



Shri G. Ramachandran's work at Gandhigram is a monument of his love of learning, interest in rural development and intense patriotism. I hope that he may live for many years and make greater contribution to the progress of our country.

Dr. S. RADHAKRISHNAN
(Former President of India)



DEAR 'MAMA' G. RAMACHANDRAN • N. RADHAKRISHNAN & MYTHILI

VOLUME I

DESIKOTTAMA
DR G RAMACHANDRAN
1904 - CENTENNIAL - 2004



DEAR 'MAMA' G. RAMACHANDRAN

Edited by
N. RADHAKRISHNAN
&
SISTER MYTHILI

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**MADHAVIMANDIRAM LOK SEVA TRUST
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THIRUVANANTHAPURAM DISTRICT, KERALA**

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G. RAMACHANDRAN

Edited by
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Sister Mythili

First Published
October 2004

Price: Rs. 90/-

Printed and Published by
Sister Mythili
Managing Trustee,
Madhavimandiram Lok Seva Trust,
Neyyattinkara-629 121,
Thiruvananthapuram District, Kerala.

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Printed at
Bhagath Printers
Thiruvananthapuram-4
Ph: 0471 2540035.

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Preface :

**G. RAMACHANDRAN
- a life in nonviolence**

How does one describe 'Desikothama' Dr. G. Ramachandran? A student of Nobel laureate poet Tagore? A close disciple of Gandhi? A freedom fighter for India's independence? An early Harijan Sevak Sangh leader who fiercely fought for social justice? A cabinet minister in the first cabinet in Travancore soon after India became free? It is hard even for a devoted biographer to remember the innumerable posts held by this legendary social reformer in the post-independent India.

His life was a veritable profile in courage, creative leadership and innovation without compromising on the essentials. There was a distinct "G.R stamp" of originality on almost everything associated with him.

All human beings are endowed with the ability to inspire others and initiate activities, which in a sense, lie at the bottom of human survival and progress. The difference is in the measure of what is called being unique. Though we are made to believe that all are born equal, all are not equal biologically, temperamentally, intellectually etc. The Himalayas and the oceans reflect the human predicament. All forms of life are believed to be the manifestation of the

divine. Some are capable of developing the full potentials which make them distinct or great in comparison with the others. It is generally believed to be a question of motivation. The great ones always motivated and inspired generations of men and women who succeeded them and this in essence explains the secret of human continuity and survival. This awareness leads me to reflect on the inspiring life of 'G.R. Mama', as he was admirably addressed.

The highlights of his amazingly active life would take anyone by surprise.

Young Ramachandran joined the Non-co-operation Movement under Gandhiji in 1921 as a student who left College. He was one of the earliest students who joined the Visva Bharathi University which was just then started by Poet Rabindranath Tagore. Graduating with honours from the Visva Bharathi in 1925, he went straight to Gandhiji at the Satyagraha Ashram in Sabarmathi and placed his life at the disposal of the Master for the service of India. Gandhiji kept him as a member of his own family for one year and took personal interest in giving him necessary training. From then on till Gandhiji's death in 1948, Shri Ramachandran became a willing instrument in the Mahatma's hands for varying programmes of national service

For five years he worked under the All India Spinners' Association. Then Shri C. Rajagopalachari took him up as the Manager of the Gandhi Ashram at Tiruchengode where he put in more than three years of service. Then when the Harijan Sevak Sangh was started, Gandhiji sent him as the Provincial Secretary, first to Tamilnad and then to Kerala. It was at this time that he played a conspicuous part in the Travancore Temple Entry Movement which resulted in the Temple Entry Proclamation in the State. Then came the Salt Satyagraha Movement when he joined Rajaji in the Salt

Satyagraha battle in Vedaranyam and was elected the fourth leader of the campaign. Then followed during the next few years two long terms of imprisonment. When Gandhiji started the Hindustani Talimi Sangh for the promotion of Basic Education, he recalled Shri Ramachandran to Sevagram where he became the Assistant Secretary of the Sangh. During the next three years he pioneered with Basic Education in Tamilnad, Andhra and Mysore. It was at this time that the Haripura Session of the Indian National Congress took place and the Session was followed by big movements, for freedom in the Indian States. Gandhiji then commissioned Shri Ramachandran to take up the work in Travancore. The Travancore State Congress which conducted a sustained and hard struggle, had in Shri Ramachandran one of its outstanding leaders who constantly kept the link between Gandhiji and the movement. In this connection he was imprisoned three times. He was a prisoner when the Quit-India Movement burst upon the country and Shri Ramachandran was immediately detained in prison, after the completion of his prior term of imprisonment. Coming out of prison some time later he was drawn once again into constructive work.

Then came Indian Independence and Dr. Ramachandran was elected to the Travancore Legislative Assembly, and became a member of the first Travancore Congress Cabinet headed by Shri Pattom Thanu Pillai. This Cabinet resigned some time later and Shri Ramachandran was called back to Wardha again to become the General Secretary of the All India Village Industries Association in which capacity he served another three years. It was at this period that along with his gifted and dedicated wife Dr. (Mrs) Soundram Ramachandran, Gandhigram was founded. The growth of Gandhigram was symbolic of the growth of India under the sunshine of national

independence. It is today perhaps the biggest Gandhian institution in India. There is hardly any Constructive work in India in which Shri Ramachandran has not participated and which he has not strengthened. Well-known books he has written are (1) *The Man-Gandhi* (2) *A sheaf of Gandhian Anecdotes* (3) *Glimpses of the Indian Renaissance* (4) *Grama Seva -step by step* (5) *Higher values of Life* (6) *Adventuring with Life*.

As a colleague of Ramachandranji for over three decades I am at a loss to mention what precise impact he has left on me. I joined him as a young lecturer in 1968 in the Gandhigram Rural Institute in whose founding and developing he played a great role. The Gandhigram Rural Institute popularly known as 'GRI' was described in official circles as G. Ramachandran Institute, a great experiment in higher education, was the living symbol of the Gandhian pattern of education in all aspects. As the Honorary Director of this fascinating experiment which provided the students, besides academic inputs, rich insights into the realities of village India outside the campus. In every respect Gurudev Tagore's Shantiniketan and Gandhiji's Sabarmati Ashram found eloquent reflections in the educational, cultural and extension life of the Gandhigram community. The manner in which the programmes were structured and the life regulated in the campus, gave an impression that only a master can conceive and implement such programmes with astounding success.

As days went by, Ramachandranji took me into confidence and I remember with accuracy when one day after the evening prayer he took me in his car to his home and asked me in his characteristic manner if I could take up a challenging job besides my teaching work. When I hesitated in replying, looking at my face he asked, 'Are you thinking that I am taking you to a slaughter house? The question is simple, can you help me in my *Shanti Sena* as Asst. Chief Organiser?'

He put into my hand a copy of the book *Shanti Sena* by Vinoba Bhave and asked me to see him after reading it next week. That day was really a turning point in my life. From matters connected with *Shanti Sena* our association spread to many larger areas and there were occasions when he entrusted to me higher responsibilities and when I looked back it might be difficult to fathom the extent of his influence on me and what I could see about myself, could be as well said about his influence on several colleagues.

Without any doubt I could say that he influenced a generation of Gandhian workers, educators, political leaders, administrators, policy planners and young men and women and the credit of interpreting Gandhi in the post-Gandhian period through education and constructive work goes to him. If Jawaharal Nehru was the political heir of Gandhi, Vinobaji the spiritual heir and Jayaprakash Narayan a bridge between Gandhian and the post-Gandhian era. Ramachandranji was the one, who dynamically interpreted the holistic vision of Gandhi and the role of education in it.

