

***Influence of Jainism on
Mahatma Gandhi***

Kumarpal Desai

**Shri Jaybhikkhu Sahitya Trust
Ahmedabad (India)**

Influence of Jainism on Mahatma Gandhi

Kumarpal Desai



Publisher

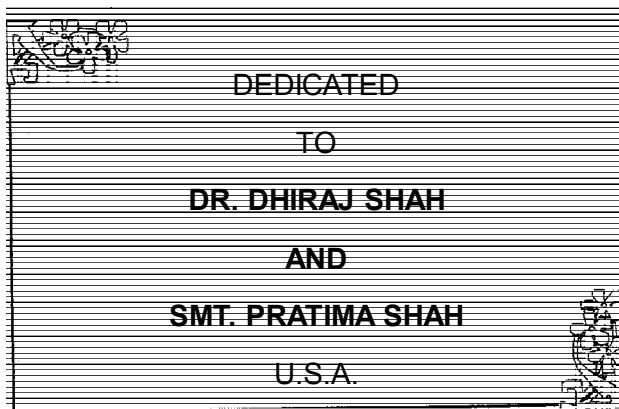
Shri Jaybhikkhu Sahitya Trust

13/B, Chandranagar Society,

Jaybhikkhu Marg, Paldi,

Ahmedabad 380 007

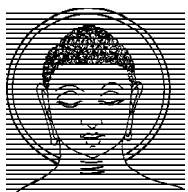
June, 2003



As long as humanity exists, the life and message of Mahatma Gandhi will continue to inspire one and all. His experiments with truth and all that he did during his lifetime were on the Indian soil, but he holds a beckon light to the entire world even today. The world has been a witness to erosion of values, rank materialism, recrudescence of violence, unmitigated possessiveness, proliferation of terrorist activities, recourse to falsehoods and unethical practices and it is at this perilous period in human history that Gandhiji's philosophy and worldview hold a ray of light to the world. Albert Einstein truly said that the world would hardly believe, generations later, that such a man in flesh and blood strode this world.

Gandhi has been an extraordinary phenomenon of the modern age. The path that he chose to tread upon and the values that he practised and exemplified, have a basis in Jain religion. The biographers of Gandhi have not adequately brought this fact to light and in this convention, I would like to present before enlightened people like you, certain details pertaining to the impact of Jainism on Gandhi's life. I deem it a privilege to be here and am grateful to JAINA for the opportunity given to air my views.





The first instance of the impact of Jainism in Gandhiji's life happened at the age of 19 when Gandhi sought his mother Putalibai's permission to go to England for further studies. Without her consent Gandhi would never think of leaving for foreign shores. Some whispered into his mother's ears that those going abroad would go the primrose path, falling prey to beef eating, carnal desires and drinking. Putalibai was confused and didn't know what to do. Nineteen year old Gandhi told his mother : "Have trust in me. I am not goint to cheat you. I say on oath that I shall abjure all these things." The mother responded : "I trust you but I am not sure what will happen in a far off country."

Putalibai, then, decided to see a jain *sadhu* Bechardasji Swami and seek his advice. Bechardasji was a *bania* by caste and had later converted to jainism. Putalibai had great faith in him. Bechardasji told her that he would make Gandhi take a vow and then there should be no problem. Gandhi took the oath before the jain monk Bechardasji to abstain from beef eating, drinking and even dalliance with women. Then she consented him to go abroad. This was the first instance in his life – a very decisive one – when he came into contact with a Jain *sadhu*.

An event in his life proved to be a

turning point in the young barrister's life and which also proved to be an important factor in turning this ordinary mortal into a Mahatma – a great soul. In the year 1891, the young barrister Gandhi returned to India from England. At that time he put up at Dr. Pranjivan Mehta's residence who was the brother of Revashankar Mehta. Revashankar Mehta was a close relative of Shrimad Rajchandra and was also a partner in his firm. Shrimad Rajchandra had also returned the same day from Mumbai and he and Gandhi met for the first time. This accidental meeting later turned into an enduring bond which lasted till the death of Shrimad Rajchandra.

