

covered no inconsistency between the two. But friends who observe inconsistency, will do well to take the meaning that my latest writing may yield, unless they prefer the old. But before making the choice, they should try to see if there is not an underlying and abiding consistency between the two seeming inconsistencies. (*Mahatma*, D.G. Tendulkar, Vol. 5, p. 168.)

Gandhi's writings, though decades old, are a rich source of response to such misimpressions. His insights and analyses are as fresh today as they were when first published. Although he lived in a situation very different from ours, his basic approach still challenges the social and political structures of our society. He asserts that power does not come from the barrel of the gun, but from the will and preparedness of the people to be their own masters and that the use of weapons, even by the oppressed, does not bring real freedom.

On the 1st September, 1939—sixteen days before Soviet troops attacked from the east—the armies of Hitler entered Poland. The Poles had no hope of successful military resistance against such powerful invaders. Nonetheless, they offered whatever resistance they could. Mahatma Gandhi referred to this action on the part of the Poles in a note he wrote in response to a broadcast made by the Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces in India, in which he had declared India a military country (25th September, 1939). Gandhi wrote:

How has the undoubted military valour of Poland served her against the superior forces of Germany and Russia? Would Poland unarmed have fared any worse if it had met the challenge of these combined forces with the resolution to face death without retaliation? Would the invading forces have taken a heavier toll from an infinitely more valorous Poland? It is highly probable that their essential nature would have made them desist from a wholesale slaughter of the innocent. . . .

The same day a Congressman asked Gandhi: What is your concrete plan based on

nonviolence to oppose and prevent this war? The question was in the context of the decision of the Congress Working Committee to abandon nonviolence in case of an invasion. Gandhi started his reply by honestly admitting that he had no ready-made plan, and that for him, too, this was a new field. He continued:

Only I have no choice as to the means. It must always be purely nonviolent, whether I am closeted with members of the Working Committee or with the Viceroy. . . . But assuming that God had endowed me with full powers, which He never does, I would at once ask the Englishmen to lay down arms, free all their vassals, take pride in being called "little Englanders" and defy all the totalitarians of the world to do their worst. . . . I would further invite the Indians to cooperate with Englishmen in this Godly martyrdom. . . . It will be an indissoluble partnership drawn up in letters of the blood of their own bodies, not of their so-called enemies. But I have no such general power. Nonviolence is a plant of slow growth. It grows imperceptibly, but surely. And even at the risk of being misunderstood, I must act in obedience to "the still small voice." (*Harijan*, 30.9.1939.)

In 1939, again in the context of the World War, he wrote an editorial to make his position clear:

Even now, as then, I would not gain independence at the cost of nonviolence. The critic might retort that, if the British Government made the required declaration (independence for India), I would be helping the allies and, thereby, taking part in violence. The retort would be reasonable but for the fact that the additional help that Britain would gain from the Congress would be purely moral. The Congress would contribute neither men nor money. The moral influence would be used on the side of peace. I have already said in these columns that my nonviolence does recognise different species of violence, defensive and offensive. It is true that, in the long run, the difference is obliterated, but the initial merit persists. A nonviolent person is bound, when the occasion arises, to say which side is just. Thus I wished success to the Abyssinians, the