Ramachandranji used to say that besides his mother and wife, *Shanti Sena* was his greatest love. The way he nourished the Gandhian concept of *Shanti Sena* and gave it a shape and life within the totality of the Gandhian paradigm of development, speaks volumes of his conviction that unless and until the youth are brought into the centre of all our efforts, we would miss the bus as a nation.

The great importance he attached to the activities of the All India Khadi and Village Industries Commission when he was its Chairman, the brave strides that he was able to make as the founder-Vice-Chancellor of the Gandhigram Rural Institute, which had grown into a deemed university under his love and care, the elaborate

women's development programmes he launched at the Madhavi Mandiram Lokseva Trust after his retirement from Gandhigram, the pioneering role he had played in organising the activities of the premier Gandhian institutions in this country such as Gandhi Smarak Nidhi and Gandhi Peace Foundation, all reflect his undying courage and leadership qualities. It is but natural that such a one would have been one of the chosen instruments of the Almighty.

One of the most gratifying things that some of the colleagues and admirers of Ramachandranji were able to do after his passing away is to constitute a national committee under the Chairmanship of former President of India Dr. K.R. Narayanan to plan and execute appropriate programmes to perpetuate the memory of Ramachandranji. The committee met several times and gave concrete shape to several programmes and some of the programmes were already implemented. One significant step that will go a long way in promoting the youth leadership activities is the establishment of Ramachandran-Ikeda Award to foster youth leadership.

Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, the President of Soka Gakkai International, which has been promoting Gandhian ideals throughout the world through the networking of institutions of education, culture and social work all over the world, has been a great friend and admirer of Ramachandranji. Both Ramachandranji and President Ikeda share similar views about the role of youth in human survival.

Another significant G. Ramachandran-related development is the manner in which the distinguished Prof. Glenn D. Paige, founder Chairman of Centre of Global Nonviolence at Hawaii, carries forward his crusade to usher in a *Nonkilling Society* through the adoption of *Nonkilling*

Global Political Science. Professor Paige acknowledges his profound admiration of Ramachandranji and believes his meetings and discussions with 'G.R.' as turning points both in his life and in the formulation of his approaches to Gandhi and Nonviolence.

'G.R. Mama', as he was affectionately addressed by his colleagues and admirers, continues to be a great source of inspiration. His great life and the innumerable institutions he founded or associated with are eloquent expressions of his total commitment to the welfare of fellow-men and women. He had no regrets. All through he was 'Adventuring with Life'. His was a Great Life and verily it was a springboard of everlasting inspiration and joy.

Neelakantam,
20.09.2004.

N. Radhakrishnan

INTRODUCTION

The present volume, first in a series of twenty four books to be published during a period of twelve months from October 2004, contains brief but intimate assessments of the personality, work and contribution of Desikothama Dr.G. Ramachandran, affectionately addressed as '*Mama*' by his admirers and friends. This has two sections—first assessments by a few of some of the closest colleagues of 'G.R.' while the second section contains messages from world leaders and national leaders on G.R.'s work and personality.

Speaking about Gandhi's desire to live up to 125 years, Ramachandraji once humorously said he wanted to live only a hundred years. But after a pause he qualified it and said that, he did not want to defy the law of nature and the only prayer he would have was let it come gracefully. His saintly mother passed away at 99.

It was joy, all through, to work with him, though it was always difficult for any of his colleagues to catch up with his speed, punctuality, perfection and accuracy. He imbibed several qualities from his parents, Gandhi and Tagore. His saintly mother taught him values of compassion and love while his strict disciplinarian father taught him the lessons of nobility. Tagore's poetry, beauty and liberal views on education and life shaped his perception of life in general while Gandhi remained a perpetual beacon and guiding presence.

Was G.R. a Tagorean or Gandhian? Several of G.R.'s friends and admirers often asked this question. There were many who took the position that he was more of a Tagorean than a Gandhian, while the number of those who argued that he was out and out a Gandhian, was no less small. There was much truth in both the positions. Our position is that he was both. Above all this, he was G. Ramachandran and he was a genius who was not a shadow of anybody. He was, no doubt, influenced by many persons-small and great. There was a distinct "G.R. stamp" on almost everything he did. He led a creative resurgence in the nature of activities of all the institutions he founded or associated with. The large number of admirers and colleagues and those who knew him cherish his leadership qualities or human touch he infused in to the working of Gandhian institutions all over India. Internationally also he had a large number of friends and admirers. Martin Luther King (Jr.) Khrushchev and Chou-En-lai and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan are only a few of who admired G.R. for his contribution to world peace.

All through his life, he influenced and inspired people around him, particularly and encouraged a vast number of people in different places elsewhere. He left a rich legacy which will continue to guide and inspire generation of constructive workers.

The birth centenary of such a one as 'G.R. Mama' whose memory is a perennial source of inspiration to most of us who also were privileged to associate ourselves with this man of destiny, should be occasions to rededicate ourselves to the ideals he cherished. These centenary volumes are our humble tribute to the memory of this great man. We hope readers will find these volumes useful.

N. Radhakrishnan

Mythili

8 October 2004

THE GOLDEN BRIDGE BETWEEN SHANTINIKETAN AND SABARMATI

N. RADHAKRISHNAN

To have worked with Gandhi and Tagore, and to have been guided by them during the formative period of one's life, that too at a time when the country was undergoing cataclysmic changes following the Nationalist Movement, and later to have worked in close contact with Nehru and Rajaji, is a rare privilege which very few Indians can imagine now. Dr. G. Ramachandran who has now become a legend has had this singular privilege of associating himself with almost all the Makers of Modern India. The vital role he played in rural reconstruction and Gandhian education is part of modern Indian history. A study of this multifaceted personality, who at a very young age fearlessly responded to the call of freedom and who without looking back went forward with uncommon courage, dedication and honesty to work for the cause of rural development and rural higher education for over six decades would reveal

extremely interesting facets of a very courageous and daring man who had a penchant for going off the beaten track. His life is a study in courage in every sense.

Leaving college to take part in the Non-co-operation movement under Gandhi in 1921, he went away from his home town Neyyattinkara, at that time a sleepy village near Trivandrum to Viswabharati in Shantiniketan to study under poet Tagore. After graduating from the Viswabharati, he went to Gandhi's Satyagraha Ashram in Sabarmati near Ahmedabad and that was a turning point in the development of the personality of young Ramachandran. Gandhi bestowed special attention on him and gave him hard training, offering him important items of work and taking the young disciple with him during many of his important journeys and also assigning important work connected with the various programmes in the armory of the Gandhian revolution. Gandhi wanted Ramachandran to be familiar with as many items of work of the Gandhian Constructive Programmes as possible. Ramachandran's association with the All-India Village Industries Association and the Harijan Sevak Sangh was part of his training under Gandhi. He was 'Appu to those in his home and 'G.R', among his colleagues and others.

What G.R said about Constructive Programme reveals his mind on this important contribution of Gandhi:

The Constructive Programme may not be a perfect one. It may have to be amended here and there and readopted to new situations. But it is unassailable at the point where its foundation is laid at the center of the picture of National Reconstruction. It is not without significance that the Five Year Plan itself had to be drawn a little close to the Constructive Programme in its final shape than it was originally.