While Gandhi was in England, his mother Putalibai passed away but his elder brother had not informed him about the mother's demise. Gandhi was eager to see her and it was Shrimad Rajchandra who broke the news to him since, as per the custom, such sad news had to be revealed by an elderly person. Shrimad Rajchandra was nearly two years older to Gandhi. On hearing the news, Gandhi said : "The news of her death was a greater shock than the one felt on the death of my father." At that time Shrimad Rajchandra's fame as a *Shatavadhani* – one who can attend to a hundred tasks at a time — had spread far and wide. In 1887, on 12 January, nineteen-



year old Shrimad Rajchandra had demonstrated his amazing power at a function in Mumbai's Faramji Cawasji Institute.

An important quality of Gandhi is his capacity to introspect. When he returned from England after becoming a barrister, he suffered from egoism but which melted away after meeting Shrimad Rajchandra and which made him aware of the principles of Jainism and that was to give him inner strength which was to sustain him all through his life. Dr. Pranjivan Mehta made Gandhi acquainted with Kavi Raichandbhai (Shrimad Rajchandra) who was barely twenty-five years old at that time.

During their first meeting, Shrimad Rajchandra made a deep impression on Gandhi who thought him to be a highly knowledgeable person with sterling character. Dr. Mehta told Gandhi that Shrimad Rajchandra was a *Satavadhani* and wanted him to experience his amazing powers himself. Gandhi was a barrister-at-law and Shrimad had studied upto VII standard at a school in Vavania, a small village in Saurashtra (Gujarat State). He had no knowledge of English. He had a retentive memory and would remember the words spoken to him and would rattle them off in the same order in which they were spoken.

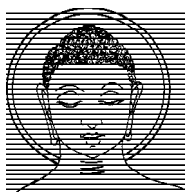


He would make additions, subtractions, multiplications and divisions mentally and would either complete a verse in an instance or compose a poem on a given subject. He would recite about 400 words from 16 languages, including Greek, Arabic, Latin, Sanskrit, Urdu, Marathi etc, which were all jumbled up. Simultaneously, he would be attending to other tasks. He would play *Chaupat* or cards or even chess against three persons. Gandhi commented : "A store-house of knowledge." It was an amazing spectacle for Gandhi who was awestruck by Shrimad's memory power. Gandhi noted : "It was a chastening experience for me to dilute the impact of western education." His arrogance slowly dissipated and humility born in its place. He acquired humility which was to become a hallmark of his character.

Gandhi writes in his autobiography (page 53), "I was jealous of his powers but was not fascinated; what fascinated me was something which I realised later. It was his deep knowledge of the scriptures, his impeccable character and his capacity to introspect."

Later Shrimad was to make deep and lasting impression on Gandhi and it was indeed fortuitous for Gandhi to have met him. Since he had not many briefs at that time,





Gandhi met him quite often and listened carefully to whatever he said. Shrimad's simplicity and vast erudition drew Gandhi closer to him. Wasn't it a rare co-incidence that Bhagwan Mahavir's philosophy was imbibed by Shrimad Rajchandra and from him it infected Gandhi? Gandhi then experimented with truth, non-violence, celibacy, non-possessiveness and these values were to guide him all through his life. A new dawn of change was thus ushered in.

Gandhi realised that Shrimad was engaged in jewellery business for earning a living and would do his best to solve all business problems but his main concern remained the realization of self and God. At his shop were found some religious books, some scriptures and he would devote himself to reading them as soon as he found time from his mundane duties and write his diary. Again in his autobiography on page 94, he writes : "A person who would write about very serious matter pertaining to one's own existence, and about self realization, could be a realized soul and not merely a businessman." Gandhi was least interested in religious stories but he got interested in stories narrated by Rajchandra. He said : "The true religion of a truly religious person should be reflected in his each and every deed and action." This is what we find in the

lives of both of them. Gandhi notes another thing : "Nobody could cheat Shrimad Rajchandra for he was deeply religious." He had to look after the business at the age of thirteen to support the family which was in dire financial condition. He would know if someone tried to cheat him for Shrimad believed that it was difficult to cheat one who possessed pure knowledge and is deeply religious."

Gandhiji accepted him as his spiritual *guru*. He writes : "I cannot describe the impact that he has left on my life. I have been searching for a truly religious man for a long time but haven't come across any other except him. Among the European philosophers Leo Tolstoy is the greatest, followed by Ruskin; but Rajchandrabhai is in a class of his own."

