

**HIST 432**

*International Relations in the Twentieth Century*

**Independence ≠ Freedom**

*The Tragedy of India*

Word Count: 3233

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## 1.0 Introduction: *Gandhi's India*

Gandhiji's<sup>1</sup> political movement sought not just India's independence, but maintained a transformative developmental vision focused on means over ends to attain India's Freedom.<sup>2</sup> For Gandhiji, the tenets of *Satya* (truth) and *Ahimsa* (non-violence) were central to the means for attaining freedom: *Sarvodaya* (welfare for all). Gandhism, through a reformist indigenous governance model, would rid India of the imperial organisational systems implanted by the British.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Gandhiji's reformist agenda was to continue especially after the revolution that liberated India from the British. However, while his call for India's Independence garnered widespread support, Gandhiji's holistic human-centric model to realise India's freedom was contested.

This analysis aims to chart the rise and fall of Gandhism via the life of my grandfather, Dr. Om Prakash Gupta, who as a follower and close associate of Gandhiji, experienced and reflected on this transition in its entirety – as is evident through his life's work and personal accounts, spanning from 1937 to 1963. This research is relevant as in addition to implicitly assuming that Gandhiji's ideas died with him, existing scholarship has tended to examine the post-colonial development of India from a national-level Nehruvian lens. Although some scholarship has examined the persistence of Gandhism through the pursuit of political alternatives at the micro-level, such movements have largely remained invisible. Therefore, I intend to contribute to this latter scholarship by examining how Gandhiji's ideals were advanced and implemented by Gandhians like my grandfather, whose life tells us about the miniscule, yet continued propagation of Gandhism. What makes this analysis even more unique is that the rise and fall of Gandhism will be examined through primary sources that have never been studied.<sup>4</sup>

The analysis will begin by briefly establishing Dr. Gupta's background, initial participation in the anti-colonial movement, and his understanding and embodiment of Gandhiji's developmental vision for free India. Next, it will discuss Gandhism's Rise in a conducive political atmosphere that enabled its holistic deployment by examining Dr. Gupta's formative time at the *Sevagram* ashram and work on the *Harijan* newspaper. Later, it will evaluate Gandhism's Struggle after India's independence and Gandhiji's death, probing Dr. Gupta's accounts to understand how the political elite interested primarily in the 'ends' had departed from Gandhiji's non-statist vision of 'means-oriented' human-centric development. It will argue that the statist approach was inherently incapable of realising

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<sup>1</sup> Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi – respectfully called *Gandhiji* (Mr. Gandhi) by Indians.

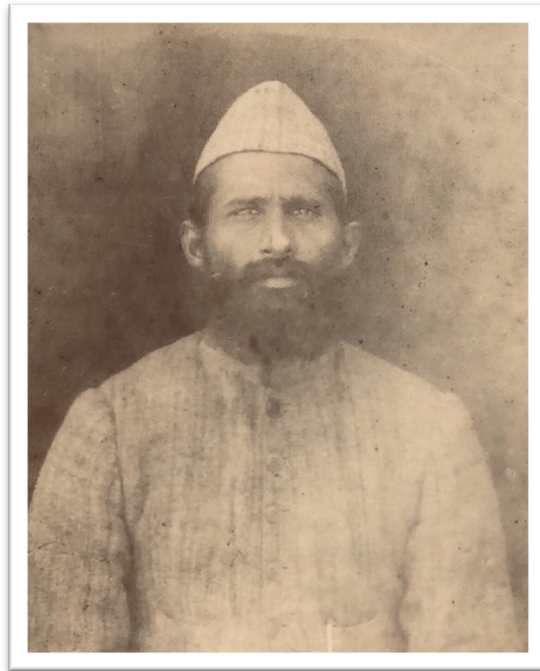
<sup>2</sup> For Gandhiji, independence was merely a result of the revolution to de-colonize India physically, whereas true freedom was to be realised through reforms to de-colonize the legacy-systems of the British.

<sup>3</sup> Given the miseries such systems had inflicted upon Indians, Gandhiji wanted to prevent India from adopting and continuing with the statist, industrialist, and capitalist system of the British. Instead, he envisioned an India that was decentralized, self-sufficient, and built bottom-up.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Om Prakash Gupta's personal photos, diary entries, and letters will aid greatly in recreating and examining this pinnacle period of India's history (1937 to 1963). Dr. Gupta was personally groomed and moulded by Gandhi over a decade, and therefore he mirrors quite equivalently Gandhian philosophy and values that are profoundly embedded in the aforementioned accounts of his. Therefore, by virtue of being his grandson, I also have unrestricted access to our familial archives and verbal histories to complement these accounts.

Gandhiji's vision to achieve India's freedom. Finally, it will examine the Fall, and highlight Dr. Gupta's continued attempts to realise Gandhiji's vision through the spaces of opportunity that the Indian state left open, through the *Bhoodan* and *Jeevandan* movements. Hence, this analysis will demonstrate that in India's post-independence political context, Gandhiji's vision for India's real freedom failed to manifest in its entirety as the apparatus and opportunities to realise these aspirations were limited and restricted.

## 2.0 Analytical Lens: *Dr. Om Prakash Gupta*



**Image 1:** Dr. Om Prakash Gupta after Serving a Jail Term (1942) <sup>5</sup>

Born on 17<sup>th</sup> May 1914 in Rehar (present day Uttar Pradesh, India) Dr. Gupta grew up in a family of *Zamindars*.<sup>6</sup> Influenced heavily by reformist literature and India's freedom struggle, he left his family, inheritance, and hometown, to take an active part in the movement. At the Benaras Hindu University (BHU), a hotspot for student participation in the freedom movement, he pursued a degree in Literature and Law, and emerged as an exceptional writer and orator. Even as a student, he lived a very simple, principled, and austere life and was always vocal about injustices. He gave up mill-clothes and would instead hand-spin and wear his own *Khadi*.<sup>7</sup> Inspired by Gandhiji's call to

<sup>5</sup> *Om Prakash Gupta after his Jail Term*. 1942. Photograph. Personal Family Archives.

<sup>6</sup> **Zamindar:** A landowner, especially one who leases his land to tenant farmers.

