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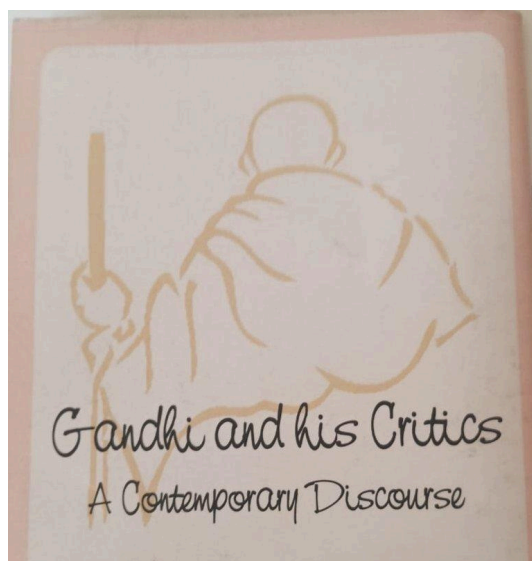
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Mahatma Gandhi and his Critics: The Need for New, Challenging, Creative Interpretations and Applications of Gandhian Philosophy & Praxis

-by Prof. Douglas Allen, University of Maine, USA



Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi is the modern world's most significant proponent of *ahimsa* (nonviolence), which is desperately needed in our contemporary world. For many decades, Gandhi's birth anniversary, the 2nd of October, now also observed as the UN International Day of

Nonviolence, has been a special day of celebration and deep reflection, a day to reimagine and rededicate ourselves to working for a world significantly informed by Gandhi's life, vision, ideals, and transformative actions.

Introductory Clarifications to my Approach, Interpretation, and Bold Theme

Unlike many of Gandhi's worshippers, devotees, and admirers – even though I am indeed an admirer – I do not think that Gandhi has given us the absolute, perfectly ethical, and spiritual blueprint of a world-order so that we can quickly respond to all his critics by rejecting their assessments as misinformed, unfair, or inadequate. Though Gandhi was an extraordinary human being, one of the most remarkable ever, he himself repeatedly confessed to his imperfections, limitations, and insufficiencies. Thus, taking into account both Gandhi's notable strengths as well as his weaknesses makes for a much more interesting, lively, engaging, and creative Gandhian legacy, which is significant for India and the world.

It follows, therefore, that critiques of Gandhian views and practices are extremely important not only theoretically but also practically for understanding what has shaped India's past and what is now happening in India and in the world. We are challenged to demonstrate how our creative interpretations and applications of Gandhi are of the utmost urgency and significance in relating to our contemporary global crises and aligning our lives to fashion a brighter future in which all human beings do not just survive but flourish.

I do not agree with those who typically provide simple Gandhian, non-Gandhian, and anti-Gandhian answers to the many present-day challenging issues. The methodology, values, conceptual framework, and spirit that inform my writing are the opposite of the typical, often stereotypical, oversimplified positive and negative responses to Gandhi and his critics. Instead, my attempt is to provide an approach, an interpretation,

and an application that challenges, engages in dialogue, generates critical reflection, and serves as a catalyst for lively interactions and debates that will enrich future creative research and practices.

In Gandhi's lifetime itself, and since his death in 1948 until the present times, along with worthwhile formulations and interpretations of Gandhi's philosophy, there have been absolutely dichotomous approaches and acutely divisive disagreements by his critics. For instance, the sharply polarized views of Gandhi's admirers versus Gandhi critics that:

- Gandhi is either against caste or he is a supporter of caste;
- He is either against racism or he is a racist;
- He is either against hierarchical exploitative capitalism or he refuses class struggle and is complicit with the capitalist ruling class;
- He is either a tolerant and inclusive Hindu who embraces the truth of all religions, or he is a Hindu who Hinduizes, Vedantizes, and falsifies the truth and reality of dominant Muslim, Christian, and other religious approaches that reject Hinduism.