If we examine Gandhiji's life, we discover that he met Shrimad in 1851. He read Ruskin's thoughts in 1904 and entered into correspondence with Tolstoy in 1910. So from 1851 to 1904, it was Shrimad's influence that was paramount in Gandhi's life. In 1904, while Gandhi was travelling from Johannesburg to Durban, a gentleman called Henry Pollack handed him John Ruskin's "*Unto This Last*" which he read during the train journey. The concept of *Sarvodaya* – upliftment of the very last –



was the result of this book and which Gandhi pursued all through his life. Then he wrote three letters to Tolstoy in 1910 and in November, 1910 Tolstoy died. He, thus, did not have the good fortune to meet personally these two, but he met Rajchandra and that was the turning point in his life, and his impact lasting till the end.

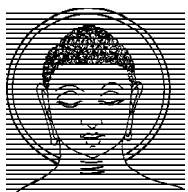
Gandhiji's source of strength was spirituality and it was Rajchandra who strengthened his faith in spirituality. Gandhiji said that while in spiritual crisis, he used to take Rajchandra's help. Here is an instance of his 'spiritual crisis'.

In October 1893, Mr. Baker took Gandhiji to Wellington convention held in South Africa. He thought that the atmosphere at the convention and the deep religious awareness of the assembled people would create such a powerful impact on him that he would convert to Christianity. The convention lasted three days but it did not have the 'desired effect' on Gandhiji. On the other hand Abdulla Shaikh of South Africa wanted him to study Islam and discussed with him the niceties of Islam. Gandhiji began reading the English translation of Quran. He read Mohmmad's biography by Washington Arvige and Carlyle's penegyric of Mohmmad. He also read books on Jarthustra to know about Parsi religion. He entered into



correspondence, on Christianity, with his Christian friends in England and especially with Edward Matlad which continued for a long time. At that time Gandhiji was aware of the weaknesses of Hinduism. In order to resolve his mental confusion he sought clarifications from Rajchandra about the doubts that assailed him. These doubts were – What is meant by soul ? What is meant by God and whether it is He who controls the universe ? What is *moksha* or salvation and whether it is possible to attain *moksha* ? What is *Aryadharma* ? What is the relevance of Bhagwad Gita ? He also raised questions about Christianity, The Bible, The old Testament, the incarnations of Krishna, Ram and Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh, the Holy Trinity in the Hindu pantheon. He wrote letters to Rajchandra seeking his guidance and he tried his best to counsel him properly and clear his nagging doubts. Raichandbhai counselled him patience and wanted him to study Hinduism a little more deeply. He gave him a copy of *Shrimad Bhagwat Gita*, which, later, Gandhiji described as spiritual panacea. He also gave him *Panchikaran*, *Maniratnamala*, a chapter from *Yogvashishtha* and *Shadadarshan Sammuchaya* by Haribhadrasuri to read. Gandhi read these volumes besides *Vachanamrut* and *Mokshamala* by





Rajchandra. After reading these books, it was clear to him that what Hindu religion has, no other religion can offer. His reverence for it increased, and he began to understand the salient features of Hinduism. He notes : "It was Raichandbhai who helped me to remove my doubts about Hindu religion." According to staunch Gandhian Sant Muni Shri Santbalji, Gandhiji's belief in Hindu religion got strengthened by Rajchandra's counselling. In order to understand Gandhiji, one must keep in mind the thoughts of Rajchandra. (Parichay-Prabhav, page 28). It is believed that Shrimad wrote about 200 letters to Gandhi and he referred to this fact in one of his lectures. If these letters were to be retrieved, they would help in solving many a basic spiritual and practical problem.

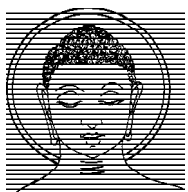
An important question often asked is : What would have happened if Gandhiji's doubts had not been resolved and if he had converted to Christianity ? Who would have then thought of *Satyagraha* (passive-resistance) and *swarajya* (self-rule) ? Gandhiji would have perhaps become a Michael or a Mohammad but that he remained Mohandas K. Gandhi is solely due to the impact of his spiritual *guru* Shrimad Rajchandra. Gandhiji writes : "I have not come across a self realized soul comparable to him and he was the greatest Indian of his time." At another place, he

says : "Shrimad Rajchandra's life itself is the greatest service rendered. I have been under several obligations of his."

Gandhiji had read many of his books and in a talk delivered after his death, he said, "I have read his books and have felt peace of mind after reading them. I believe that one who wants to alleviate mental agony and one who wants to know one's duty will find everything in his writings, be he a Hindu or a non-Hindu."