Ideals and methods are blood relations. The ideals of Rural Reconstruction, which we have now defined as National Reconstruction inevitably, bring in certain methods of so fundamental as this one. We need the maximum of employment for the maximum number of people. This means the widest possible spread-over of employment, instead of concentration of employment at certain points. The Constructive Programme therefore emphasizes decentralization of production and distribution. That is why Khadi and Village Industries are of the utmost importance. Decentralization and self-sufficiency is impossible. What is however possible in decentralization without self-sufficiency cover a very wide, vital and challenging area. Constructive Workers therefore still cling tenaciously to Khadi, Village Industries and Basic Education. These do find a place in the Five Year Plan. But these are not central in it. We have here thus the agreement and the difference between the Gandhian Plan and the Five Year Plan.

Dr. G. Ramachandran acknowledged Mahatma Gandhi as his master and there is clear evidence to show that Gandhi bestowed on G.R even from the earlier days of their acquaintance great affection and attention. The young Ramachandran was greatly influenced by poet Rabindranath Tagore. Those who knew G.R from close quarters are aware of the extent to which G.R was influenced by Tagore. He was in every sense of the term a great confluence of Gurudev Tagore and the Mahatma. It is not easy for any commentator or scholar to delimit and say that Gurudev Tagore's influences on G.R are on such and such aspects and that of the Mahatma is in some other. And probably the better way to look at this very important and complex aspect is to realise the fact that G.R from his younger days displayed a kind of individuality that revealed penetrating farsightedness and resisted any blind acceptance of anything that he came into contact. He had his own approach to everything that he did. Yet it cannot be denied that it was Tagore who influenced him at the most impressionistic period of his life as a student in Shantiniketan. G.R. wrote:

My faith and my Certainty received inspiration and added strength from my Great Guru in Shantiniketan, poet Rabindranath Tagore. What I derived from him enriched and widened my intellectual and cultural vision. Apart from his greatness as a poet and philosopher he was the first great Internationalist of the Indian Renaissance. His central message was the unity of mankind to be achieved through cultural inter-

course. That was why, he created Viswabharati University. He wanted the world to meet together for cultural contacts and understanding. He too believed in the certainty that man would ultimately redeem himself. Mahatma Gandhi and poet Rabindranath Tagore jointly symbolized the vitality of the soul of India and her undefeatable hope for the future. I was doubly blessed that I was a student of Viswabharati when Gurudev was in the full glory of his *health sadhana*.

Shantiniketan in those days was a heaven of individual freedom and it fostered liberal thinking and Tagore's ambition was to provide a type of education which will infuse not only courage and conviction in the students that will arm them with inner strength which often stems only from the Upanishadic ideal of beauty and every learner is a transformed and inspired agent in the divine dispensation. G.R talking about Gandhi's influence on his life said, "Gandhi entered into my life like a gentle and creative hurricane uprooting several incoherent ideas and replacing them with the visions of a healthy tomorrow for which he himself again, provided the guidance".

Tagore, the great internationalist who dreamt of a new world was trying to create through education a new generation of learners who will stand up without fear or favour and fight for what they considered just and right. This is an important aspect G.R has mentioned on several occasions with great pride and which he mentioned in his tribute to Tagore as well.

Those were the days of the Non-co-operation Movement launched under Gandhi's leadership; and young Ramachandran was the leader of a group of students who vigorously campaigned for the movement. They were nicknamed as 'the Gandhi fanatics'. They violently disagreed with the views expressed by Tagore in the columns of Modern Review criticizing Gandhi and his programmes. There were other groups which believed that Tagore was right and between the pro-and anti-Gandhi groups there were acrimonious discussions and one day a debate was held among the students on the topic at which, besides students, some senior faculty members were also present. Ramachandran was the mover of the resolution," In this controversy in regard to the immediate tasks to be accomplished in India, Mahatma Gandhi's programme is the only right programme." While arguing G.R pointed out that it was all right for the poet to sit in Shantiniketan, singing his beautiful songs and writing his magnificent poetry and weaving the texture of a world philosophy and doing some symbolic rural reconstruction. These were excellent and necessary in themselves, but the initiative undertaken by Mahatma Gandhi is far more significant and important. Describing it a Herculean task the speaker felt that all have to join together in this great task. There were forceful counter-arguments and after a stormy debate the resolution was carried and it was a great day in the life of young Ramachandran, for he was able to show with convincing success his oratorical skill besides giving public expression to

what has been troubling him for sometime. He was happy that he could prove that his hero was right.

Next day afternoon, Ramachandran received a message from Tagore that the poet would like to see him. He thought that Tagore had taken the matter seriously and he was nervous. The poet received him with his characteristic smile and made him comfortable. The poet told him that he was delighted to hear that his students had argued fearlessly and finally adopted a resolution condemning him. He then asked G.R whether it would be possible for the Students' Union to let him explain his position. Consequently there was a meeting next day at which the poet explained:

"When I established the Viswabharati, I have one great dream in my heart. I myself, as a boy had no happy life at school. Teachers would jump at me and compel me to think along their line. So, I ran away from school and when I grew up I said I must establish somewhere an institution where boys and girls grow up in freedom and joy. The foundation of Shantiniketan and Viswabharati is therefore the freedom of our young minds. Every boy and girl here must be free to think, grow and develop his or her own lines".

He further mentioned the debate held the previous day on the controversy and wanted to explain his views directly to them. Referring to the Gandhi-Tagore controversy he said he had great reverence, admiration and love for Gandhi. This does not mean that he was in full agreement with all what

Gandhi was doing or thinking. "I want the whole of India to follow Gandhiji, but they must follow him, thinkingly, understandingly and not blindly".

And the surprising thing is that after about three decades when G.R started his own educational experiment in Gandhigram along with his wife Dr. Soundram, he offered almost the same freedom to his students and colleagues and one of the recurrent themes of his post-prayer speeches and other discussions he had with his students and staff was gentle exhortations to exercise the same freedom he had enjoyed in Shantiniketan. There were quite a few instances of several students who in the conventional sense of the term 'disobeyed' the staff or showed 'discourtesy' or lack of interest in the academic or extension programmes of the Institute getting a reprieve when the matter was referred to the 'court' of G.R. By displeasing several of his colleagues G.R waived many important decisions concerning disciplinary matters in order to help the erring students. He remained always a friend of the youth.

During the four decades of his stewardship of Gandhigram complex of institutions and the Gandhigram Rural Institute there was hardly any instance of any student or staff being rusticated or punished for any misdemeanor or misconduct. This invited the caustic comment that it would pay more to be disloyal and indisciplined when G.R is around than to be disciplined and loyal. The Gandhigram Rural Institute also won at one time the derisive

epithet 'Reformatory' for the tradition of accepting any student from anywhere in India without looking into his conduct and character certificate. What one was required to have was the minimum marks to become eligible, and aptitude to study and participate in the programmes of the Institute. This attitude paid rich dividends, though it created heart-burning in many members of the staff who were sticklers to rules. There were a few instances of some of his colleagues violently disagreeing with him; one or two even leaving the Institute alleging interference. When it came to the students, his attitude was that of a patriarch who had no ill-will and who would look at even some serious faults with amused delight and would advise his colleagues to show magnanimity in dealing with young men and women. This attitude of G.R not only endeared him to almost the entire student community but in the long run, the senior and other members of the staff were also influenced by him.