In my challenging approach and framework, expressing my bold theme and argument, such dominant dichotomizing approaches regarding Gandhi and his critics usually lead to dead ends and rigid closures that are central to our contemporary existential and global crises. They restrict and block our human potential for transformative theoretical formulations and cooperative, engaged, transformative practices desperately needed in India and the world. At the end of this paper, I'll suggest ways in which we can relate to past and present research on Gandhi and his critics, by which we can move forward in new creative ways that offer great potential for the future.

Significant Difficulties and Great Challenges

In addressing Gandhi, as well as his critics, there are significant difficulties and great challenges for us in identifying, analyzing, and interpreting:

- Who is Gandhi?
- What are Gandhian perspectives?
- Who are Gandhi's most significant critics?
- What are the critics' anti-Gandhian perspectives?

The several challenges regarding Gandhi, and one can think of many similar challenges relating to his critics are the following:

First and foremost, the difficulty in understanding Gandhi's life, his writings, his legacy, and what he did and did not do arises from the fact that the literature on Gandhi is so extensive and varied. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* consists of more than 100 volumes. These do not include all publications by Gandhi, his letters, recorded speeches, and other relevant expressions. This means that interpreters – both admirers and critics – are necessarily selective in what they include and exclude from Gandhi. We privilege certain writings as essential to Gandhi, exclude his other expressions, and then present this as the real Gandhi to be supported or critiqued and rejected.

Another challenge in understanding the real Gandhi arises from the fact that there is an incredibly vast literature both by Gandhi's sympathetic interpreters, devotees, and admirers, as well as by his critics. Even dedicated Gandhians often attribute to Gandhi's positions, principles, and actions that are highly diverse and sometimes contradictory. It has been humorously said that it seems that everyone who experiences Gandhi, even if from a long distance at a train station, makes this into a kind of revelatory *darshan*. Gandhi is often reputed to have expressed wondrous, meaningful, even miraculous words, gestures, and actions, sometimes extolled, even deified as the larger-than-life Mahatma, by Indians who claim to have heard this secondhand or from some unknown source. M.K. Gandhi is often admired, venerated, and symbolized as an icon, the exemplary leader of a Gandhi cult, worshipped at times in what I've described as forms of Gandhian fundamentalism. Not only is this not helpful for developing the potential for understanding the theme of Gandhi and his critics, but it is also antithetical to understanding Gandhi, his life, and his legacy.

Gandhi himself was sometimes surprised, bewildered, and alarmed by what was attributed to him by his followers, as well as by his critics. Historians and other scholars have often demonstrated that there is little or no empirical, historical, or contextual evidence that Gandhi ever said or did some of the things attributed to him. Nevertheless, such imaginatively and contextually constructed formulations of Gandhi and what is Gandhian were extremely significant historically, culturally, morally, spiritually, mythically, and symbolically during Gandhi's lifetime and continue to be so today in constructing the narrative of Gandhi by his admirers and by his critics.

Yet other difficulties and challenges in identifying, analyzing, interpreting, and relating Gandhi and his critics during his lifetime and today are the questions:

- Which Gandhi? Do we need to consider multiple Gandhis that are supported or rejected?
- Which Gandhians? Do we need to consider numerous Gandhians with diverse Gandhian perspectives?

The above challenges apply to many of Gandhi's sympathetic or hostile critics. Thus, it can be asked: Which Muhammad Ali Jinnah? Which Sri Aurobindo? Which B.R. Ambedkar? Which Savarkar? Which Subhas Chandra Bose? Which Pandit Nehru? This even applies to Gandhi's family. Which Harilal Gandhi? Which Kasturba Gandhi?

Such difficulties and challenges are greatly enhanced by the fact that we usually regard Gandhi and his critics in relatively static ways. In contrast, Gandhi repeatedly regards his life as dynamic, action-oriented, open-ended, ongoing experiments with truth, both successful and failed experiments from which both he and we can learn by dialectically reformulating our theoretical understandings and practical applications. Through such failed experiments, Gandhi often modifies and sometimes even rejects his earlier positions, even to the extent of describing some of his earlier views and actions as "Himalayan blunders."