Shrimad Rajchandra and Gandhiji often discussed religion and once, after a prolonged debate, both agreed that it was difficult to do without leather and that leather be used only if it was inevitable. After their debate, Gandhiji wrote : "I was rigid from the very beginning. I asked him whether there was any leather in the cap he was wearing. Shrimad, being lost in his own thoughts, was oblivious of the fact that there was leather in the cap. When I showed it to him, he immediately removed the leather, without arguing with me. He liked what I had said and acted accordingly. He thought it was not worthwhile to argue with one who held him in great reverence. He never touched leather in life after that incident." It was he, said Gandhiji, who taught him lessons of compassion and the nature of true *dharma* and he drank deep from that well of religious knowledge.





Tolstoy Farm, 21 miles from Johannesburg, had plenty of snakes and Gandhiji, from his early childhood, was mortally afraid of them. He asked Rajchandra: "Should I allow a snake to bite or should I kill it?" Rajchandra replied: "It is not proper to say that one should allow it to bite but is it proper that one should kill it in order to protect the body? One who is uncivilised can only be told to kill the snake, not otherwise." In this way Gandhiji used to ask a variety of questions ranging from the most complex to the most ordinary and he got satisfactory answers from him.

Gandhiji's views on calibacy reflect Shrimad Rajchandra's impact. One should practise abstinence in relation to one's own wife, believed Gandhiji, and this was again due to Shrimad's abiding influence over him. Similarly, the quality of forgiveness, he learnt from Rajchandra. He realised that one should not be vengeful even towards one's enemy. On 10th February in 1908, a Pathan called Meer Alam attacked Gandhiji in South Africa but Gandhiji had not even slightest ill-will towards him. He wrote in *Indian Opinion* that the government should not take any action against him and that people should bear no grudge against him. With the passage of time, Meer Alam realised his folly. Similarly, Gandhi was indulgent to General Smutts,

Home Minister of Transvaal State, who had harassed him to no end and he forgave him for what he did to him. He gifted to General Smuts, on leaving South Africa, a pair of *chappals* - slippers - which he himself had sewn. Smuts said that he would cherish his gift. It is said that after the incident of Meer Alam's attack and Gandhiji's act of forgiving him, that he came to be known as "Mahatma Gandhi".

Gandhiji's life epitomises qualities such as non-violence, fearlessness, love of truth, forgiveness, celibacy, non-possessiveness, *anekant* and vegetarianism and one can discern the profound influence exercised by Jain religion on him. It was from Shrimad Rajchandra that he came to know the true nature of non-violence.

What is non-violence? Is it merely a word bereft of any deeper meaning? Is it an empty concept? It is none of these – it is a many-petalled lotus which shape's one's life. Since the time of Bhagwan Rishabhdev, the word has acquired myriad connotations. Many have exemplified this quality by sacrificing their lives or by practising severe penance or by suffering. It was Bhagwan Mahavir, some 2500 years ago, who gave the idea to the world, which became the basis of whatever Gandhiji did in his life time, something central to his entire existence. Seen from this point of view, there appears



to be an “invisible traffic” between Mahavir and Gandhiji. Bhagwan Mahavir gave an infallible guide to ideal living - what to do and what not to ? What to eat and what not to? How to behave and what to say and how ? This ultimately leads to non-violence, just as all roads lead to Rome.

Both Bhagwan Mahavir and Mahatma Gandhi faced ordeals in respect of non-violence. Both faced violent crowds – Bhagwan Mahavir went to Ladh region inhabited by most violent people, who ate human flesh. He faced them with equanimity and refused to even to keep a stick to ward off ferocious dogs. Nor did he used his hands to keep them at bay. Similarly, in August, 1946, Gandhi stood amidst a hostile and violent crowd in Kolkata where communal violence was at its peak and people were baying for blood. He was unarmed and the only cover he had was non-violence. In the face of such a situation there are only two possibilities – surrender or sacrifice. Bhagwan Mahavir showed love and compassion to Sangamdev, Yaksha Shulpani and the snake Chandakaushik. 2500 years later Gandhiji did the same thing. He believed : *Love conquers all*. Viceroy Lord Mountbatten said, “Something that even a brigadier could not have done, he did it all alone and saved the eastern wing of India from catastrophe.” The non-violence of Jain religion is not confined to scriptures but was practised by Mahavir