This led to the emergence of a new atmosphere in Gandhigram; namely, it became India's first indiscipline-free and punitive-free education complex—a factor which amused the great education expert and UGC Chairman Dr. D.S. Kothari. Sri. Kainikkara Kumara Pillai who was the first Principal and Deputy Director of the Gandhigram Rural Institute and great Gandhian scholar a few months before his demise, in one of his reminiscing moods, remembered his days in Gandhigram with warmth though he had initial

difficulties in comprehending and adopting subsequently the informal atmosphere G.R was trying to promote in Gandhigram. Sri. Kumara Pillai who was a great disciplinarian and stickler to rules was at a loss when he joined the Institute. It took sometime for him to "adjust" and in the long run it gave him a new insight. Prof. M.P. Manmathan who visited Gandhigram to study the evolving pattern of student involvement in extension activities was greatly surprised to find a new approach with convincing success at work in Gandhigram and he said more than once that the Gandhigram experiment was worth emulating.

Gandhigram, started to put into practice the Gandhian Constructive Programme with such modifications as have become imperative in the post-Gandhian period in India, has now completed 57 years of service and has emerged as the biggest centre of Gandhian constructive work and educational experimentation in India.

Attracted by the friendliness of the local people and the beauty of the Sirumalai Hills in the east and the Kodai Hills in the west, standing on two sides like sleepless sentinels of nature, it was Dr.(Mrs.) Soundram Ramachandran who discovered the site.

She had wandered all over the South seeking a place to put into practice what Ramachandran and she learned from Mahatma Gandhi. When the early workers came here it was just a stretch of empty, open land with not a tree or brick on it. Today it is a lovely and smiling campus of nearly 400 acres.

When it was started there were only two small buildings and it was a tiny community of a handful of teachers and fewer than a hundred students in a small basic school and a basic teachers' training school. A little village hospital was also built.

It has now grown into a complex of several teaching, training, production, co-operative, extension and research institutions with nearly 2500 students and 500 teachers and workers involved in daring and integrated programmes of rural development covering about 100 villages.

The campus life in Gandhigram is organised in such a way as to help the students to mature and assume responsibilities. This is done by providing them with a meaningful kind of life. Accordingly, they have evolved a corporate system of responsibility. The common congregational prayer for all people in Gandhigram fosters inter-religious amity and concord.

Now there are over 30 institutions in Gandhigram. Among them are a Children's Home, a Pre-Basic (Nursery) School, the Thambithotam Basic School, the Kasturba Sevikashram, the Rural Institute of Higher Education, the Lakshmi Teachers' Training College, the Gandhi Centenary School of Educational Crafts, the Kumarappa Court of Village Studies, the Kasturba Hospital, the Institute of Rural Health and Family Planning, the Family and Child Welfare Training Centre, the Khadi Bhavan, the Shanti Sena, the Kala Bhavan and the Fellowship of Friends of Truth.

Of the above, the Children's Home captures the attention of everyone who comes to Gandhigram. This Home is called "*Sowbhagam*", which means happiness and prosperity.

Though most of the children are orphans or foundlings, no child bears either of these labels. They remain in the Children's home for many years till they grow up and are admitted in the hostels of the Senior Basic and Post-Basic Schools or go for other studies. Besides regular schooling, they are given special training in music, dancing, tailoring, gardening, care of domestic animals and kitchen craft, according to their taste and aptitude.

The Kasturba Sevikashram, the institute of women's adult education, derives its main strength from the sustained interest Dr. (Mrs.) Soundram Ramachandran took. Those admitted to this institution are widows, deserted wives and grown-up women in unfortunate situations.

These women remain there until they are coached for the E.S.L.C or S.S.L.C examination and are then diverted to training as teachers, midwives, nurses and craft teachers.

The Rural Institution of Higher Education before it acquired the University status, comprised (a) the College of Rural Services which offered three diploma courses; (b) the College of Post-Graduate Studies which offered Post-Graduate diplomas in Rural Sociology and Community Development; and (c) the College of Agricultural Science, which offered a two-year certificate course in Agricultural Science.

They have now been restructured into Faculties and offer degrees. M. Phil. and Ph. Ds in most of the disciplines, except engineering and medicine.

Extension and research activities make the Rural Institute different from the traditional colleges. The location of the Rural Institute in Gandhigram has made its impact on its development. The rural communities around Gandhigram have always been its laboratory for learning and experimentation and this has had a beneficial impact both on the students and the farmers.

Students become extension workers after class hours. Consequently, there is a meaningful relationship between theory and practice, which has helped the learning process. Many students have found this means of communication with rural people a stimulating experience.

Apart from classroom learning, students go to the village to study rural problems, undertake individual investigations related to some specialised subject.

While students in the agricultural section spend at least three weeks with Grama Sevaks each year, the students of the Sanitation Faculty have concurrent field work for two days every week and supervised field training for three months after the examination in April.

The students of the undergraduate classes spend ten days every term in villages for undertaking surveys and participating in practical rural projects.

The students of the Post-Graduate Courses are placed for nearly seven weeks, during their two-year stay in Community Development Blocks, local administration areas at different levels and in field placements in small, medium and large industrial centres.

The service programme of the Rural Institute covers 25 villages and consists mainly of providing housing facilities for the weaker sections, organising and running pre-school education programmes, developing agriculture, conducting adult education classes, and initiating subsidiary occupations.

These are in addition to health surveys, environmental sanitation work in collaboration with the Panchayat Unions, protected water supply projects, immunization programmes for children, and inoculation and vaccination for the adult rural population.

Thirteen villages in Dindigul and Reddiarchatram Panchayat Union areas have been selected for intensive multifaceted area development. This complex of villages forms a unit for the developmental activities of the Extension Department and they are carried on with some financial support from a German voluntary organisation.

The Rural Institute had introduced the Gurukula system under which a teacher took personal care of a group of students and also gave them tuition under the modern tutorial system.

The Gandhi Centenary School of Educational Crafts was an important institution which was started during the Gandhi Centenary Year. This centre provided craft activities and practical and teaching work experience to different students and teachers of various Departments and it also offered the facilities of agro-implements to the surrounding farmer community.

The Institute of Family Planning and the Kasturba Hospital have been doing meritorious services and have succeeded in reducing the birth rate in the Aathoor Panchayat Union Area. The hospital is an approved surgery centre for sterilization operations.

The Gandhigram Shanti Sena was at the centre of the community life. It stands for collective discipline and is distinct from individual principle. Gandhigram used to be a campus without a compound wall, members of the Shanti Sena did sentry duty throughout the night and day in small groups.

The students of the Rural Institute get training in Shanti Sena and participate in this with the students and trainees of all the other institutions in Gandhigram. The Gandhigram Shanti Sena earned a good name for its work in cyclone relief in 1956 and later in the conflict resolving initiatives during communal disturbances in the Ramanathapuram District.

The Gandhigram Kala Bhavan meets the need for an institution to develop the artistic talents of

the inmates of Gandhigram. It has four sections—music, dancing, painting and drama. Boys and girls from all institutions of Gandhigram, who have the necessary taste and aptitude, are selected and given free training in these.

Several leaders who visited Gandhigram have praised the work Gandhigram has been doing. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, while delivering the fifth convocation address of the Gandhigram Rural Institute said:

"A visit to Gandhigram is something more to me than a pleasant visit; it helps me to educate myself and to learn much from here and imbibe much, which can only be imbibed by a personal visit. So I am happy I have come here and seen the developments that have taken place during the past few years. It is obvious that Gandhigram has grown not only in extent but in the depth of its work and the influence it is having not only on the surrounding neighborhood but in a wider sphere. More particularly, I am glad that the vision that has inspired Gandhigram has been to follow Gandhiji's ideals in education, adapting them to present problems."

