

FAREWELL STATEMENT FOR ALL INDIA RADIO

By Martin Luther King, Jr. / 9 March 1959

Leaders in and out of government, organizations—particularly the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi and the Quaker Centre—and many homes and families have done their utmost to make our short stay both pleasant and instructive.

We have learned a lot. We are not rash enough to presume that we know India—vast subcontinent with all of its people, problems, contrasts, and achievements. However, since we have been asked about our impressions, we venture one or two generalizations.

First, we think that the spirit of Gandhi is much stronger today than some people believe. There is not only the direct and indirect influence of his comrades and associates but also the organized efforts that are being made to preserve the Mahatma's letters and other writings, the pictures, monuments, the work of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, and the movement led by the sainted Vinoba Bhave. These are but a few examples of the way Gandhiji will be permanently enshrined in the hearts of the people of India.

Moreover, many governmental officials who do not follow Gandhi literally apply his spirit to domestic and international problems.

Secondly, I wish to make a plea to the people and government of India. The issue of world peace is so critical that I feel compelled to offer a suggestion that came to me during the course of our conversations with Vinoba Bhave.²

The peace-loving peoples of the world have not yet succeeded in persuading my own country, America, and Soviet Russia to eliminate fear and disarm themselves. Unfortunately, as yet, America and the Soviet Union have not shown the faith and moral courage to do this. Vinobaji has said that India or any other nation that has a faith and moral courage could disarm itself tomorrow, even unilaterally.

It may be that just as India had to take the lead and show the world that national independence could be achieved nonviolently, so India may have to take the lead and call for universal disarmament. And if no other nation will join her immediately, India may declare itself for disarmament unilaterally.³

Such an act of courage would be a great demonstration of the spirit of the Mahatma and would be the greatest stimulus to the rest of the world to do likewise.

Moreover, any nation that would take such a brave step would automatically draw to itself the support of the multitudes of the earth, so that any would-be aggressor would be discouraged from risking the wrath of mankind.

May I also say that since being in India, I am more convinced than ever before that the method of nonviolent resistance is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for justice and human dignity. In a real sense Mahatma Gandhi embodied in his life certain universal principles that

are inherent in the moral structure of the universe, and these principles are as inescapable as the law of gravitation.

Many years ago when Abraham Lincoln was shot—and incidentally he was shot for the same reason that Mahatma Gandhi was shot for, namely, for committing the crime of wanting to heal the wounds of a divided nation. And when he was shot, Secretary Stanton stood by the dead body of the great leader and said these words: “Now he belongs to the ages.” And in a real sense we can say the same thing about Mahatma Gandhi and even in stronger terms: “Now he belongs to the ages.” And if this age is to survive, it must follow the way of love and nonviolence that he so nobly illustrated in his life.⁴

Mahatma Gandhi may well be God’s appeal to this generation, a generation drifting again to its doom.⁵ This eternal appeal is in the form of a warning: “They that live by the sword shall perish by the sword.”⁶ We must come to see in the world today that what he taught and his method throughout revealed to us that there is an alternative to violence and that if we fail to follow this we will perish in our individual and in our collective lives. For in a day when Sputniks and Explorers dash through outer space and guided ballistic missiles are carving highways of death through the stratosphere, no nation can win a war.

^{1.} Earlier in the day King read a version of these remarks during a press conference at the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi. His typescript included two introductory sentences: “Our much too brief pilgrimage to India has regretfully come to a close. I wish to thank everyone for the way your doors and hearts have been opened to me, my wife and Dr. Reddick” (King, “Farewell statement,” 9 March 1959; see also “Need for Universal Disarmament,” *Hindustan Times*, 10 March 1959).

^{2.} On 3 March, King walked for several miles on a *padayatra* (walking tour) with Vinoba, a disciple of Gandhi and founder of the Bhoodan movement, an effort to convince landowners to give land to the poor. King questioned Vinoba about his strategies for change and the future of India. For Vinoba’s replies, see “Dr. Martin Luther King with Vinoba,” *Bhoodan* 3 (18 March 1959): 369-370; see also Bristol to Johnson, 16, 17, and 22 April 1959.

^{3.} At the press conference this suggestion provoked a flurry of questions from reporters. When asked if he meant that the Indian army should disband, King told the press that he favored the elimination of “all major weapons of destruction” (“Need for Universal Disarmament”).

^{4.} King underlined the following passage in his copy of missionary E. Stanley Jones’s *Mahatma Gandhi: An Interpretation* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1948), p. 154: “When Lincoln was shot for the same reason that Gandhi was shot, namely, for the crime of wanting to heal the wounds of a divided nation, Secretary Stanton said as he stood beside the dead leader, ‘Now he belongs to the ages.’ Of Mahatma Gandhi it can also be said, and said with deeper meaning, ‘Now he belongs to the ages’; for if there are to be any ages

to come for man on this earth, we will have to apply his way of truth and nonviolence.” Edwin M. Stanton was Lincoln’s Secretary of War.

⁵ Jones, *Mahatma Gandhi: An Interpretation*, p. 159: “So Mahatma Gandhi is God’s appeal to this age—an age drifting again to its doom.”

⁶ Cf. Matthew 26:52.

Source:

Gandhi Centennial Radio Program, 1968.