the soul-force within himself and his fellowmen. Soul-force is the source of the greatest power, with unlimited potential. He was a living example of this conviction. His eleven vows (ahimsa et al - non-violence, truth, non-stealing, celibacy, non-possession, labour, controlled palate, fearlessness, equal respect for all religions, local self-reliance,

and removal of untouchability) daily, his satyagraha, his constructive programs - meant to awaken the soul-force.

Gandhi advocated against seven "deadly sins", based on natural principles/laws: wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without morality (ethics), science without humanity, religion without sacrifice and politics without principles.

For Gandhi, "Real Swaraj will come ... by acquisition of capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused." He worked to develop such capacity that involved individual's transformation. Individual's transformation and society's transformation were not separate unrelated things for him. He emphasized : "A person cannot do right in one department whilst attempting to do wrong in another department. Life is one indivisible whole."

Gandhi wrote: I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt or when the self becomes too much for you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and weakest man whom you have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? ... Then you will find your doubt and your self melting away.

*Today we face the spectres of global warming/climate change, and continued depletion of natural resources and diversity on Earth. The unbridled consumption on the part of some and the total deprivation of others is one of the results of 'development' and economic growth. What is the way out?*

**Gandhian Thought. Gandhigiri!** It gives guidance in resisting destructive processes and building constructive ones from a position of inner moral strength. Evolving new/alternative livelihoods thought is inspired by his profound thinking and philosophy. No contradictions!

Gandhi inspires us as a person too. One gets charged with a feeling 'if a Gandhi can do, why can't I?'

Gandhi, born in middle class in an obscure princely State, was mediocre at studies, shy and nervous. He could not muster courage to speak in public. But he was a man with exceptional sincerity and truthfulness. Once any principle appealed to him, he immediately began to translate it in practice. He did not flinch from taking risks and did not mind confessing mistakes. He was ever-growing; hence he was often found inconsistent. He was not concerned with that.

In due course, he went on to lead India into freedom and became Mahatma. Einstein said - Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth. Martin Luther King Jr said - Gandhi is inescapable.

**For any one immersed in the yoga of livelihoods thought, Gandhi is inescapable. He is and will remain our inspiration.**