Among the other visitors were Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Dr. Zakir Hussain, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, Sri. V.V. Giri, Smt. Indira Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King, Dr. Douglas Ensminge Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Sri. Morarji Desai, Sri. K. Kamaraj, Sri. C. Rajagopalachari and Prof. Nurul Hassan.

Prof. Nurul Hassan while complementing Gandhigram on the services it has been rendering, said: "I would like to become a student once again and learn through the significant educational work of this Institution. A time has come when we can think in terms of creating more Gandhigrams in different parts of the country."

It provides a deep sense of fulfillment to reflect on how Gandhigram has grown and expanded during the 56 years of its existence since its small beginning. Gandhigram is today the eloquent example of how the revolutionary ideas of Gandhi could be put into social and educational action for a new India, the India of Gandhi's dream. G.R and Soundram proved to be a formidable team. Gandhi remained a steadfast-bridge. What G.R wrote about his wife's contribution to rural development in general and to the growth of Gandhigram is worth remembering.

Dr. Soundram and I came from different cultural and social backgrounds. While Dr. Soundram was away in Delhi as a student of Lady Harding Medical College, I was organizing Khadi work far in the South in Nagercoil in Tamilnadu. Friends wondered how after I had taken my M.A Degree in Viswa Bharati, Shantiniketan, I could bind myself to Khadi work. Friends forget that in between I had received the training under Gandhiji himself in the Sabarmati Ashram in different items of the Constructive Programme. Growing up in such different areas how did Soundram and I come together? This is somewhat

a personal matter but is nevertheless an important part of this biography. I was at this time a member of the Executive Committee of the Harijan Sevak Sangh of which G. D. Birla was the President. Prof. Malkani was then the Assistant Secretary of the Harijan Sevak Sangh. Prof. Malkani introduced me to Dr. Soundram who had just finished her M.B.B.S. We thus met together in Delhi for the first time. That we developed a deep friendship which some years afterwards ended in our marriage is a later chapter of this story.

We must now skip through intervening years and come to the time we started and developed Gandhigram. As a Medical practitioner Dr. Soundram became deeply concerned with the problem of population explosion in the villages around Gandhigram. She inevitably came to the conclusion that she should start Family Planning Institute. As a faithful Gandhian she had to remember Gandhiji's views on Family Planning. Gandhiji did believe in every small family. Married couples should however achieve this and strictly through Self Control and not through artificial methods. But a Family Planning Institute for the poor and common rural people essentially meant artificial methods. Dr. Soundram discussed this matter with me and sought my advice. We both agreed that this was essentially a problem of Health Education. If Health Education led the way to artificial methods we must not run away from such a course. More over self-control was very difficult to achieve. Putting together all our thoughts on the subject

we decided to go ahead with the project of an Institute of Family Planning. We found that if Self Control was difficult, introduction of artificial methods was equally difficult. Women would not even listen to a talk by Doctors on Birth Control. The courage and conviction with which Dr. Soundram persuades her idea won my admiration. I stood by her and explained how Gandhiji wanted village workers to have the courage and freedom to find their own solutions and not merely depend on his opinion. We thus became Fellow Rebels!

The deep roots Gandhigram has put out in the rural soil and the branches that have spread out in many directions to meet the needs and challenges of rural India in the context of the modern world owe their origin to the inspiring leadership of Dr. Soundram Ramachandran and Dr. G-Ramachandran. The message that Mahatma Gandhi sent them on the inauguration day on October 7, 1947 was: "Success attends where 'truth reigns."

This has been both a challenge and a blessing to them. It was a reminder that success is inherent only in truthful action. Gandhigram has tried never to forget the core of this message from their master.

The avowed aims of Gandhigram have been to devise such steps and programmes to interpret creatively the significance of Gandhian philosophy, organise extension programmes, programmes for women uplift, promotion of small family norms, village sanitation, basic education, communal

harmony and conflict resolution and undertake governmental and non-governmental programmes. When the campus began functioning at the present site it was almost an arid and deserted place without much vegetation and the way the campus developed over the year shows remarkable foresight. The campus now nestles with all kinds of trees and looks beautiful and in laying out the plan of the campus one can see the unmistakable influence of a Tagore or his students or disciples. True, there were quite a few Shantiniketan trained artists whose help was sought in developing the campus.

The community life inside the campus thanks to the leadership provided by the Ramachandran couple was an expression of the Joyous and beautiful world of Shantiniketan and the productive meaningful world of Gandhi. It attracted very soon the attention of staff and students from all parts of India. It was hailed as a very bold experiment in translating the Gandhian vision of social transformation and the Tagore's passion for orderly development through education, arts, and cultural rejuvenation. G. Ramachandran and his wife Soundram plunged themselves in to action at various levels: Soundram concentrating on women's education, care for deserted wives, and orphaned children and medical care to women from unfortunate circumstances, GR spent time in providing a revolutionary frame work to Gandhi's concept of Basic education, Khadi work, village industries, rural housing, sanitation, extension work

and employment opportunities for the unemployed youth in the villages around Gandhigram.

They complemented each other and it was a partnership in dedicated *Samagra Gram Seva* and soon Gandhigram became the Sabarmati and the Shantiniketan of the south, both a miniature India and an International Centre of liberal education, crafts, rural reconstruction, productive work and women's rehabilitation with a sprinkling of volunteers and trainees from different part of India; Everywhere there was appreciation, though the initial days were days of great tribulations for want of funds and support. Villagers surrounding the complex initially did not receive the community with any kind of appreciation; on the country, there were lots of suspicion because the small family norms, the community was propagating and those traditional satraps and village chieftains who were controlling the villagers found a rival in Gandhigram and they feared that Gandhigram would cut into their support base. Even political panics found a rival in Gandhigram.

So it became a Herculean task for those who were part of the new experiment to bridge the gap and create confidence among the villagers and it was a major test for the leaders and this bridge the Ramachandran couple and their band of colleagues crossed with astonishing success.

The Crowning glory of Gandhigram came when Gandhigram was ten years with the starting

of the Rural Institute for Higher Education, one of the fourteen Rural Institutes started by the Government of India as part of taking rural higher education to the very doors of village India. The Rural institutes were conceived to be a new system of education with its focus on integration of education with productive work and to prepare the young to face the challenges of the country under transition through the blending of the educational resources, academic excellence, spirit of inquiry, scientific and technological advancement within manageable limits, extension and research, mostly on the American pattern of Community Colleges. It was even suggested that instead of Degrees the graduates be given Diplomas which will distinguish the graduates from the traditional graduates.

The basic pattern was more or less like the degree course offered by the conventional universities but the Programmes offered by the Gandhigram Rural Institute were qualitatively different. The emphasis was on character development, skill formation and attitudinal changes, so much so a student of the three year Diploma Course, for example, had to do, besides his optional subjects and languages, compulsory courses in art appreciation, story of civilization, extension education and community development and Hindi. In addition to this a student had to spend a minimum of three months during his three year period of study in village working with the villagers and trying to identify themselves with the villages. As a partial

fulfillment of these courses a dissertation had also to be prepared by every student. The courses were thus very tough and highly competitive. Still what made the courses attractive and kept sustainable were the additional hours of work, the campus life, the joyful participation of the students and staff in the programmes and certainly the undivided attention offered by G. Ramachandran who had taken over the complete charge of the Rural Institute as its Honorary Director and ably supported by a highly motivated staff drawn and attracted towards the ideals of Gandhigram from different parts of India, both on ideological consideration and a desire to become part of highly revolutionary experiment. It was definitely a bold experiment in offering a modified version of the Gandhian dream of the *Nai Talim* at a higher level.