<sup>7</sup> **Khadi:** Clothing made from hand-spun fibre that was indigenously grown. It turned into a movement that symbolised a rejection of British materials and was hence reflective of Gandhiji's vision of a self-reliant and self-governing India.

mobilisation, through 1938 to 1942, he led and organised several non-violent protests and acts of resistance against British rule during the Quit India Movement.<sup>8</sup> He was arrested and sent to jail multiple times for non-cooperation and civil-disobedience and was eventually exiled from Benaras for six months in November 1942, in the midst of pursuing his Doctorate of Letters. He used this as an opportunity to join Gandhiji and immersed himself even deeper into the freedom movement.

In fact, this reformist seed was already sown in him in January 1942, when he heard Gandhiji speak in person at a convocation address in BHU. This was the first time he conversed with Gandhiji and it was a pivotal moment for him because from then on, it became his life's mission to implement Gandhiji's vision of a free India. In Dr. Gupta's own words, "*Gandhi envisaged a three-pronged program for the complete transformation of Human society. The struggle for Indian independence was his immediate concern. To find out non-violent ways of solving all problems - personal, national, or international was his middle-term plan, and to train people for the acceptance of new values was his long-range programme.*"<sup>9</sup> Hence, true freedom could only be realised by a reformed human society wherein all three agendas were pursued simultaneously. Using this as the analytical architecture, the following sections will demonstrate how the differential pursuit of these agendas influenced the rise and fall of Gandhism.<sup>10</sup>

### 3.0 The Rise: *Aspirations of Freedom*

For Dr. Gupta and the Indian masses, Gandhiji was the man spearheading the collective dream of India's independence and freedom. As Jawaharlal Nehru described him, "*he did not descend from the top; he seemed to emerge from the millions of India, speaking their language and incessantly drawing attention to them and their appalling condition.*"<sup>11</sup> Gandhiji inspired a whole nation - his simplicity and appeal to the masses was complimented by a reformist movement where everyone had a role to play. As it was every Indian's dream to be liberated from British rule, Gandhiji's simple and non-violent movements like the *Salt Satyagraha*, *Khadi Movement*, or *Harijan Seva*, enabled the participation of all. Sandipto Dasgupta has framed Gandhiji as the man who led the anti-colonial movement by, "*forging a contingent alliance between the disparate groups, most notably by mobilizing the rural peasant masses under the banner of Indian National Congress (INC) and its predominantly urban elite leadership.*"<sup>12</sup>

Gandhiji wanted the INC to be disbanded after independence, and its leadership to spread out as social workers across rural India to continue Gandhian reforms and nurture freedom, bottom-up. Gandhiji's indigenous vision for post-colonial India, was based on his critique of

<sup>8</sup> Tharoor, Shashi. *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India*. New Delhi: Aleph, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Gupta, O. P., Dr. (1989). *Gandhian Approach to Disarmament and Peace*. In 1124275079 848354406 R. P. Misra (Author), *Gandhian Model of Development and World Peace* (pp. 29-39). New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.

<sup>10</sup> Do note that this is about the prominence of Gandhism, not the efficacy of its deployed reforms.

<sup>11</sup> Nehru, J. (1946). *The Discovery of India*. London: Meridian Books.

<sup>12</sup> Dasgupta, Sandipto. "Gandhi's Failure: Anticolonial Movements and Postcolonial Futures." *Perspectives on Politics* 15, no. 3 (2017): 647-62. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1537592717000883>.

Western modernity and its impact on humans<sup>13</sup> i.e., “*Gandhi imagined independence as a rejection of a Western model of politics, and hence through a binary framework of colonial versus non-colonial. The failure to do so could be seen as a continuation of colonialism beyond colonial rule.*”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, Gandhiji envisioned a non-statist model that devolved political power to village units, wherein through the moral development of individuals, a republic with economic self-sufficiency and political autonomy could be fostered. Gandhiji’s ‘*enlightened anarchy*’ was to create a non-hierarchical federation of villages as opposed to the pyramid-structure of Western governance models i.e., “*decentralization would preserve the political autonomy of the villages, while a non-capitalist artisanal production system would preserve its economic self-sufficiency.*”<sup>15</sup>



**Image 2:** Dr. Om Prakash Gupta taking notes as Gandhiji addresses Jawaharlal Nehru and a Crowd (1945)<sup>16</sup>

With respect to Dr. Gupta’s three-pronged interpretation of Gandhiji’s vision, all three goals were actively pursued during the Rise. While independence was certainly the immediate goal, Gandhiji’s aspiration to attain complete freedom was genuinely pursued through two instruments: *Sevagram*, a model village to solve societal problems, and *Harijan*, a newspaper for the propagation of his political ideals and moral values.<sup>17</sup> The following letter was part of an exchange between Dr.

<sup>13</sup> “*Gandhiji’s Hind Swaraj, written in 1909, it showed that a recent visit to England had finally persuaded Gandhi that western civilization, with its factories and machinery, mass communications, noise and violence, was depriving man of quiet and the power to cultivate those spiritual qualities which lie at the heart of Gandhian philosophy, particularly those he described as truth and non-violence.*”