thought immense suffering. Gandhiji also walked on the same path and through self-suffering tried to win opponents over. If love is centred in "self", then it proves fatal, it is violent. If I want to save my skin by injuring others, through speech and deeds, then it is being utterly selfish. But when "self" is removed from love, it embraces the universe. Gandhiji believed in such universal love and it was from Shrimad Rajchandra that he imbibed the concept of love and non-violence. He said : “This man (Rajchandra) has touched my heart in matters religious for whom non-violence is central to his life. It is non-violence to be shown to the smallest worms and insects on the one hand and human beings on the other.”

Gandhiji also found fearlessness in Shrimad twenty-five years after Shrimad's death. He said, “Let us learn from him to assert truths fearlessly. Let us be afraid of our conscience only, all the twenty-four hours. It is our watchdog and we must not go against our conscience.”

It is apparent, if we study his life, that Gandhiji was afraid of nothing except God. He found fearlessness in Shrimad Rajchandra, his mentor. Despite being human beings, he says, we are none better than the quadrupeds in the present time. The strong suppress the weak, the rich the poor and the exploiter the exploited.

Bertrand Russell, the thinker, said :



“Ban the bomb but who will ? It is not just to bell the cat but to bell the tiger. The million-dollar question is : How and who will ? Its answer is non-violence. It was he who displayed extraordinary courage and fearlessness in facing violence and proved that non-violence is not the quality of the coward or the timid but of one who is strong. Another thing, after non-violence, that Gandhiji acquired from Shrimad Rajchandra was truthfulness. According to him Shrimad practised what he preached and always spoke the truth. Thus truth, which is central to Jain religion, is found reflected in Gandhiji's life and deeds. How did he acquire these two qualities – love of truth and non-violence ?



In the issue of “Young India” of March 1925, he writes : “His *anekantvad* is based on two principles - truth and non-violence.” He was impressed by the philosophy of *anekantvad*. He writes : “I believed that my view or opinion was always right, and that those who opposed me were wrong. Now I have realised that we both are right and I stopped accusing my critics or opponents of being wrong. I learnt that we must see what Muslims say from their point of view and what Sikhs say from the view point of the Sikhs.”

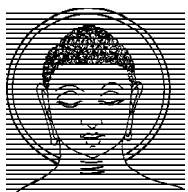
In 1938, after Shrimad's death, Gandhiji visited Rajkot and straight from the Railway Station, he visited the shrine of his spiritual guru and source of inspiration. On Shrimad's birthday, Gandhiji would remember him

wherever he happened to be and talk about what he learnt from his life in his prayer meetings.

He once said that from Shrimad's life we can learn four things : simplicity of life, truth, non-violence and faith in the eternal verities of life. Jain religion lays great stress on fasting and for Gandhiji it was his most powerful weapon. He, like Shrimad, learnt to listen to the conscience and believe in soul force. This alone can make one strong and this alone can make life worth living. Fasting purifies the soul, makes one non-violent and helps to attain salvation.

A striking incident, reflecting Jain philosophy in Gandhiji's life, happened in Gandhi's Phoenix Ashram in South Africa. A student found a shilling on way to station. Ashram's teacher Dhaivatben and students decided to spend the shilling on buying savouries. Since everyone would be party to the conspiracy, no one would complain to Gandhiji; but he somehow came to know of it. Gandhiji discussed the matter with the teacher and others and called his son Devdas. He slapped Devdas. What pained him was the fact that the son had cheated the father, He then went to Johannesburg but fasted that day. After ten days, he fasted again for seven days to atone for the sin. Every evening people were treated to a touching discourse and for seven consecutive days a verse composed by





Shrimad Rajchandra was recited. Manilal played on the organ and sang in a very serious tone and Gandhi went on discoursing. These discourses embodied the message of Rajchandra. He said : "I am fasting not to punish anyone but to overcome my weaknesses. Our *rishis* practised severe penance and as a result a tiger and a cow would play together in front of them. Unless we develop such a state of spirituality, salvation will not come our way."