A very important and attractive side of the Gandhigram experiment was the campus life. Keeping in tune with the Shantiniketan tradition of boys and girls in waking up early in the morning and going round the campus singing choral songs in praise of the gift of nature and our duty to preserve nature at any cost as developed and successfully implemented by Tagore both in Shriniketan and Viswabharati and called *Prabhatbheri* was an experience. After returning to the hostel at 5 A.M - they get themselves divided in batches. Some turn to the cleaning of toilets and bathrooms, while a substantial numbers would be working on cleaning the surroundings. A third batch

would move into the kitchen to take up cooking while another batch would be at the cleaning of the vessels. There were no cooks, no cleaners, no scavengers and nobody to serve. From preparing the menu to the purchasing of groceries, accounts maintenance, students managed everything under the guidance of staff- The spirit of service, camaraderie, friendship, sharing, self dependence these programmes fostered was remarkable. There were plenty of scope for amusement, sports and creative expressions. Three important items stood out in this context. There was what was known as the *Aam Sabha*, the student's parliament, which used to meet once every month regularly to debate on students' problems without fear or favour. As one watched these student's parliament I was surprised to see the dignity with which the students organised their assemblies, certainly with much more sense of decorum and decency than the way present - day assemblies and parliament are functioning.

Another attractive side of the campus life was the spirit of unity fostered by promoting the cultural streams of different segments of Indian society. Almost all the important festivals and occasions connected with major religious groups were organized jointly. Tagore's birth anniversary every year was an occasion for a gala get-together and Bengali dance, Rabindra Sangeet, Rangoli competitions, enactment of Tagore's plays, creative competitions, exhibition of Tagore's paintings were the highlights of the programmes on that day.

There is a Kalabhavan which trained students in different fine arts including theatre arts and crafts. The Kalabhavan became the nerve centre of highly creative programmes and were managed at different periods by such eminent artists and scholars like Prof. M.G. Gopalakrishnan, a distinguished academician and musician who retired from Gandhigram Rural Institute as the Dean of the Faculty of English and foreign languages. He was the Principal of the Kalabhavan until his retirement. Three Shantiniketan artistes, J.M. Dutta, S.P. Sreenivasan and Abani Haldar, each one of them a master of painting, mural arts, or educational crafts, nourished the cultural life with great care and dedication. Prof. G-Sankara Pillai, the distinguished playwright and innovator of Indian Theatre and Prof. S. Ramanujam, another highly accomplished director of plays were on the Faculty of the Gandhigram Rural institute for long and contributed greatly to the emergence of an out look among students which truly was egalitarian, secular, democratic and definitely tolerant and understanding. A world-class artist and film director like Sri. Adoor Gopalakrishnan who was a student of Gandhigram acknowledged his indebtedness to the kind of education that he received from Gandhigram.

Another surprising aspect that attracted many visitors to Gandhigram from different parts of India and abroad is the adherence to cultural traditions and values and the manner in which they were

sought to be promoted. Mention may be made here about the Youth Organisation, the Shanti Sena and the way GR tried to intergrade this with the main education pattern and community life in Gandhigram. The idea of Shanti Sena, first mooted by Gandhi in order to develop a body of unarmed soldiers of peace who would rise above any kind of parochial or caste or religious considerations would even be willing to risk their lives to preserve life and property and would strive to promote communal harmony, amity and peace in society during crisis and who would work like a task force and undertake service programmes on a regular basis, did not receive much attention for quite some time. Vinoba Bhave, the spiritual heir of the Mahatma and walking - saint who collected several thousand acres of land and distributed them to the landless and the poor in this country and who launched the revolutionary programmes of *Gram-dan*, *Jivan-dan* and *Sampath-dan* took up the idea of Shanti Sena and organised units during his *Bhoodan padayatra*.

Gandhigram took up the Shanti Sena programme in a big way and made earnest efforts to develop a comprehensive youth training programme in nonviolence and conflict resolution. GR himself initially took care of this programme and extended his full support to make this a very attractive programme so much so for a number of years the Shanti Sena training programme remained one of the most important and attractive programmes of Gandhigram. GR would say that Shanti Sena was his first love and verily it was so.

The Shanti Sena did excellent relief work under the leadership of Dr. Soundram in the sixties during the Rameswaram floods and the Ramanathapuram communal clashes. In keeping the surrounding villages clean and in the literacy drive before the Adult education programmes were launched the Shanti Sena did commendable work. Sri. V.M. Chandrasekhar, a remarkable organiser of Shanti Sena made this body of students an accomplished team of peace activists and social workers. I have a partiality for the Shanti Sena programme because from the day one I joined the Gandhigram Rural Institute in 1968, Dr. GR asked me to assist Sri Chandrasekhar and it was the beginning of a new chapter in my life. My association with the Shanti Sena during the next twenty two years in Gandhigram and another ten years in Delhi offered me an opportunity to fully understand the infinite potential and scope of this programme if the programme is comprehended and implemented correctly.

The training programmes we organised in different parts of India and abroad, in the education institutions both in India and abroad, the bold initiative of involving the students in conflict resolution activities in Kanyakumari, Theni, Uthamapalayam, Dharmapuri, Villupuram (in Tamilnadu) Punjab, Assam, Mizoram, Jammu and Kashmir, Meerut and in Delhi have demonstrated the firm belief of Gandhi and his disciple Dr. G.R. that youth trained in the marvel of nonviolence could

play very effective role as peace promoters. Every visitor to Gandhigram found in the Shanti Sena not only immense hope but they also insisted on the experiment being duplicated- But surprisingly lip service not withstanding, when it came to the question of adopting the Shantisena these souls could not persuade their friends in their Universities or Institutions to implement this in their Institutions.

The importance G.R attached to the Shanti Sena could be illustrated here from one example. The Shanti Sena volunteers used to be in-charge of the watch and ward duty and management of crowd and taking care of discipline during the visit of even the President or the Prime Minister of the country to the campus was the responsibility of the Shanti Sena. During the visit of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in 1957, the security persons suggested that the PM security would be their responsibility and students would not be involved in this. G.R insisted on the Shanti Sena as usual taking care of the watch and ward duty of the campus and he said that no uniformed policemen would be allowed in the campus. The protocol and the security people found this unacceptable and there was an impasse and the matter reached the PM and he ordered that the tradition of the Gandhigram Complex be maintained and their practice of not allowing policemen in uniform be strictly adhered to and no violation of this be allowed. Hence as a face-saving and practical step, plainclothes policemen wearing the Gandhicaps and the white dress of the Shanti Sena volunteers

were allowed to be present in strength and be stationed wherever they thought they should be stationed. The tradition continued until recently.

On another occasion during the India-China clashes the Government of India made N.C.C. compulsory in educational institutions and the Gandhigram Rural Institute also received a circular in this regard. G.R replied to the Ministry that Gandhigram stood for Gandhian values and hence Gandhigram Rural Institute would not be in a position to implement the government instruction to replace the Shanti Sena with the N.C.C. There was a prompt reply from the Secretary to the Government that those institutions which failed to implement the order would forfeit all government financial aid. G.R was not a person who could be brow beaten. He replied that he would gladly close down the Gandhigram Rural Institute then rather than introducing military or paramilitary training in Gandhigram. The matter reached the Prime Minister who again ruled that Gandhigram should be left alone.

