

I'M PREPARED TO SAVE YOUR LIFE PROVIDED.....

“During the first three months of 1955, Maurice Brown and Francis Watson of British Broadcasting Corporation, London, visited India, travelling, interviewing and recording some of those they knew could contribute, recorded their memories and opinions of Mahatma Gandhi. The extracts below contain in brief the text of interview they had with Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. To maintain a link the opinions of a few others have also been retained.

Narrator : We are on the heights now, with the saint, the Mahatma.

B. R. Ambedkar : He was never a Mahatma. I refuse to call him Mahatma, you see. I never in my life called him ‘Mahatma’. He doesn’t deserve that title. Not even from the point of view of morality.

Narrator : Opposition. Opposition from Dr. Ambedkar, political” leader of the Scheduled Castes of India, the Untouchables. Gandhi wanted Untouchability to be dissolved by bringing the scheduled castes within the fold of Hinduism and removing all their disabilities. Dr. Ambedkar wanted protection for them as a separate community, which to Gandhi seemed morally wrong and politically dangerous. It was a very stern fight, leading in the end to one of Gandhi’s most celebrated fasts.

B. R. Ambedkar : Oh of course, he bargained and bargained ; I said, nothing doing. I’m prepared to save your life, you see, providing you don’t make hard terms but I’m not going to save your life at the cost of the life of my people. I always say that as I met Mr. Gandhi in the capacity of an opponent I’ve a feeling. I knew him better than most other people, because he had opened his real fangs to me, you see, and I could see the inside of the man.

Narrator : But one didn't have to be an opponent to be wary of the idea of a Mahatma. J. B. Kripalani, the Indian Socialist leader, was not an opponent. He was a follower from 1917 until Gandhi's death.

J. B. Kripalani : He repudiated the idea of superman, he repudiated the idea of his becoming a Mahatma. He even said that if he were such a Mahatma, it would not be possible for us to understand him. Fundamentally, I believe, Gandhiji's message was social, political, economic, and not spiritual in the sense in which spirituality is understood. I would say that we had enough of Gods and supermen. Gandhi was good enough as a man.

Dhirendra Mohan Datta : I never thought that Mahatma Gandhi was typically Indian.

Narrator : Dr. Datta is a well known philosopher now living at Santiniketan, the educational institution of Rabindranath Tagore which is now a University.

Dhirendra Mohan Datta : To modern Hindus, he was their very ideal, the very ideal which they could follow with their European education and their European background and so on they could very easily sympathize with the Hindu ideals. But the orthodox Hindus thought that he was betraying that his Hinduism was not real Hinduism.

B. R. Ambedkar : He was absolutely an orthodox Hindu.

Narrator : Dr. Ambedkar thinks so. So did many but not all Muslims. Some of them felt that Gandhi's attitude to Untouchability distinguished him.

H. N. Brailsford : He once put it in this way, that he represented eighty-five per cent of the Indian people. Well, that was a bit of an exaggeration, because he never did represent more than a mere fraction of the Muslims. But when it came to the rest, Hindu and Sikhs and even Untouchables, then his boast was correct.

Narrator : It was, at all events, sincere. Most deeply of all, he felt the cause of the Untouchables to be his own. Brailsford had some private talks with him about this.

H. N. Brailsford : He spoke with a passion that meant, I think that he was suffering under a terrible sense of vicarious guilt. He knew how abominably his people, the Hindu Nation, had treated these outcasts ; and he was determined, just for that reason, that it should be his people, the Hindu Nation, that put matters right.

Narrator : Gandhi's own attempt to put matters right was at that time a new campaign, a new passion. Dr. Verrier Elwin was with him a few months earlier in India, almost at the start of things.

Verrier Elwin : Yes, that was in 1931, and when I went with him to a temple which belonged to a leading mill-owner in Ahmedabad, and Gandhi took a party of Untouchable children into the temple. I still remember the faces of the orthodox priests when this happened, they didn't like it at all, but afterwards Gandhi had a meeting and in the course of it he said that in future the Untouchables should be called the children of God, the Harijans, by which name they've been known ever since.

Narrator : But there was a new and formidable face at the Round Table Conference. Dr. Ambedkar, born an Untouchable, had pulled himself up by his own gifts and character, and didn't want any Caste Hindu to do penance for him.

B. R. Ambedkar : Give us a separate electorate, you see.

Narrator : Dr. Ambedkar was direct and implacable. Even afterwards he never changed towards Gandhi.

B.R. Ambedkar : All this, talk about Untouchability was just for the purpose of making the Untouchables drawn into the Congress, that was one thing, and secondly, you see, he wanted that the Untouchables should not oppose his movement of *Swaraj*. I don't think beyond that he had any real motive of uplift.

Narrator : But Gandhi's motives were strong enough, after he had gone back to India, to be tested in the great fast at Poona. He was prepared for it, Pyarelal remembers, amid the conflicts of the London Conference.

Pyarelal Nayar : He said he would not sell the vital interests of the Untouchables even for the sake of India's independence, but he knew that separate electorates were not good for the vast mass of Untouchables. He said, therefore, that he would resist it even if he were alone, with his life. At that time again, nobody thought what it would ultimately result in.”¹

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¹ : B.B.C.—Talking of Gandhiji, Orient Longmans, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. Script and Narration by Francis Watson, Production by Maurice Brown, Pages 9, 10, 16, 78 and 79.

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