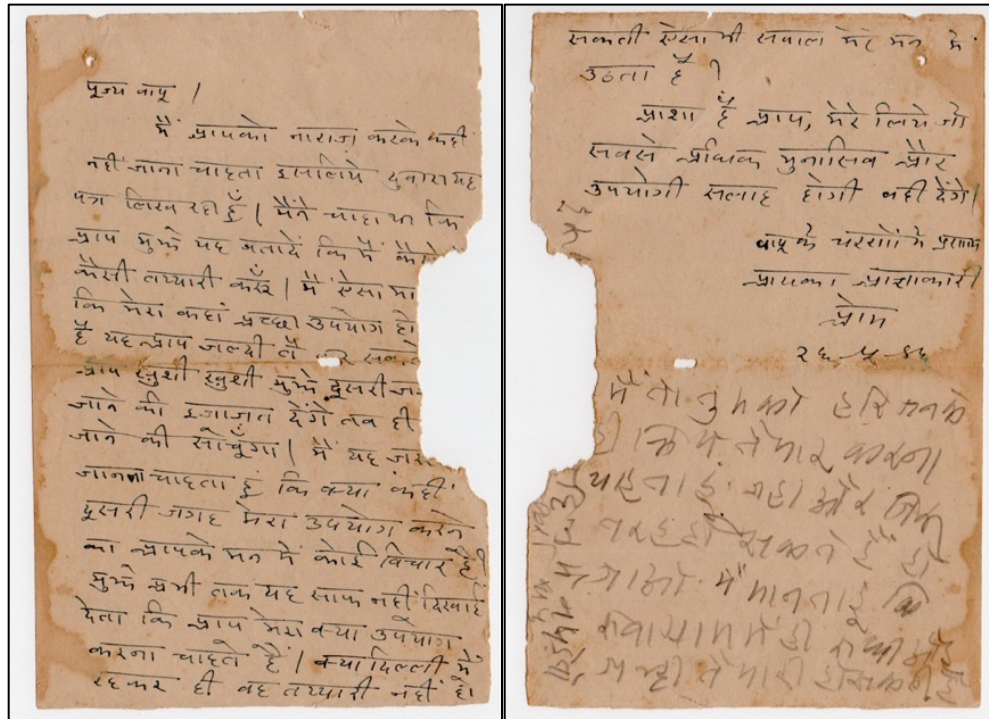
<sup>14</sup> Brown, Judith M. “The Mahatma and Modern India.” *Modern Asian Studies* 3, no. 4 (1969): 321–42. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0026749x00002778>.

<sup>15</sup> Dasgupta, Sandipto. “Gandhi’s Failure: Anticolonial Movements and Postcolonial Futures.” *Perspectives on Politics* 15, no. 3 (2017): 647–62. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1537592717000883>.

<sup>16</sup> Om Prakash Gupta taking notes as Gandhiji addresses Jawaharlal Nehru and a crowd. 1945. Photograph. Personal Family Archives.

<sup>17</sup> “*For the implementation of his immediate plan he used discussions, persuasion, non-cooperation, and non-violent resistance as his tools and techniques. Political and economic decentralization back up by his scheme of constructive work was his means to devise*

Gupta and Gandhiji, where, in asking about *Bapu's*<sup>18</sup> future plans for him, Dr. Gupta expressed his desire to accompany him to his mission in Delhi. However, wanting to prepare Dr. Gupta for *Harijan*, Gandhiji directed him to work at *Sevagram* first, and gain practical exposure to Gandhian reforms to enhance his understanding of how Gandhian principles manifest on the ground.



**Image 3:** An Exchange Between Dr. Gupta and Bapu (1946)<sup>19</sup>

*Sevagram* (village for service) was the model self-sufficient and self-reliant village that Gandhiji envisioned. It embodied and represented Gandhian philosophy, values, and systems in their totality. Gandhiji spent the final decade of his life at *Sevagram*, described by one of India's most prominent Gandhian economists, J.C. Kumarappa as, "the *de facto* capital of India."<sup>20</sup> In experiencing first-hand the centrality of bottom-up development, the principle of *Swadeshi* (localism), *Nai Talim* (new education), and rural economic models, Dr. Gupta was able to live Gandhiji's vision of true freedom in practise. He also worked and forged close bonds with J.C. Kumarappa and Vinoba Bhave, a Gandhian saint, who he would later initiate the *Bhoodan* movement with. *Sevagram* was also where he formed a close relationship with *Bapu* - living a rural life, where they grew their own vegetables, cooked, cleaned, and also worked together on *Harijan*.

*non-violent means for the solution of all social problems and lastly his scheme of Basic Education was his long-range programme to create from below all the sanctions for peace."*

<sup>19</sup> Gupta, O. P., Dr. (1989). Gandhian Approach to Disarmament and Peace. In 1124275079 848354406 R. P. Misra (Author), *Gandhian Model of Development and World Peace* (pp. 29-39). New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.

<sup>18</sup> Gandhiji was affectionately called *Bapu* (Father)

<sup>19</sup> Gupta, Om Prakash to Gandhi, Mahatma AND Gandhi, Mahatma to Gupta, Om Prakash. 26<sup>th</sup> May 1946. In Personal Family Archive. India.

<sup>20</sup> Banerjee, S. (2019). *Tracing Gandhi: Satyarthi to Satyagrahi*. London ; New York: Routledge, Taylor et Francis Group.



**Image 4:** Dr. Gupta and Gandhiji Planting a *Tulsi* (Basil) plant at *Sevagram* (1946) <sup>21,22</sup>

*Harijan*<sup>23</sup> was Gandhiji's newspaper published in English, Hindi, and Gujarati – his voice to the masses that discussed not just India's independence but also what realising real freedom would require of society. Gandhiji would write upliftingly about the debilitating problems of poverty, disease, and untouchability, appealing to the Indian masses on moral grounds. Image 5 is a draft article for *Harijan* where Gandhiji writes about making the *Bhangi* (untouchable) population feel socially included for, “*in his attitude towards untouchability there was no element of compromise.*”<sup>24</sup> Dr. Gupta would routinely review and edit Gandhiji's articles for *Harijan*. To him, *Harijan*'s articles were not just printed words on paper, but a roadmap for the work he would pursue throughout his life.

<sup>21</sup> *Om Prakash Gupta and Mahatma Gandhi Planting a Tulsi Plant at Sevagram*. 1946. Photograph. Personal Family Archives.

<sup>22</sup> Tulsi's Significance: Basil is a sacred and auspicious plant for Hindus.

<sup>23</sup> Gandhi referred to the untouchables as *Harijan* (Children of God)

<sup>24</sup> Brown, Judith M. “The Mahatma and Modern India.” *Modern Asian Studies* 3, no. 4 (1969): 321–42.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/s0026749x00002778>.