By the mid seventies the Rural Institutes which were started with great fanfare and expectations in different parts of India were facing crisis due to a number of reasons, the chief among them being the fall in student enrolment and the other related to the apparent failure of the experiment in the present form. The students who were studying in these institutes were clamoring for degrees instead of diplomas which the National Council for Rural

Higher Education to which these fourteen institutes in different parts of India were affiliated to was offering. Secondly, under the agreement governing the real institutes fifty per cent of the total expenditure would come from the Central Government while the remaining fifty would be met by the state government and the agencies which were running these rural institutes. Several state governments did not care to honour this clause while many institutes did not have the resources to meet even their share of the twenty five percent. Thus the rural Institutes found themselves to be second class, neglected and uncared for centres of learning. The matter was taken up at the highest level and these institutes were advised either to affiliate themselves with the nearest Universities or to the State Agricultural Universities.

Gandhigram Rural Institute was also given this option. Here comes the redoubtable Dr. G.R. He stuck to his guns and refused to toe the line suggested by the government. He pointed out that it would not be possible for the G.R.I to compromise on its ideals after having been party to an experiment for over 20 years. The Institute has developed many models and it could not abandon its social commitment to the surrounding forty villages where it was doing extension work and integrated rural development. Hence he suggested to the government to accord the status of a University to G.R.I Nobody in the higher echelons were prepared to give even a serious consideration to this apparently 'outrageous'

suggestion. By that time all the other thirteen rural institutes had disappeared and surrendered their special identity. G.R.I was also promptly advised by all concerned to affiliate itself with the nearest University. There was uncertainty, alarm and concern even among the staff and students. G.R flew to Delhi and met the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and appraised her of the situation and pleaded with her not to be a party to the defeat of a Gandhian experiment in community education, rural development and she agreed to get his alternative proposal examined. Thus began a series of exercises at the level of the UGC and the Dept. of Education to look into the claims and counter-claim and in the meantime Dr. G.R was appointed to the Chairmanship of Khadi and Village Industries Commission and he had to move to Bombay. A section of the bureaucracy and some other institutions which were not friendly to Gandhigram were jealous of Gandhigram and they played some tricks and in the absence of G.R matter was further complicated. As soon as G.R returned vigorous steps were initiated to make the government and the UGC to see the force of argument for granting G.R.I the status of a University. The UGC committees which, on behalf of the Ministry of education were unanimous that Gandhigram Rural Institute which had distinguished itself as a highly accomplished centre of higher education be granted the status of a University, i.e., an institute which would Deemed-to-be a university.

It was a dream coming true. India's first village University along the lines Gandhi visualised had come into existence—a personal triumph of Dr. G Ramachandran's perseverance, uncompromising efforts to march ahead, no matter how long the way is like his master who emphasised to walk alone, and G.R moved on and on braving aside the scorn from his own colleagues. It was an unbelievable achievement. And finally when on August 7, 1976 the Government granted the status of a University to the Gandhigram Rural Institute it proved beyond any shadow of doubt that the vision of a leader and uncompromising adherence to what one considers dear would never fail. The sense of achievement and all around happiness in everybody in the Gandhigram Community were matched only with the child-like and infectious enthusiasm with which G.R influenced his team of 'adventurers' to plan for the future. The saga of dedication and the manner in which he organised the massive efforts in clinching the issue of granting the status was almost a losing battle for a general who was determined to carry the message across even when sure defeat stared at him. Smt. Indira Gandhi who came down to Gandhigram to inaugurate the University mentioned in her address the significance of the Gandhigram experiment and the hope of the nation to see that a new type of education is developed in the country as envisioned by Tagore and Gandhi.

G.R hardly took any rest in those days. Those who knew him were not surprised at the tremendous

amount of energy he was able to put in, getting his ideas across to his team. He worked day in and day out and he did not let his team also to rest. He convinced them of the immense importance of the conferment of the status of a university to G.R.I in recognition of its two decades of distinguished work and the expectations of the nation. The enormous influence he wielded in those days with the powers that be could be seen in another significant aspect. He was able to make sure that what befell to the rural institute experiment would not haunt the Deemed-to-be University so far as its financial position is concerned. Hence he secured from the government the commitment to support the G.R.I fully on its financial requirements. Thus the G.R.I becomes eligible for 100 per cent financial support on par with some of the Central Universities and Institutes of Science and Technologies.

This was a personal triumph of Dr. G Ramachandran since without this firm commitment from the government, he knew he would not be in a position to carry further the restructuring of higher education and it is now an undeniable fact of educational reforms and changes in India how in the next ten or eleven years the Gandhigram experiment helped the other Universities and institutes in the restructuring of their courses and programmes. A definite emphasis on extension, research and integrated rural development hitherto ignored by many universities in the country became the core area of concentration in many universities.

The government gave complete freedom to the G.R.I in the formulation and the composition of its bodies. It gives G.R.I even the freedom of choosing its own Chancellor by the Senate and the nine member Syndicate was dominated by the academic community of the Institute. The constitution, and rules and byelaws which govern the Institute have been drafted in such a way that would ward off a possible take over of the campus by political leadership or any particular lobby. There are, of course, a few nominated external members in the various bodies but then their number is very negligible. The emphasis was: "Here is an experiment and it has to be nurtured locally and those who are part of the experiment will be better qualified to guide it and assess it"

The assessment pattern was fifty per cent internal and fifty per cent external with village placement and submission of dissertation on the basis of a field study were made obligatory. The fifty per cent internal marks, a revolutionary step at that time, was based on the integrity of the teacher and the continuous assessment of the students on the basis of their day-to-day performance. The idea was to eliminate what G.R would always say "the policeman's examination" and awarding marks on the basis of one or two terminal examinations. The courses were fully semesterised, again a revolutionary step in the seventies when hardly any Indian University was willing to take up such a step.

Everything looked exciting and G.R.I was everywhere endearingly described to be "G. Ramachandran Institute", signifying the complete identification of G.R with the Institute. By this time in order to see that proper concentration is ensured he started concentrating on G.R.I while his wife Dr. Soundram ably assisted by Sri. V. Padmanabhan, was fully in command of the parent organisation in Gandhigram which by that time got itself registered as a separate Trust "The Gandhigram Trust", for the purpose of decentralisation and further growth. G.R's most trusted colleague in his great mission was the remarkable and untiring Sri. V. Krishnamurti. The contribution of Prof. R. Srinivasan, Prof. V. Rengarajan, Dr. Sivasubramaniam, Sri. Nanjunda Rao, Ms. Sarala, Prof. R. Subramaniam, Mrs. Lalithambika, Prof. M.G. Gopalakrishnan and Dr. M. Veluswamy in the various stages of the development of the campus is worth remembering.

While all these steps were hailed good healthy and in right direction, a fatal mistake committed by the then advisors of G.R was the contempt with which a caution expressed by a section was turned down. The Gandhigram Rural Institute had got its recognition as a distinguished centre of academic experimentation and rural development activities and it had a distinct academic aim, content, scope and the expectations were also entirely different from the traditional Universities in the country. From the day of its inception way back in 1957 the Gandhigram Rural Institute was specialising in

certain areas and it won distinction in this chosen area and Dr. G.R won the battle for the status of the University because of its special thrust areas and nature of its work.