This tendency to isolate and abstract experiences and expressions from Gandhi's life, his relations and conflicts with critics, and our formulations today in static ways limits our understanding and hinders new creative interpretations and applications of Gandhi, his philosophy, and praxis. For example:

Are we addressing Gandhi and Gandhians regarding *Satyagraha* in the early 1920s, when Gandhi halted the national Non-cooperation Movement for Indian Independence after the relatively isolated violent incident at *Chauri Chaura* in February 1922; or his significantly different views after the Quit India Movement of the 1940s when he does not call off civil disobedience movements after incidents of far greater violence?

Are we addressing Gandhi's approach to caste:

- early in his life,
- or when he later occasionally embraces some idealized views of caste,
- or when he expresses his most radical anti-caste views late in his life?

Such open-ended questions can also be directed at the lives and views of many of Gandhi's critics.

Several Debates and Controversial Examples from Gandhi's Admirers and Critics

The limits of such static approaches can be seen in the debates involving many Gandhi admirers and Gandhi critics, especially in how we have tended to present some of Gandhi's most controversial, historical, contextually presented, and, in my view, hopelessly unacceptable positions. Here I'll note several of many relevant examples. In fairness, I acknowledge that these are

several of Gandhi's weakest and shockingly most unethical and unacceptable expressions.

In the late 1930s, Gandhi advises German Jews to observe nonviolent *Satyagraha* in responding to Hitler, Nazi genocide, and the Holocaust as, "the final solution," to exterminate all Jews. On February 24, 1939, the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, who is a great admirer of Gandhi, responds sadly and convincingly, in my view, that Gandhi's advice is completely out of touch with reality and contextually inadequate. A limit of a sole static focus on this "debate" of strong disagreements is that it limits our understanding, when we focus only on Gandhi and Buber's difference of opinion on a specific topic, while completely ignoring the fact, as to how the critic Buber greatly admires and shares much philosophically, ethically, and spiritually with Gandhi. In my view, an extreme limitation of this isolated static approach is that it fails to bring strong open-ended Buberian and Gandhian perspectives into new creative dynamic relations that can challenge us to formulate new original interpretations and applications today, which express my bold theme and argument and are evident in the following dramatic examples.

A second example is the well-known "debate" between Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore after the Bihar earthquake of 1934 in which Gandhi claims that the earthquake is a punishment for the sin of untouchability. The critic Tagore, with his naturalistic approach to the earthquake, responds furiously with several powerful attacks. Once again, a limit of an isolated and static "debate," in which both Tagore and Gandhi offer many complex and multidimensional points and counterpoints, is that it ignores how much the critic Tagore admires Gandhi, how much Gandhi admires Tagore and how much they are interconnected and unified on the most fundamental levels of human experience, truth, and reality. In my view, an extreme limitation of this isolated static approach is that it fails to bring strong open-ended Tagore-informed and Gandhi-informed perspectives into new creative dynamic relations that can challenge us to formulate new creative interpretations and applications today.

A third example can be seen in many “debates” in which diverse anti-Gandhi feminist critics attack Gandhi as an extremely oppressive patriarch with misogynistic views and actions. Once again, in fairness, I regard several of these as among Gandhi’s weakest and most objectionable positions. For example, upholding particular traditional views of *karmic* purity, Gandhi even states that if a woman is raped, this shows that she is impure, thus blaming the victim. If the rape cannot be prevented, the woman is dishonored, and it may even be better if she takes her own life rather than live with such impure dishonor. One wonders how the incredibly moral Mahatma Gandhi can take such blatantly immoral positions, especially since his philosophy of *satya*, *ahimsa*, morality, *sarvodaya*, and other key principles would seem to emphasize an opposite Gandhian position.

What I want to emphasize is that a limited, isolated, and static focus on several such ‘immoral’ examples regarding Gandhi’s sexist positions ignores the open-ended developmental understanding that Gandhi rejects many of these earlier views. For example, after the horrifying aftermath of the Partition, in which so many thousands of women were raped, Gandhi responded with incredible compassion, selfless service, and understanding that they were victims and that we must serve their needs.