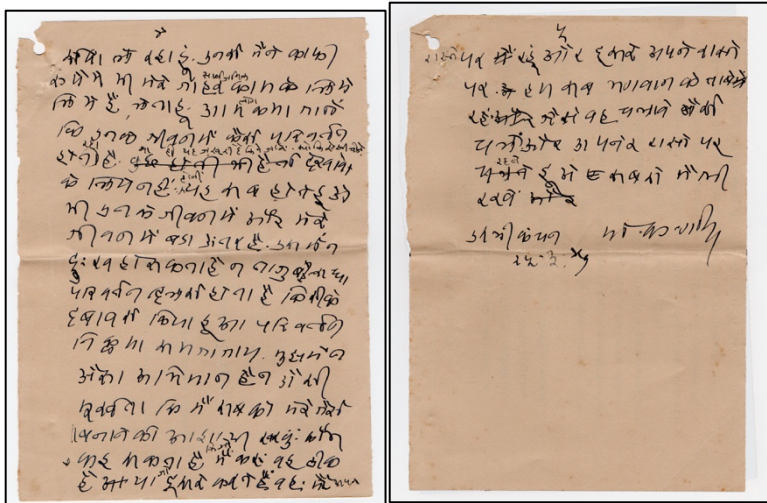
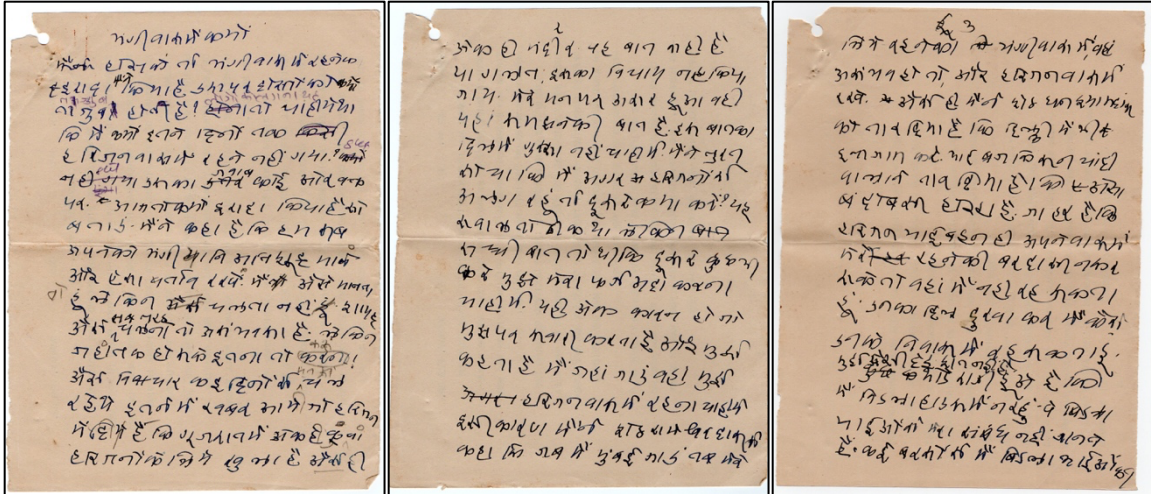


Image 5: Gandhiji's Draft Article reviewed by Dr. Gupta (1947)<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, as evident, the political atmosphere leading up to India's independence was conducive to Gandhiji's three-pronged vision for post-colonial India, and enabling of its holistic realisation aimed at attaining true freedom. Gandhiji had always maintained that one must not be just a resistor of colonialism, but also a reformist, because solving societal problems and transforming human values, required a lot of work, patience, and coordination.<sup>26</sup> However, as the following section will explore, nearing independence, as India's political elites took over its governance, the adherence to Gandhiji's vision was relegated to the sidelines.

<sup>25</sup> Mahatma, Gandhi. *Bhnginas Me Kyon*. Draft Article. Delhi: Harijan. 25<sup>th</sup> March 1947. Personal Family Archives

<sup>26</sup> "If Harijan stands for truth and if the reformers have patience, the opponents of today will be the reformers of tomorrow"  
^Taknet, D. K., & Baswani, V. (2015). *The Marwari Heritage* (p. 168). Jaipur: IIME.

### 4.0 The Struggle: A Tryst with Destiny

On the eve of India’s independence, 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947, Dr. Gupta scathingly observed, “without solving problems of poverty and hunger, freedom has no meaning. I could call this the freedom for the rich. Today, is the day, when we should actually be taking a pledge to work until we achieve real freedom.”<sup>27</sup> Later, in context of the communal violence instigated by India’s partition, he wrote how he was deeply disturbed and did not participate in the celebrations at BHU, but went to a refugee camp instead, exclaiming, “this is my place.” For him, this independence was incomplete, and not reflective of true freedom. The human values and socio-economic reforms prescribed by Gandhiji were far from being realised.

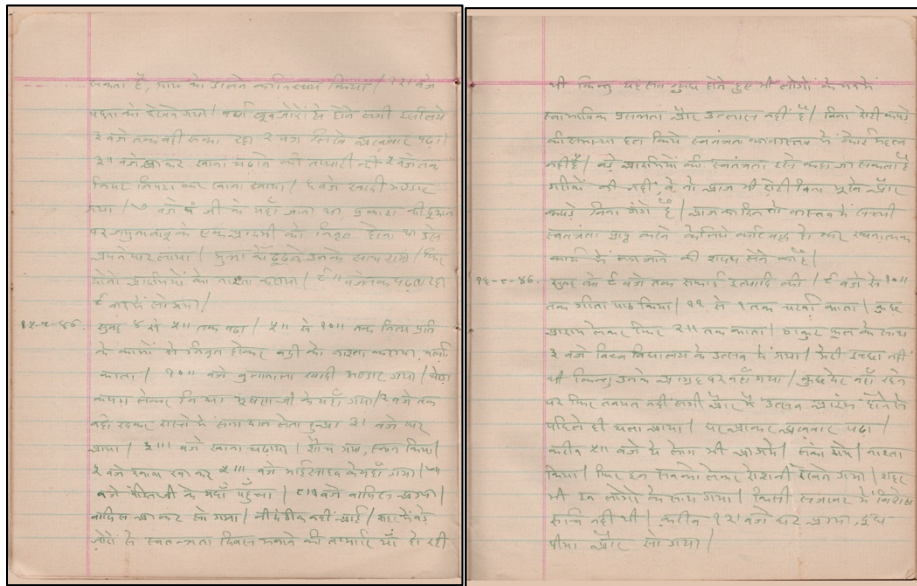


Image 6: Dr. Om Prakash Gupta’s Entry from 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947 <sup>28</sup>

Prior to India’s Independence, Gandhiji was the ‘glue’ that held the freedom movement together, and most leaders appeared to be aligned with his vision and reformist agenda. However, once independence was won, it became explicitly evident that while Gandhiji remained fervently committed to the ‘means’, most of his followers remained so, only till the ‘end’ was achieved. To Gandhiji’s credit, he had created a democratic atmosphere, where people spanning from the ideological left to right, could co-exist.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps this is why individual leaders with different visions for a post-colonial India, diverged from Gandhism, and instead of spreading out as social workers as he had envisaged, became the new rulers of India, with their own statist agendas.

