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Context to the nugget

Dr. Guha speaks about Gandhiji's inner journey on multiple fronts – diet, medicine, celibacy and inter-faith harmony. He speaks about how he had a scientific approach in each of these and sometimes crafted experiments to test out a certain belief and based on the results, modified it as he moved forward. He also speaks about Gandhiji's tolerance and open-ness to others' views as he was shaping his world-view through his journey.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Some of Gandhiji's habits and rituals in the quest for inner discovery, what about some of those things strikes you, off the different things that...

Dr. Ramachandra Guha (RG): I think of course there was diet, there was medicine and then there was sex or celibacy, so there were these three main obsessions. Well there was a fourth which was interfaith harmony which we have not talked about, which was, some ways most important, what kind of Hindu he was? We can talk about that later now in terms of his personal idiosyncrasies and eccentricities; he experimented a great deal with that, so it was, what should we eat? What is good? What is bad? What is healthy? What is unhealthy? What excites the senses? What does not excite the senses?

DJ: And it seems like a very scientific trial and error kind of a...

RG: Then there was medicine, where he went from being someone who opposed modern medicine to someone who saw a place for it, particularly after he had two surgeries that saved his life one for one for piles and one for appendicitis so he adopted above plural pragmatic approach to medicine and then there was celibacy which was the most peculiar and bizarre thing where he was so obsessed with celibacy that he conducted this strange and notorious experiment or testing it by sleeping with his grand-niece which I have described in a chapter in my book and that came from some peculiar belief that if you are sexually pure you can control society and tame the passions, that you tame the passions within, you can tame the passions outside with Hindus and Muslim pursuing each other this is totally absurd, absurd and also I say a manifestation of vanity that if he is sexually pure Indians would stop fighting with each other so then there is in terms of in his inner journey his religious journey which is again very interesting and very novel and worth spending time on and the discovery, so Gandhi was a Hindu and even he call himself as a Sanatani Hindu but he was a very special kind of Hindu, for one thing his Hinduism did not require a shrine to express itself so in adult life he went to a temple only once which is a Madurai temple in Meenakshi because they had finally admitted Dalits the kingdom of god was within him Ram was then in his heart so that's the first aspect as a Hindu. No ritual, no shrine, faith is within you its inside you, you don't need a church or a

mosque or a temple. Secondly, there is this whole issue of the discrimination with Dalits which he felt strongly about and wanted to absolutely eliminate thirdly he believed that, he was opposed to conversion and he famously said about CF Andrews his closest friend “my job is not to make CF Andrews a Hindu and Andrews’ job is not to make me a Christian, my job is to make him a better Christian and his job is to make me a better Hindu” by which he meant that if you see your faith in a mirror, you see your imperfections and in Christianity they are texts that glorify violence so to be a better Christian not to pay emphasis on the text that glorifies violence, in Hinduism their text that glorify untouchability and a good Hindu would meet to remove those texts or don’t pay attention to those texts and so his attitude to faith was stood between two extremes on one hand you have fundamentals so today Hindu, Muslim, Christian who believed their faith is absolutely pure certain everyone else infidel, or a bigot or a pagan and other side the atheist who are dockings who feel all faith is like crazy and superstitions and rations Gandhi has saw a room for faith but the faith must be final must not we imposed on others and that faith could be improved and refined through interfaith dialogue so I think he had a very interesting unusual and that’s the part of his personal journey he thinks about faith all the time for many years here is this young man, he is reading religious scriptures listening to them having prayer meetings with text of different traditions read, talking to Muslims, talking to Christians, talking to Parsis talking to Jews and I think that’s the aspect of his journey and even talking to atheist is the very interesting book which some of your readers may want to see its available online it’s called ‘An atheist with Gandhi’ and Gandhi had a follower and atheist follower called G Ramachandra Rao known as ‘Gora” who worked in Andhra who was very involved in the movement to abolish untouchability and he lived with Gandhi and argued his atheism with him and they had a very interesting argument and Gandhi said its fine.

DJ: One of the quotes that struck me in the book Ram was Gandhiji wanted to shut out the world when it came looking for him. One of the challenges that we face in the world we are living is just preserving our mind space to think about what we want to do and the world calmers for our tension so in your research on Gandhiji how did he go about preserving mind space.

RG: So I think for example spinning, spinning is an activity in which you are of course doing labour you are breaking down the caste barriers via you know Baniyaa spinning in fact in one of his court appearances ... he says farmer and weaver, so you are spending time with yourself you know spinning is also and of course then silence, walking, walking is another activity in which you are whatever you call it slow food and slow this right? And the day of silence that he adopted which was also a way of diving into self.

DJ: And did he keep that all the way?

RG: He started quite late he had to be started only in the 1930s in the last 10, 15 years in his life he kept it I am not sure exactly when he has started I will have to check but, spinning is also a form of labour I mean spinning for him was also kind of something you do regularly and also producing something feeling that you are doing something worthwhile but also you are just with this machine on a human scale, at the human scale you are communicating with machine and you are driving. Spinning is very different from driving in a Mercedes for example, where it is a macho thing you control or a fancy motor bike its different from that or a speed boat or a launch. It’s also a physical activity but has a very different kind, you with a machine but a very different kind of machine.

DJ: And there’s a certain simplicity to the machine, and sort of the repetitiveness of motion which drives I guess, it’s an opportunity for reflection.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: What struck me the most as I read the book and from this piece of conversation with Dr. Guha is that Gandhiji budgeted significant time for reflection. Even when he was extremely popular in the country where people around the country and around the world were screaming for his time and attention, he found time for writing or walking or spinning the wheel which gave him time to reflect on some of these deeper issues.

Second piece that struck me here was his open-ness to various points of view and his willingness to shape his beliefs along the way when subjected to new information.

Thank you for listening. Apologies for the audio being a little noisy. Dr. Guha and I had this conversation in the outdoors in the pleasant Bangalorean winter. But we couldn't put the construction worker at a neighbouring site or the birds on mute. Hope that didn't come in the way of the listening experience. For more podcast content curated by theme, please visit playtopotential.com and visit the Curated Playlists section. To know more about the Coaching and Transition Advisory work I do, please visit transitioninsight.com

End of nugget transcription

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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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