One of the important tenets of Jainism is non-possessiveness - *aparigraha*. Mahavir used to say that one should not keep even a toothpick if not required. Gandhiji was profoundly influenced by this principle and from it the idea of trusteeship was born. Whatever is in excess, is for others. You have to look after not only your own needs but also needs of other people too. Learn to distribute, to share", he said. The same is true of vegetarianism which is central to Jain religion. Virchand Raghavjee Gandhi was the first to talk about Jainism in the western world. Twenty-nine years old Veerchand Raghavji gave a talk on September 11, 1893, on Jainism in the Columbus Hall of Arts Institute in Chicago. A barrister by profession, he was the first *Shravak* – a householder - to visit the USA and was well-versed in Jain, Buddhist and Hindu scriptures. Gandhiji was in close contact with him. Veerchand Gandhi set up Jain Literary Society in England and went on propagating

vegetarianism when he came into contact with Mahatma Gandhi. Both together experimented with healthy diet."

Jain religion emphasises, emancipation of women. It was the first religion which got rid of the shackles of slavery and put women on a high pedestal as it did with Chandanbala. Similarly, Gandhiji too fought for women's emancipation, stressing empowerment of women.

Gandhiji followed practices as laid down in Jain religion. He forsook evening meals during the last 36 years of his life. He drank boiled water and ate only five items in a meal which included salt. This is in accordance with the Jain concept of *Vriti Sankshep* which specifies that fixed number of items be consumed in a meal.

Jain religion is not merely a religion but a way of life. Central to it are knowledge and character which should manifest in one's conduct. Non-violence, truth, non-possessiveness, forgiveness, *anekant*, celibacy, fearlessness and vegetarianism are the core values of Jain religion and they are reflected in Gandhiji's life, in what he said and did. The conclusion therefore is inescapable that Jain religion has a lion's share in shaping the personality of the *Yugpurush* - the person of the millennium - Mahatma Gandhi.

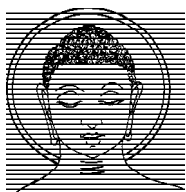


QUOTATIONS FROM THE LIFE AND WORKS OF
MAHATMA GANDHI
 IN RELATION TO HIS EXPERIENCES WITH
SHRIMAD RAJCHANDRA

Mahatma Gandhi lit up the world with his message of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) and Truth. But who inspired him ? How is it that the barrister Mr. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi became *Mahatma* Gandhi ? How did he become renowned all over the world as a *Mahatma* (Great Soul) ?

It was Shrimad Rajchandra who inspired Gandhi to embrace *Ahimsa* and spirituality. With this inspiration Gandhiji led a political, religious and social revolution in India. Gandhiji said of Shrimad :

“I cannot describe the lasting influence that Shri Rajchandrabhai had on my life. For many years I have been in search of a righteous person in India, but I have not yet met anyone who can be compared to Shri Rajchandrabhai. Amongst European philosophers, I consider Tolstoy to be top class and Ruskin the second order scholar. However, the experience of Rajchandrabhai was superior to both of them.”



Mahatma Gandhi has expressed his deepest respect towards Shrimad Rajchandra in his autobiography “Experiments in Truth” as well as in his various speeches. Expressions of the personal experiences which Mahatma Gandhi had with Shrimad are compiled here:

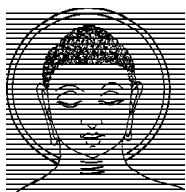
“I have learnt much from the lives of many a person, but it is from the life of *Kavishri* (the poet i.e. Shrimad) that I have learnt the most.”

[A lecture delivered by Gandhiji in Ahmedabad in 1921]

On one occasion, someone suggested to Gandhiji : “to speak a few words in any language before Shrimad and that Shrimad would recite them back in the same sequence”.

This suggestion surprised Gandhiji. Describing himself at that time, he says : “I was young, recently returned from England, and proud of my linguistic abilities. I was also very proud of my English connection, and believed that I was superior to others. With all my knowledge, I first made a list of words in different languages, because I was unlikely to remember them myself ! Then I read out all these words. Raichandbhai recited the words back to me in the same sequence, slowly and one after another. I was amazed and dumbfounded. I formed a very high opinion of the phenomenal memory of Kavishri and envied it. This experience can be considered as an excellent contribution in deflating the pride with which I had come back from England.”





Of his experience at the first meeting with Shrimad, Gandhiji says :

“The thing that did cast a spell over me was his wide knowledge of the scriptures, his spotless character and his burning passion for self-realisation.”