<sup>27,28</sup> Gupta, Om Prakash. Diary Entry. 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947. India. Personal Family Archive.

<sup>29</sup> “Gandhiji’s role as a leader can be described as essentially that of a mediator between various groups and forces. In the first place, though on occasion not even a Congress member, he became the acknowledged leader and symbol of the anti-British agitation. As such, he held together a group of political leaders, mediating between their diverse ideologies and aims. His very rise to power in 1920 was based on this mediatory function.”

<sup>^</sup> Brown, Judith M. “The Mahatma and Modern India.” *Modern Asian Studies* 3, no. 4 (1969): 321–42. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0026749x00002778>.

Hence, with respect to Dr. Gupta's interpretation of the Gandhian constructive program, having pursued all three-prongs collectively under Gandhiji's leadership, once independence was in sight, the prominence of the latter two that were aimed at realising real freedom had started to fall. After the immediate-term goal of independence was realised, the medium-term goal to solve societal problems was pursued differently by the political elites. And while the government's antithetically statist pursuit of the medium-term goals fell short, their approach itself meant that the long-term goals of transforming human values were inherently unattainable.<sup>30</sup> The governmental apparatus to appeal to people's hearts and souls could not exist in a grand statist project. In taking complete charge and curbing the bottom-up developmental model, Gandhiji's goal to transform human society was paralyzed.

Jawaharlal Nehru, a Gandhian, anointed by Gandhiji himself as India's first Prime Minister, described his statist developmental approach as the need of the hour. Nehru asserted that, "*the crucial issue before the INC was not the means-oriented question of, non-violence versus violence, but rather how to achieve (the end of) a new political and social order*" through industrialization, not rural artisanship.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Nehru was convinced of the desirability of the Western socio-economic systems as Gandhiji's slow 'constructive program' would leave, "*India underdeveloped and lacking in basic amenities of modern life.*"<sup>32</sup> Hence, with that assumption, prosperity was to trickle down to the masses through a top-down model of development.

However, in December 1947, when Gandhiji sent Dr. Gupta to Bhopal as his emissary to the *Nawab*<sup>33</sup> to discuss a programme for the landless poor there, Dr. Gupta reflected quite bluntly on the already-rotting statist system.<sup>34</sup> In the diary entry, Dr. Gupta observed how the government in Bhopal had started to degrade as a political party i.e., it was not interested in Gandhiji's social and political reforms. Instead, they were fighting each other for power and positions, and were an absolute disgrace to the Gandhian values, merely replicating the colonial governments. Therefore, during this period, the validity of Gandhism itself was challenged by the 'divergent' Gandhians interested in assimilating power.

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<sup>30</sup> Human values could not be transformed without bottom-up propagation. A change of the heart had to manifest through a change in a person's life i.e., doing things together and feeling together. The State had no vision for this. For instance, Gandhiji's *Sarvodaya* was successful only because its reforms were deployed from below i.e., acts like donating work because they are spiritual in nature.

<sup>31,29</sup> Dasgupta, Sandipto. "Gandhi's Failure: Anticolonial Movements and Postcolonial Futures." *Perspectives on Politics*15, no. 3 (2017): 647–62. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1537592717000883>.

<sup>33</sup> A Viceroy

<sup>34</sup> "*It is not my place to comment on the working of the local Congress Party, the Hindu Maha Sabha, and the Muslim League in the state but can't stop myself from saying that these were a bunch of good-for-nothing and self-serving people occupying the seat of power. How can these men who neither had any moral character, vision, nor any interest in public welfare do any good for anybody? I wish there were some self-less, dedicated, and capable people among them - for there is so much that needs to be done. It is a sad state of affairs!*"

^ Gupta, Om Prakash. Diary Entry. 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> December 1947. India. Personal Family Archive.