Even more significantly, the various static feminist views of Gandhi’s critics often prevent our understanding of Gandhi’s changing dynamic positions on many topics, including his radical critiques of patriarchy and how there must be gender equality in all areas of life, whether in family relations or in participating in *Satyagraha* struggles. Indeed, I regard Gandhi as a revolutionary feminist, even if we use different language for that. In so many ways, a reformulated and reapplied Gandhi-informed position on gender relations is more progressive than what we usually find in contemporary India, the U.S., and the world, and this frees the potential for new creative debates, interactions, and understandings of Gandhi and his critics. Once again,

in my view, an extreme limitation of this isolated static approach is that it fails to bring vital open-ended feminist-informed and Gandhi-informed perspectives into new creative dynamic relations that can challenge us to formulate new creative interpretations and applications on gender relations and other topics today.

Gandhi and His Critics: B.R. Ambedkar and Bhagat Singh

I can now develop more of my approach, interpretations, analysis, and theme by focusing on Gandhi and two of his most prominent critics: Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Bhagat Singh. Indeed, I could have devoted most of this entire paper to the well-known debates and controversies between his prominent critic, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, and himself, as well as between the other prominent critics, Bhagat Singh and Gandhi. I have had numerous encounters in India and elsewhere in which attacking Indians respond:

“We are Dalit followers of Dr. Ambedkar, and we hate Gandhi,” and “We are followers of Bhagat Singh, and we hate Gandhi.”

Many of these isolated static formulations of the debates, with differing and strongly oppositional perspectives of Ambedkar, Bhagat Singh, and Gandhi, are insightful and worthy of consideration. However, in the open-ended creative orientation and thesis I’ve been proposing, I think that such static, rigid debates and perspectives are often oversimplified, lack nuance and complexity, and lead to dead ends that block our potential for new creative research and applications.

I propose that Ambedkar’s perspectives on caste, modernism, and many other topics have great strengths, sometimes lacking in Gandhian perspectives, but they also have limitations and weaknesses where Gandhi has greater strengths. I propose that Bhagat Singh’s informed perspectives on capitalism, the need for revolutionary class struggle, and many other topics have great strengths, sometimes lacking in Gandhian perspectives on

these topics, but they also have limitations and weaknesses where Gandhi has greater strengths. Once again, in my view, an extreme limitation of this typical isolated static approach is that it fails to bring strong open-ended Ambedkar-informed, Bhagat Singh-informed, and Gandhi-informed perspectives into new creative dynamic relations that can challenge us to formulate new creative interpretations and applications of class exploitation, caste oppression, multidimensional, structural, systemic violence and nonviolence, and other essential contemporary topics.

Let me briefly share a diverse and hopeful experience I've repeatedly had in India with followers of Ambedkar and other Dalits. On many occasions, I've been invited to deliver Gandhi-informed lectures. Sometimes interrupted during my presentation and more often just after I have finished, several in the audience stand up and aggressively and loudly proclaim:

“We are followers of Dr. Ambedkar, and we are against Gandhi.”

Gandhi is a supporter of the oppressive Hindu caste system; He is an enemy of Dalits, so-called Untouchables, outcastes, and low caste scheduled Indians; We reject anything Gandhian as an enemy of Dalit liberation.

Several of these speakers are demagogues, but most are sincere young Dalits who are disturbed by my Gandhi-informed views and want to correct me. Occasionally, these sincere young Dalits ask to meet with me or simply come to my room in the evening for several hours of intense discussion.

I listen patiently, empathetically, and respectfully. Since I am committed to the service of others, especially the most oppressed and the least free, I finally respond that I agree with much of what Ambedkar and these Dalits say. I also agree that some of what Gandhi presented on caste and many later Gandhian perspectives on caste need to be rejected. Then, after sometimes gently sharing that I don't think that these speech-making young Dalits have ever read Gandhi, I share some of my selectively reformulated

revolutionary views of Gandhi on caste. Their responses are usually amazing:

- We have never heard of such a Gandhi;
- We can agree with everything you have just presented;
- Unfortunately, the Gandhians we experience are rigid and dogmatic and reject Ambedkar and other Dalit views as unnecessary and false since they claim that their Mahatma Gandhi has all of the answers and solutions.