•

“Raichandbhai’s commercial transactions numbered in hundreds and thousands. He was a connoisseur of pearls and diamonds. No business problem was too difficult for him. But all these things were not the centre around which his life revolved. It was the passion to know himself. The man who, immediately on completing his weighty business transactions, began to write about the hidden things of the spirit. He could evidently not be a businessman at all, but a real seeker of Truth. And I saw him thus absorbed in Godly pursuits in the midst of business, not once or twice, but very often.”

[“Satya Na Prayog” or the Story of My Experiments with Truth]

•

“I have since met many a religious leaders or teachers. I have tried to meet the heads of various faiths, and I must say that no one else has ever impressed me as much as Raichandbhai.”

•

“His words had a profound impact on me. I had great regard for his intellect and for his moral uprightness. Deep down within me was the conviction that he would never lead me astray and

would always guide me with his innermost thoughts. Therefore in my moments of spiritual crisis, he was my refuge.”

[From Gandhiji’s ‘The Story of My Experiments with Truth’]

•

“While we are worldly souls, Shrimadji was not like us. While we may have to take many births hereafter, for Raichandbhai his present life may be the last. While we perhaps are running away from liberation, Raichandbhai was heading towards it with a tremendous speed. This speaks volumes of Raichandbhai’s self effort.”

[From Gandhiji’s Pen-Picture of Shrimad Rajchandra]

•

(Note: At one stage Gandhiji was considering conversion of religion)

“... I asked a few fundamental questions on Hinduism to Shri Raichandbhai by post and his replies were so logical, so appealing and convincing that I regained my faith in Hinduism and I was saved from conversion of religion. From that moment onwards, my respect and admiration for Raichandbhai increased in leaps and bounds and I considered him to be my religious guide as long as he lived.”

[From Gandhiji’s Pen-Picture of Shrimad Rajchandra]

•

“He walked with a measured pace and it was clear to anyone watching him that he was



deeply engrossed in some thoughts. His eyes sparkled with magic and inner brilliance. There was a constant glow of peace and happiness on his face. They only proved the single-mindedness of his purpose. ... His tone was so sweet that one would not get tired of hearing him. His face was smiling and in full bloom and with joy. It clearly showed the inner joy and peace.

[From Gandhiji's Pen-Picture of Shrimad Rajchandra]

•

"He was honest in all his dealings and that was the impression I had of him. Many a time I happened to be present when he was making a deal. His words were consistent and clear. I never saw any 'smart' moves on his part. He would always recognise any such moves on the part of his opponent and he could not stand them. He would raise his eyebrows and I could trace the displeasure in his eyes."

•

"There is also a belief that religious people are so innocent that anybody can cheat them; that they have no knowledge of worldly affairs. If this was true, then Lord Krishna and Lord Rama should be considered worldly. Kavishri [Shrimad] used to say that one with pure knowledge would be impossible to cheat."

•

A religious person may be honest but not necessarily knowledgeable. For one's liberation, there is a need for a combination of honesty and



self-realisation. Deceit cannot last long in the presence of one who is self-realised. Untruth cannot last long in the presence of truth. Violence is defeated in the presence of non-violence. The darkness of falsehood disappears in the light of honesty. A self-realised person and a religious person immediately recognises a deceitful person and his heart fills with compassion. How can one not recognise others when one has personally experienced the self ?

•

The liberator of the soul is the soul itself.

Raichandbhai has expressed this reality in many different ways in his writings. Raichandbhai had studied many religious texts. He had no difficulty in understanding Sanskrit and Magadhi languages. He had studied Vedant, *Bhagavat Gita*. He used to read as many Jain books as he could obtain. His powers of comprehension were immense. It was sufficient for him to read a book only once to grasp its essence.

•

In all his discussions with me, he never ever told me that I should practise a particular religion if I wanted to attain liberation. He only told me to be aware of my conduct.

•

Raichandbhai used to say many a time that different religious beliefs are like sheep pens, into which humans lock themselves. Those who have made efforts to attain liberation do not need the auspicious mark of any religion on their forehead.



Religious differences always bored him and he seldom involved himself in them. He would study the special traits of all religions and would present them to others. I got the same thing from him in my correspondence from South Africa.

•

In Raichandbhai's view, there is no need for anyone to relinquish his or her religion or belief. Whilst following one's own religion, one can be liberated. To achieve liberation is to totally shed passions and aversions.