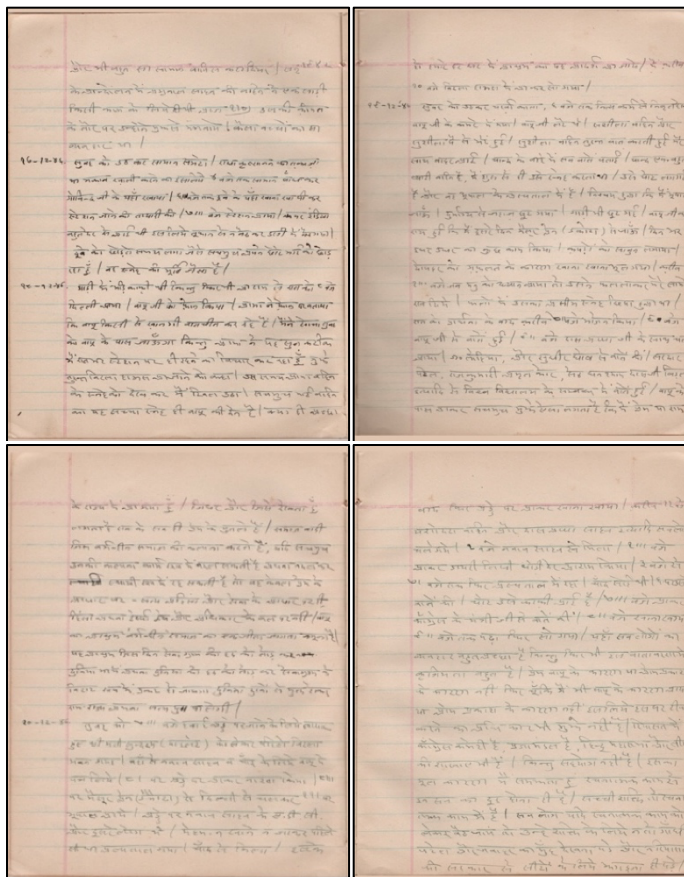


Image 7: Dr. Om Prakash Gupta’s Reflection on Bhopal’s Government (1947) 35

“The light has gone out of our lives”<sup>36</sup>, lamented Nehru following Gandhiji’s assassination on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January 1948. Following his death, Gandhiji’s vision for a free India withered away gradually. India’s new-found independence gave birth to a new, political order and atmosphere that sidelined Gandhian reforms. Although his ideas remained alive through his staunch followers, they now had limited apparatus and opportunities to deploy such reforms. While *Sevagram* was no more India’s developmental model, *Harijan* faded into the darkness with Gandhiji’s demise. In the entry below, Dr. Gupta reflects on what *Bapu* had meant to him. He particularly wonders what the ‘big job’ that Gandhiji said he had for him was. His interpretation of that, “*blank paper*” ended with a reinforced resolve to dedicate his life to work towards achieving Gandhian ideals and spreading his message. He knew that to realise complete freedom for Indians, he had to continue resolving societal problems and transforming human values at the ground level.

<sup>35</sup> Gupta, Om Prakash. Diary Entry. 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> December 1947. India. Personal Family Archive.

<sup>36</sup> Nehru, J. (Writer). (1948, January 30). The Light Has Gone Out of Our Lives. In National Broadcast. New Delhi: All India Radio.

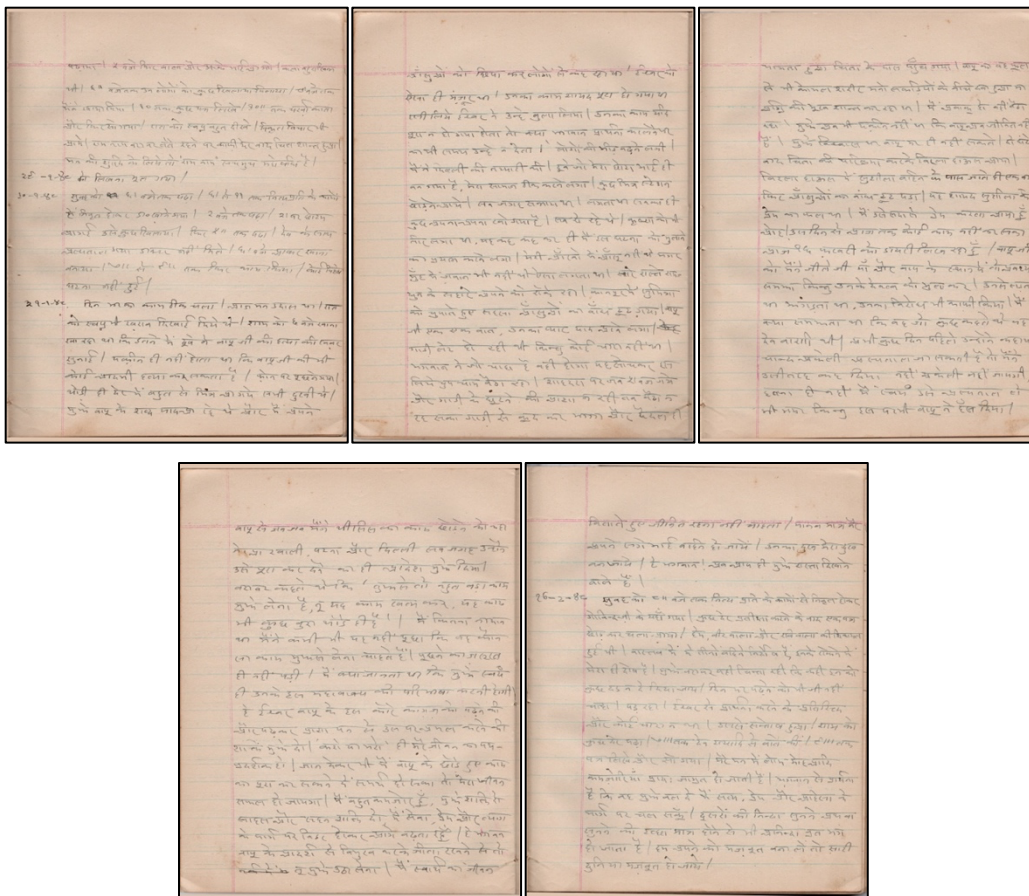


Image 8: Dr. Om Prakash Gupta's Reaction to Bapu's Assassination (1948)<sup>37</sup>

5.0 The Fall: *Independence ≠ Freedom*

Although the new government had taken charge of India's modernised developmental agenda, on the ground, there still remained unemployed, hungry, and distraught Indians, eagerly waiting for immediate succour. Gandhian values and ideologies were now missing from the post-colonial governing agendas. Yet, despite the inconducive political atmosphere of independent India, a handful of staunch Gandhians continued their struggle to realise Gandhiji's future of free India, to the extent that they could manage operating through spaces of opportunity that the state left open. Incredibly, Dr. Gupta was able to pursue this at all local, national, and international levels through movements like *Bhoodan* and *Jeevandana*.

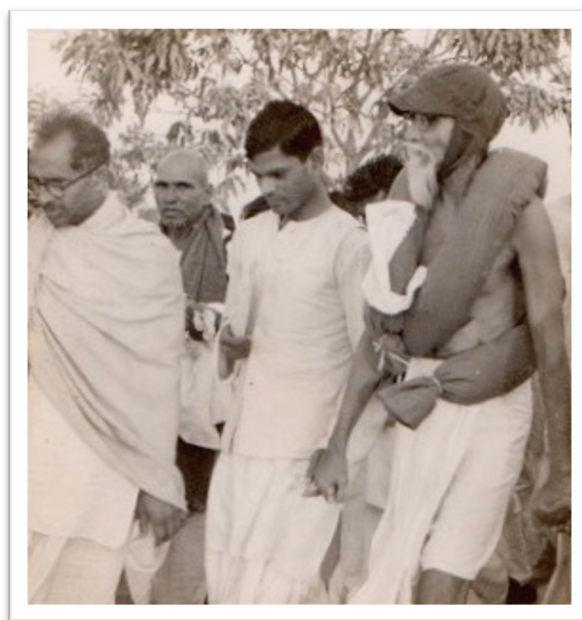
*Bhoodan* (Land Donation) was a one-of-its kind movement initiated by *Acharya*<sup>38</sup> Vinobha Bhave in 1951. It was one of the only nation-wide instances of a, “*form of decentralised, non-statist effort at economic transformation after independence.*”<sup>39</sup> Dr. Gupta, along with other Gandhian activists, walked

<sup>37</sup> Gupta, Om Prakash. Diary Entry. 31st January 1948. India. Personal Family Archive.