I then experience an emerging mutual sense of warmth, friendship, comradeship, and solidarity with these young Dalits. I have shared this example in some detail, and I could share numerous similar examples because this gives me hope and provides some of the potential for how we can develop new creative interactions and perspectives about Gandhi in the future.

Diverse Anti-Gandhian, Non-Gandhian, and Sympathetic Critics

Thus far, consistent with the general topic of, ‘Gandhi and His Critics’, I have repeatedly used the word “critics” in a rather oversimplified and uncritical manner. It will now be helpful to develop, analyze, and better understand what we mean by “critics,” how we identify and formulate the positions of critics, and how they relate to Gandhi and Gandhians. What is the wide range of diverse critics and their critiques today?

Obviously, there are many anti-Gandhi critics who are extremely hostile to anything Gandhian. Developing the diverse positions of such antagonistic anti-Gandhi critics involves understanding their perspectives on the need to resist, control, eliminate or destroy, or ignore everything Gandhian. One thinks of the many expressions of extreme, conservative, militant, violent, Hindutva anti-Gandhian Hinduism that dominate much of life in India today.

In addition, there are many other powerful critiques of Gandhi and Gandhian perspectives in India and throughout the contemporary world. Many of these represent the experiences, values, cultures, perspectives, and world views of what Gandhi interprets as the expressions of “Modern Civilization”: the super wealthy, capitalist, power-elite who control their huge corporations with their top-down concentration of power and the structures of economic globalization; those who control and profit from class exploitation, hierarchical inequality, endless greed and materialistic consumption; those who promote and profit from militarism, nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, endless wars and conflicts; and those who reject or ignore any commitment to Gandhi-informed morality, culture, technology, or spirituality. These modern anti-Gandhian critics, at most, find Gandhi an insignificant troublemaker, a minor nuisance, and an irritant. Within their dominant, modern, anti-Gandhian and non-Gandhian perspectives, they can usually ignore anything Gandhian as useless and irrelevant.

In recent years, we may note what may strike some as a surprising reversal of anti-Gandhi critics: Many influential Hindu leaders and organizations in India, earlier extreme critics, now misleadingly appear to embrace and extoll Mahatma Gandhi. Here, one finds Hindutva-promoted critics, including those in the ruling BJP, the RSS, and other parts of the dominant political, social, cultural, religious, nationalistic, and ideological narratives in India today. In earlier decades, these leaders and organizations were hostile critics of M. K. Gandhi. They expressed their anti-Gandhi antagonistic critiques:

- Gandhi makes us weak;
- He is a traitor to Hindu India and an enemy of Hindus;
- He favours Muslims and other minorities over Hindus;
- He is responsible for Partition for the Kashmir problem, and more

According to many of these critics, the Hindu nationalist Nathuram Godse, who assassinated Gandhi, was right in doing so.

In present times, there often appears to be a complete reversal by many of these leaders and groups who now embrace Mahatma Gandhi as an outstanding Indian patriot, a great Hindu, an honored martyr, someone who really expresses the Hindutva point of view and recognizes the superiority of Hindu culture and Hindu civilization, and more. I submit that these professed supporters of Gandhi remain anti-Gandhi critics, who use and misuse Gandhi's powerful name, image, and mass appeal to further their anti-Gandhian values, priorities, policies, and objectives. For example, they extoll and misuse Gandhi while promoting views, policies, and actions that Gandhi clearly views as contradictory to his philosophy, ethics, theory, and practices expressing tolerance, mutual respect, harmony, unity, nonviolence, peace, justice, and respect for multiple legitimate approaches, perspectives, and paths to truth and reality.

