

One of the things that should be duly emphasized is that Gandhi had always felt deep sympathy for the victims of oppression, no matter with what sort of means they were able to fight against their oppressors. And he never reproached them for not using the *weapons* which he thought could have been more effective than swords and guns, i.e., nonviolent resistance. The accusation (even appreciation) that Gandhi's position was solely moralistic is totally baseless. More and more scholars of Gandhian thought are recognising that Gandhi's approach was based on his direct experiences with the social and political conditions in which he lived and worked. He had realized that the orthodox approach could not have liberated the people of India from the bondages which prevented them from growing as free individuals as well as a free community. He pleaded that the gap created by oppressors and rulers throughout the history of civilization, and which is constantly being perpetuated by power-oriented politicians and their accessories, between politics and morality, must be removed. People should take upon themselves the task of building a sane pattern of human relations. Gandhi challenged India to make a choice between sanity—human dignity and well-being—and the slavery of power and materialism.

When his eldest son asked him what should he have done, had he been present when he (Gandhi) was almost fatally assaulted in 1908—whether he should have run away and seen his father killed or whether he should have used physical force, which he wanted to use, to defend him—Gandhi told him that it was his duty to defend him even if he had to use violence. “I do believe that, where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence.... But I believe that nonviolence is infinitely superior to violence, forgiveness is more manly than punishment.

Forgiveness adorns a soldier. But abstinence is forgiveness only when there is power to punish; it is meaningless when it pretends to proceed from a helpless creature. A mouse hardly forgives a cat when it allows itself to be torn to pieces by her.” (*Young India*, 11.8.1920.)

His son had only two options, according to his own question: using violence or running away. Naturally, Gandhi, a fearless person himself, could not have advised his son to be a coward. However, if the son had seen more than two options open to him, the matter would have been different. Gandhi did not plead for India to practice nonviolence because she was weak. “I want her to practice non-violence being conscious of her strength and power. No training in arms is required for realization of her strength. We seem to need it because we seem to think that we are but a lump of flesh. I want India to recognize that she has a soul that cannot perish, and that can rise triumphant above every physical combination of a whole world.” (*Young India*, 11.8.1920.)

He, quite rightly, called himself a practical idealist, and fully recognized and appreciated “the sentiment of those who cry out for the condign punishment of General Dyer and his like.” He said, “They would tear him to pieces, if they could.” At the same time he knew that it was the cry of the helpless. The facts are that Dyer's orders to shoot an unarmed crowd in Amritsar in 1919, killing nearly sixteen hundred people in a few minutes, could not have been undone by such a revengeful act, and that the real enemy was not the wretched General, but the British rule, the throwing away of which will require a more sophisticated strategy rather than a spontaneous sentimental response. Gandhi recognized and appreciated the spontaneous violent response to the violence of the oppressor, but he wanted to grow out of it by using his knowledge and experience, so that his response would be well