<sup>38</sup> **Acharya:** Preceptor and expert instructor.

<sup>33,34,35,39</sup> Sherman, Taylor C. “A Gandhian Answer to the Threat of Communism? Sarvodaya and Postcolonial Nationalism in India.” *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 53, no. 2 (2016): 249–70. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0019464616634875>.

across Indian villages, gathered lands from the haves through non-violent means, and re-distributed it amongst the have-nots. In recognising the plight of the Indian rural population and the centrality of the agrarian sector to societal functioning, they strived to counter the *Zameindari* system. As the *Acharya* had expressed, for them, a centralised state took initiative away from citizens and deprived them of the, “*true freedom of self-reliance.*”<sup>40</sup> Dr. Gupta led the core team that went to the next village one day before the *Acharya*, to actually appeal to and persuade the *Zamindars* to donate their lands. Furthermore, he conducted the groundwork to identify local beneficiaries in need of the lands, and administer the legal procedures, before facilitating the final, symbolic, transfer once the *Acharya* arrived.



**Image 9:** Dr. Om Prakash Gupta (right) Leading Bhoodan with Acharya Vinobha Bhave (left) (1951)<sup>41</sup>

Millions of acres of lands were redistributed in a way that neither the communist insurgencies nor governments were able to accomplish. Moreover, postcolonial India lacked the resources to pursue centralised planning for the entire economy and the constitution itself restricted the government’s involvement in land-reform. Furthermore, the Gandhians, “*had access to the areas that had been off-limits to the authorities.*”<sup>42</sup> Therefore, while Nehru elaborated that, “*these ideas could not have been incorporated into existing plans,*”<sup>43</sup> and that it was the government’s responsibility to resolve India’s land problem, *Bhoodan* could help create the right atmosphere for a subsequent governmental intervention. Hence, this movement demonstrated that even through the Gandhians’ apparatus to pursue Gandhian reforms for true freedom were limited, “*they caught the public imagination by sounding a note of simplicity and tradition in a period of rapid change and deviation from traditional paths.*”<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Om Prakash Gupta and Vinobha Bhave commencing Bhoodan. 18<sup>th</sup> April 1951. Photograph. Personal Family Archives.

<sup>44</sup> Brown, Judith M. “The Mahatma and Modern India.” *Modern Asian Studies* 3, no. 4 (1969): 321–42. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0026749x00002778>.

*Jeevandan* (life donation), was the idea of devoting one's whole life to the movement. It was embraced by prominent figures like Vinobha Bhave, Jayaprakash Narayan, and Dr. Gupta himself. Initially, Dr. Gupta returned to BHU to complete his Doctorate of Letters, where he was hosted by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, then the Vice Chancellor, at his home until 1949, where he completed his Book, *Mubavara Mimansa*, on the origins and development of Hindi Idioms.



**Image 10:** Dr. Gupta Presenting his Published Book to Vice-President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan <sup>45</sup>



**Image 11:** Dr. Om Prakash Gupta (left) and Jawaharlal Nehru (immediate right) at the GPF (1962) <sup>46</sup>

In 1958, the Gandhi Peace Foundation (GPF) was founded with the mission to spread Gandhiji's message of peace and non-violence. Jayaprakash Narayan invited Dr. Gupta to serve as the founder secretary of the GPF in Delhi. He worked specifically on organising seminars, activities, conferences, and also published literature in Hindi and English and was an editor of the *Gandhi Marg*

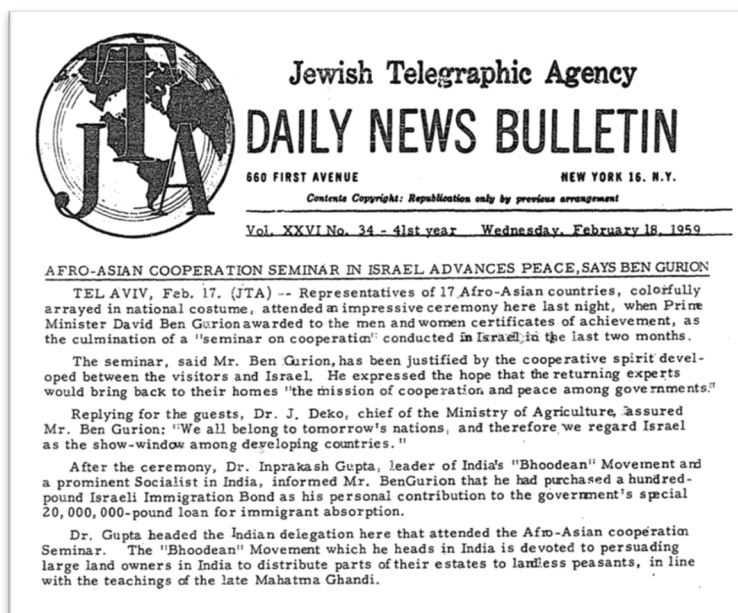
<sup>45</sup> *Om Prakash Gupta Presenting his DLit Thesis to President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan*. 1962. Photograph. Personal Family Archives.

<sup>46</sup> *Om Prakash Gupta and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru at The Gandhi Peace Foundation*. 1962. Photograph. Personal Family Archives.

magazine. Image 11 was taken at the GPF with PM Nehru who was its founding chairman and someone who continued to maintain a close relationship with Dr. Gupta. Dr. Gupta was also routinely invited to attend and address conferences globally, for instance, to Israel, USSR, France, Switzerland, Italy, Egypt, etc. Image 12 was taken at the Afro-Asian Cooperation Seminar in Tel Aviv, Israel, 1959 where Dr. Gupta's address was focused on the Gandhian approach to disarmament and peace. Image 13 is a news-clipping from the day, that reports on the Conference and describes Dr. Gupta in context of his work with the *Bhoodan* movement.