Over the past few years, there have also been significant, authentic, revealing changes in the positions of many other critics and even in their attitudes and approaches to Gandhi and various Gandhian perspectives. Excellent examples are evident in recent research by some top modern scientists, engineers, and other environmental experts. Previously, these modern environmental scientists and modern technology experts were confident, often arrogant, in assuming that their scientific, technological, and quantifiable models and techniques offer the only path and the specific solution to our ecological problems. Now, as the critics increasingly acknowledge weaknesses and failures, how we have reached or passed beyond the alarming tipping point, and how all human and nonhuman life on the planet is threatened with devastation and extinction, many previous critics increasingly realize the need for a radical paradigm shift in which Gandhi and Gandhian values and perspectives have much to contribute. For example, now influenced by and agreeing with Gandhi, some of these advanced environmental scientists and technology experts acknowledge that to survive and flourish, we need a change in our "modern" values. We must recognize our interconnectedness with nature; when we destroy nature, we destroy ourselves, and we must define happiness, development, and reality in more nonviolent, sustainable, Gandhi-informed ways.

In this section, we have noted that there is a very wide range of diverse critics of Gandhi, who often express a wide range of diverse critiques of Gandhian perspectives. They often present us with anti-Gandhian critiques expressing significant differences with Gandhi, but they also sometimes share many of Gandhi's concerns, values, and goals. As noted throughout this essay, we often focus on maximizing differences between Gandhi and his critics, not realizing that they may share more than what divides them. This blocks us from developing new, creative, interconnected, unifying understandings and applications of today's greatest urgency and significance.

A Bold Concluding Proposal

I intend to conclude this paper with what may strike most readers as a very bold and unexpected proposal that illustrates the bold theme and argument I've emphasized throughout this paper.

When we consider Gandhi's writings and other expressions today, every reading is to some extent a rereading; every interpretation is to some extent a reinterpretation, and every appropriation is to some extent a reappropriation and reapplication. In a dynamic, complex, open-ended process of research and practices, we are attempting to relate Gandhi's horizon of meaning with his experiences, expressions, historical, economic, political, social, cultural, religious, ethical, and spiritual contextual variables with our own horizons of meaning, informed by Gandhi's perspectives, but also informed by what is new and different in the contemporary world.

In this regard, Gandhi's writings are open-ended and malleable but not infinitely malleable. Approaches and claims by various critics and by various Gandhians sometimes express misreadings, misinterpretations, and misappropriations. For example, generalized claims by various critics that Gandhi was essentially, unchangeably, and always a racist, casteist, and sexist are misreadings, misinterpretations, and misapplications. Generalized claims by some rigid dogmatic Gandhians that Gandhi was an

absolutist regarding nonviolence and that he never allowed for any violence are also misreadings, misinterpretations, and misapplications.

This same dynamic, open-ended process applies to how we reread, reinterpret, and reappropriate what we selectively consider in the writings and other expressions of Pandit Nehru, Dr. Ambedkar, Bhagat Singh, Savarkar, and other diverse critics, and how we relate such understandings with what is different and new in our contemporary world. This same dynamic, open-ended process applies to how we reread, reinterpret, and reappropriate the wide range of diverse relations between Gandhi and his critics during his lifetime and how we can reconceptualize, reimagine, reapply, and understand the bold creative potential for their new relations that are most insightful and necessary for our contemporary world.

In other words, in referring to the discussion “Gandhi and his Critics: A Contemporary Discourse,” “contemporary” includes historical, cultural, and other research on what happened in the past that related to Gandhi and his critics. But more than that, we are challenged to consider how our contemporary discourse can relate to Gandhi and his critics in ways that are different, creative, and desperately needed today.

I can relate this bold proposal to how I understand and develop two moves in M.K. Gandhi’s seemingly bizarre reading and interpretation of his favorite sacred text, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, as a gospel of nonviolence. This strikes not only Gandhi’s critics but also diverse Gandhi supporters, millions of whom accept the teachings and practices of Gita as bewildering and based on a blatantly false reading and a personal, idiosyncratic interpretation that the text cannot justify.