•

Such extra ordinary memory, such knowledge and such adoration from all those around him attracted me towards him. You cannot acquire such a memory in school, true knowledge can be acquired from a 'self realise' person if there is a desire and a genuine thirst. To earn respect you do not have to go to England or anywhere else for, if your virtues deserve respect, you will be respected. I learnt this fundamental lesson immediately on my arrival in Mumbai.

•

My association with Kavishri lasted for a long time. Some people do have a sharp memory but there is no need to be overwhelmed by it. You see many people with very good academic knowledge but this knowledge is worthless if there is no accompanying culture. Powerful memory together with wide learning are only worthwhile if accompanied by cultural virtues, and they only can bring glory to the world. Kavishri was learned and cultured.

•



In my two years of very close association with him, I noted that he never deviated from the detachment which shines through the verses of 'Apurva Avsar'. The most remarkable feature of all his writing is that he only wrote what he had really experienced – there is no artificiality or falseness. I have never seen him add even one extra line to impress someone. He would always have with him some scriptures and a notebook. He would make a note of all his thoughts. Sometimes he would write prose and at other times it might be a poem. 'Apurva Avsar' was probably composed in this manner.

Whether eating, sitting or sleeping, in all that he did, there was always a detachment. I have never seen him drawn towards wealth or worldly grandeur.

•

I always felt that his writings were a genuine reflection of truth. He never wrote even a single letter merely to display his knowledge. His objective was to share with the reader the joy of the Soul. I am confident that any individual, whether a Hindu or of any other faith, if he genuinely wants to end the Soul's suffering or is keen to know the main purpose of life, would find much in Kavishri's writings.

•

During his last days, Shrimad Rajchandra suffered intense physical pain; but this did not bother him, for he was far more concerned with seeing the Divine.

•



In his remembrance, we think of the quality of fearlessness with which he brought to attention anything that was of spiritual value. Let us only fear for our conscience; let us beware, all the time, that we do not let this continual source of awareness suffer.



We should try to study the infinite penance of Shrimad's life, and let us understand how he learned to worship the Soul alone. Thinking ourselves as humble as a little lamb and with our small effort, let us think of the consciousness reigning within us, become as strong as a lion, and make our lives meaningful."



Two outstanding virtues to be imbibed from Shrimad's life are his love for Truth and *Ahimsa* [Non-violence]. His actions and conduct reflected what he believed to be true. His love for *Ahimsa* was because he was a Jain and also because it was inherent in his nature. Basic *Ahimsa* – which means not to harm even the smallest life-form and so on – (as understood by the Jains) but his *Ahimsa* did not stop there. If any human suffered any pain, Shrimad would also suffer in sympathy and because of this, he would become very detached from the material world.

His detached lifestyle is noticeable from his earliest days. He passed away at the young age of 33 years. His attitude of detachment can be seen in his writings at the age of 17 and 18. From



that young age his life's direction was one of detachment and equanimity. Even though he remained a house-holder and a businessman almost till the end of his life, yet his inner life was one of detachment.

Four lessons for us from his life are : 1) Focus on the eternal; 2) Candour in life and equal treatment to all; 3) Truth, and 4) a life full of *Ahimsa*.

I have read some of the letters he wrote just before his death and I have noticed these virtues in them. Let us remember these virtues and implement them in our lives.



The relevance of Shrimad's teaching of detachment and the transitory nature of the material world become apparent when incidents like the one below take place.

Today's newspaper carried the news of the disappearance of a P&O steam ship called 'Arabia' at mid-sea. On board that ship were such worthy people as Mr Ratan Tata, a true gem of India, and Mr Jivraj Mehta. There is no trace of either of them. The concern for this loss has created a feeling of despair across the nation. I cannot even imagine how the families of the missing persons must be feeling.

Shrimad had lived a life full of detachment. After hearing of such accidents one feels that only such a life full of detachment is worthwhile.



The one in whose remembrance we have gathered was compassion personified, he understood compassion and cultivated compassion in his life.

•

He frequently said that he could bear being repeatedly stabbed with spears but he could not bear untruth, fraud and cruelty prevalent in the world. He could not bear the stabbing pain of non-religious practices undertaken in the name of religion. I have seen him many times fuming at cruelty.

•

Seek nothing else. Find one who is Truth Personified and surrender, every moment at his feet. After that, if you do not find *Moksha*, come to me for it.

•