**Image 12:** Dr. Om Prakash Gupta at The Afro-Asian Cooperation Seminar with PM David Ben-Gurion <sup>47</sup>



**Image 13:** Newspaper Clipping of The Afro-Asian Cooperation Seminar <sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Om Prakash Gupta and David Ben-Gurion at a Peace and Disarmament Conference in Israel. 1963. Photograph. Personal Family Archives.

<sup>48</sup> The Afro-Asian Cooperation Seminar in Israel Advances Peace, Says Ben Gurion. (1959, February 18). *Jewish Telegraphic Agency - Daily News Bulletin*. Retrieved from [http://pdfs.jta.org/1959/1959-02-18\\_034.pdf?\\_ga=2.184391590.1034723904.1608023802-824760698.1608023724](http://pdfs.jta.org/1959/1959-02-18_034.pdf?_ga=2.184391590.1034723904.1608023802-824760698.1608023724) (Spelling Corrections: Dr. Om Prakash Gupta, Bhoodan, Mahatma Gandhi)

Dr. Gupta eventually settled down in Hyderabad, India, where he along with my grandmother, Ms. Vidya Devi, a freedom fighter, staunch Gandhian and social worker, deserving of her own Essay, established an Ashram to serve the community of Villages around them. They focused on rural-reconstruction work and ran programs for children's education, adult literacy, health and sanitation, revival of cottage industries, agricultural improvements, and community building. They also conducted training camps for people wanting to pursue similar rural-reconstruction work in other parts of India. As Trustees of the *Gandhi Smarak Nidhi* (Gandhi Memorial Fund) and active members of several other Organisations like *Sarvodaya Mandal* (Universal Welfare Organisation), they were routinely invited to talk about Gandhiji and his philosophy.

## **6.0 Conclusion: *The Tragedy of India***

In conclusion, Gandhism lost traction by virtue of the inconducive political atmosphere of post-independence India. While a development-centric future was chosen for India, Dr. Om Prakash Gupta's life makes evident that a human-centric alternative that could have realised true freedom, was abandoned. While Gandhiji's philosophy was based on the long-term vision of an India that was free of violence, injustice, and inequality, the myopic political elites of the time locked India into a trajectory that merely perpetuated the colonisation of India, albeit by its own. They maintained and perpetuated a governance system that now allowed Indians themselves exploit their Nation, even as the vast majority continued to battle with issues of poverty, casteism, hunger, and disease. Real freedom continues to elude India to this day, even after 75 years of independence, and there-in lies the tragedy of India.

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## 8.0 Appendix – Translations

### Image 3: An Exchange Between Dr. Gupta and Bapu (1946)

*Hindi – English Translation:*

*“Dear Bapu,  
I don’t want to do something that will upset you. So far, I am not very clear about what you have in mind for me. Please tell me what exactly you expect of me. If it is about some task that you want to train me for, why can’t it be done here in Delhi. However, if you think I will be of better use elsewhere, please advise.  
With Respects  
Om  
26.05.1946*

*Dear Om,  
I want to prepare you for Harijan - wherever, and whichever way it can be done. According to me Sevagram will be a good place for your training right now.  
With Blessings  
Bapu.”*

### Image 6: Dr. Om Prakash Gupta’s Entry from 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947

*Hindi – English Translation:*

*“Hectic preparation was on across the city to celebrate India’s Independence. However, my day was not very eventful. In fact, I had a very disturbed sleep that night. Generally, there was a lack of joy and excitement among the people. Without solving problems of poverty and hunger freedom had no meaning. I could call this the freedom for the rich. Today, is the day, when we should actually be taking a pledge to work until we achieve the real freedom.”*

### Image 7: Dr. Om Prakash Gupta’s Reflection on Bhopal’s Government (1947)

*Hindi – English Translation:*

*December 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> December*

*I reached Delhi on December 19 to spend a few days with Bapu at Birla House. Bapu makes you feel so much at home - his love and magnanimity always elevate your spirit. Speaking and just being with Bapu gives a divine pleasure. I also met Dr. Lobia, Sardar Patel, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, and G. D. Birla who came to see him.*

*Gandhiji decided to send me on a mission to Bhopal the next day by a special Dakota plane with a letter to be delivered to the Nawab of Bhopal and to visit a close associate of Bapu who was unwell and recouping in a hospital. As an emissary of Bapu, I was very well received but somehow it all felt artificial to me. I met the Nawab of Bhopal, a Congress Minister in the interim government, and several others.*

*It is not my place to comment on the working of the local Congress Party, the Hindu Maha Sabha, and the Muslim League in the state but can't stop myself from saying that these were a bunch of good-for-nothing and self-serving people occupying the seat of power. How can these men who neither had any moral character, vision, nor any interest in public welfare do any good for anybody? I wish there were some self-less, dedicated, and capable people among them - for there is so much that needs to be done. It is a sad state of affairs!*

Image 8: Dr. Om Prakash Gupta's Reaction to Bapu's Assassination (1948)

*Hindi – English Translation:*

*"I couldn't imagine that somebody could kill Bapu. I broke into uncontrollable tears, when I heard the news. I told myself, maybe his work was completed and so God has taken him away from us. Otherwise why wouldn't God wait until he finished his mission. I immediately started for Delhi. I was remembering Bapu, recollecting every word that he said to me and cried all the way to Delhi. My train stopped on the outskirts of the city and was not going to go any further. I was getting impatient. I got off and walked to Bapus pyre at Rajghat - miles away. His body was in flames and, I sat there still and frozen - unable to grasp the ruth that Bapu was gone. That night I spent at Birla House, Bapu's residence in Delhi. I would often come and stay with him here even while I was working on my Doctoral thesis at BHU in Benaras. He was more than a father figure to me. I would discuss, argue, fight with him on occasions - but he would always smile, remain kind and loving towards me. Every time I would tell him that I wanted to give up my studies and come and work with him, he would insist that I finished my thesis. He would tell me "I have some big work carved for you". I never asked him as to what it was. Now it was for me to decipher what that task would have been. I pray to God to help me read that "blank paper" and give me the strength to walk that path!"*