As is well known, Gandhi first attempted to justify his reading and interpretation by proposing that the Gita should not be read and understood literally, on which level it is indeed very violent. Instead, it should be read and understood on the deeper levels of metaphor, myth, allegory, and other symbolic expressions in which it expresses profound nonviolent, moral, and spiritual meanings.

It is also helpful to use this approach when examining the writings and widespread appeal of various critics of Gandhi. For example, in a previous section, I focused on Ambedkar as a Gandhi critic and Bhagat Singh as one. I submit that only when we consider the mythic, allegorical, and symbolic levels of re-readings, reinterpretations, and reapplications can we begin to understand more fully the veneration, the iconic heroic idealization, and the deep ongoing widespread appeal of Bhagat Singh, for his millions of devoted followers.

What is less known, and what expresses an example of my major innovative emphasis, is a radically different, complementary, hermeneutical move and bold assertion by Mahatma Gandhi in justifying his interpretation of Gita as a gospel of nonviolence. As we have just noted, Gandhi acknowledges that on the literal level, the Gita is not a nonviolent text. He also grants that those who heard the discourse of the Gita about circa 5,000 years ago, the later great Hindu philosophers and other interpreters, those in the Indian Independence Freedom Movement for whom the Gita is their exemplary text, and hundreds of millions of devotees did not regard Gita as an essentially nonviolent text.

Instead, in his second radical move, Gandhi proposes a qualitative paradigm shift justifying his nonviolent reading, interpretation, and application. The Gita, with its profound teachings and lessons, allows us to reread, reinterpret, and reconstitute it in new, creative, nonviolent ways. We are involved in a dynamic, open-ended process grounded in the past but revealing new ways of rereading, reinterpreting, reapplying, and disclosing the Gita's potential for addressing our contemporary crises of so much immoral, social, economic, political, militaristic, psychological, linguistic, educational, technological, and environmental violence. In other words, the Gita is an essential text of nonviolence for Gandhi and for us because we can reimagine, reread, reinterpret, and reapply it in profoundly nonviolent ways that address our contemporary existential situation, just as earlier generations reconstituted it in ways that did not regard it as essentially nonviolent.

My main claim here is not that Gandhi's critics must endorse his Gandhi-informed, reformulated, new, creative views, and practices of *ahimsa*, although I think that his approach today is valuable in broadening and deepening their understandings of contemporary violence and nonviolence. Instead, my main claim here is that writings and other expressions by Gandhi and by his critics need not be regarded as expressing ahistorical, nontemporal, non contextualized, unchanging, essentialized points of view. Instead, such Gandhian and anti-Gandhian expressions are part of a dynamic developmental process in which we are given the challenging contemporary role of becoming co-authors, active subjects, engaged participants in reconstituting new structures, relations, and meanings that respond to our contemporary lives and world.

The remarkable, albeit imperfect, Gandhi does not provide all the answers and solutions, just as none of the imperfect Gandhi critics provide all the answers and solutions. My proposal has been that when we bring selectively reconstituted Gandhi-informed perspectives into integral dynamic relations with some of the selectively reconstituted critic-informed perspectives involving a radical, qualitative, revolutionary paradigm shift, we are challenged to formulate, debate, and engage in dialogue in ways that will give us hope for overcoming our existential and global crises and will move us toward solutions that are significant and desperately needed in our contemporary world and for the future.

About the Article

– Prof Douglass has based his paper on his keynote address at the Inaugural Session of the three-day International Seminar at Aryabhata College, Delhi University, supported by the Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi, on, 'Gandhi and His Critics: A Contemporary Discourse,' 2-4 October 2023, organized by Dr. Satish Jha, Convenor, Gandhi Study Circle, Aryabhata College.

-About the Author

Douglas Allen served as Professor of Philosophy at the University of Maine, USA, for 46 years (1974-2020) and became Professor Emeritus of Philosophy in September 2020. He served as Chairperson of the Department of Philosophy (1979-1982, 1998- 2003) and as the President of the international Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy (2001-2004) and now is the Editor of the Lexington Books Series of Studies in Comparative Philosophy and Religion.