Paradoxically when G.R.I got the new status all the paraphernalia of the conventional universities namely a Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Syndicate, Senate, Academic Council, Board of Studies, Finance Committee—and all such structures which are part of the conventional Indian University, came into being and structurally there appeared to be no difference between G.R.I and the nearest University in Madurai or anywhere else. Everybody in the flush of happiness and excitement seemed to have forgotten the simple truth that a revolutionary programme cannot be fostered and nurtured through an orthodox and conventional frame-work. A small unitary educational complex of about 1000 students and staff and without any affiliating institutions or colleges like the G.R.I could have fared well with an Academic Council to take care of academic matters and an Administrative Council to advise on matters administrative. G.R.I itself before the conferment of the University status was the best example of the efficacy of this, for it had only these two bodies and I remember the system worked very well. The inordinate delay in getting matters debated well at various bodies could have been obliterated with a small body. With the coming in of elected representatives who may not know who Gandhi or Tagore or for that matter what the objectives of the Institute are, as politicisation will become

inescapable in the long run, and this would lead to derailing of the Institute. All the members who get into these bodies need to be those who share the wisdom of the founding fathers. The compulsions and arithmetic of representations on the basis of election would enable undesirable elements trying to settle scores, misusing the privileges of the forum. It is quite possible they might some day question the wisdom of those who prepared the ground on which they get themselves entrenched. There is the other argument that these are the inescapable factors of the University system and one has to realise these aspects in the right sense. Still it appeared incomprehensible and difficult to subscribe to this theory for the simple reason that a system which won an institution or a nation or an individual a particular position or achievement is good enough to sustain it, of course by the absorption of intelligent and inescapable ethos and requirements of the changing times.

As someone who was part of the G.R.I experiment before and after it got its University status I felt that the earlier structure which enabled the Institute to weather successfully the many storms it had to face and steer clear off to safety bringing it cheer and glory was good enough with sufficient changes. Well, then the quality of leadership an institution gets makes all the difference, not to minimise the role of the supporting staff. Dr. M. Aram and Dr. Devendra Kumar, two of the finest Gandhian educators and scholars who succeeded

Dr. G.R added quite a few useful courses and tried to put the G.R.I on the academic world map. No efforts were made to resist the attempts to make G.R.I a copy of the Universities in the neighborhoods. What happened gradually is the overbearing and overawing and, to some extent intimidating, conventional University system of management which the champions of that system would confidently claim good, taking over the campus.

Well, I have no quarrel with any of them. My submission is that the G.R.I experiment as conceived and nurtured by Dr. G.R is still valid, relevant and if restructured properly the way G.R wanted it to be and the nation expected it should be, could provide the nation the much-needed breakthrough in education which is being desperately expected and looked for. The nation cannot afford one more failure. What one requires is perhaps the fighting qualities of G.R and the courage of conviction and dedication which are central and integral to any efforts towards change. The question then is, do we want change? Are we prepared to accept change? Changes will be impossible with half-hearted and cosmetic adjustments. Those who are in command should realize that G.R.I is the last post of a big initiative launched by the nation and to fashion it like the vestige or a pale shadow of a conventional University will be a retrograde step and to abolish one by one the special features of the Institute would be viewed tomorrow adversely.

The golden bridge which Dr. G. Ramachandran was trying to lay had at its base in the hard realities of Indian life as understood by Gandhi and the cementing force as emphasised by Gurudev Tagore. G.R in no sense was trying to make Gandhigram a copy-book of Shantiniketan, a charge he had to face from people who did not have a vision of future and whose minds were closed because of narrow linguistic considerations. No doubt the elevating and penetrating quality of Rabindra Sangeet did influence G.R and his love of poetry and his infinite passion for beauty had their source in Tagore. I shall deal with this aspect a little later. Another style he nourished was the Shantiniketan style of convocation. Convocations in Shantiniketan like many other functions, were held in the open and the graduates who were to receive the degrees would not wear the hired robes of the colonial education system; on the contrary, would be present in the Indian simple dress and would be bedecked with mango leaves and beautiful display of Rengoli would lend additional charm to the atmosphere. The guests would be received again in the traditional styles of boys and girls dressed in traditional style and with *poornakumbh arati* and with decorated umbrellas and not with the NCC model of 'attention'. Those who care for beauty and values always found this not only an expression of the ever-inspiring artistic tradition of the country but a carefully nourished device to make the young minds feel proud of the country's heritage.

Even from the first Convocation, this great cultural tradition of India was adopted by G.R in the Gandhigram Rural Institute, a fact which surprised every visitor to Gandhigram. Nobody looked at this as something Bengali or alien and the offering of poornakumbh later became an integral part of Gandhigram culture like any aspect of Gandhian philosophy of rural reconstruction the community was propagating and promoting. Appropriate changes were incorporated over the years and it became a truly national expression of not only the warmth with which guests are received but a symbol of the emerging culture and reflection of the efforts of the University in preserving the cultural tradition of the nation and fostering local and national forms of artistic expressions. G.R bestowed great attention on this aspect. Those who were in charge of this aspect of work always found the interest Dr. G.R would take in offering them guidance as a great source of not only encouragement but also an instance of inspiration. Dr.G.R took great pride in retaining this great national tradition as a part of the Gandhigram culture, for he believed that the best way to foster a tradition is to get it incorporated into the overall programme and this particular item always won the admiration from all quarters. This gradually was made a part of the guard of honour arranged by the Shanti Sena to the important visitors to the campus. Over the years, all the important visitors such as Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who visited the campus twice, President Rejendra Prasad, Zakir Hussain, Khan Abdul

Ghaffar Khan, Rajaji, Kamaraj, Smt. Indira Gandhi and several international leaders like Martin Luther King, Glenn. D. Paige were received at special Shanti Sena rallies, one of the special features of the campus. Several hundred white khadi-clad young men and women lining up sporting Gandhi caps always impressed every visitor. The whole exercise would be only for a few minutes during which the Captain of the Shanti Sena, always a woman, would welcome the guest followed by Dr. G.R introducing the guest and the guest later thanking the Shanti Sena. But the organisers had to work very hard behind the curtain to meet with the rigorous standards set by G.R always. A perfectionist that he was, he would never leave anything to chance. It might be excruciating to the organisers but it always paid rich dividends because the programmes went on well and he would pat the organisers after the function at special gathering and those who were a bit but down would naturally feel that it was worth the trouble; for, to get a pat from Dr. G.R in those days was considered very precious by his colleagues. G.R knew this and he enjoyed doing this; a past master of diplomatic moves. And this is one of the secrets of his success.

Such indulgence had their lighter moments also. One specific instance comes to my mind. During the visit of Zakir Hussain, the then Vice-President, to Gandhigram, as usual, a special Shanti Sena rally was planned. Dr. G.R asked the student captain and the staff in charge of Shanti Sena to report to him

two days before the function and he insisted on a dress rehearsal during which he posed for the guest and the captain had to rehearse all the steps. He would also help the student in her speech delivery, the text of which he himself had corrected suitably. Invariably from the files the staff member in charge would have taken out a copy of the previous speech. The first speech welcoming Dr. Rajendra Prasad during the inauguration of the Gandhigram Rural Institute in 1957 which G.R himself prepared for the student captain would be the base of the succeeding speech. The speech clothed in elegant expression, quite characteristic of the inimitable style of G.R was a classic piece of writing. After addressing the Chief Guest the text of the speech would go almost like the following: "Sir, You are standing under the same canopy under which the great so and so stood and addressed the Shanti Sena and we are privileged to welcome you today." She will continue to mention the important items of work undertaken by Shanti Sena. After the programme the text will go back to the file and would be taken out only on the next occasion during which either G.R or in his absence the Chief Organiser would add the name of the previous guest to the earlier list so much so there came a time when only one more name had to be added to the list of those who had taken the salute of the Shanti Sena earlier.

So after the very successful reception to Dr. Zakir Husain when G.R hosted a small tea party to the organisers, the student captain, for whom G.R

and several other staff had a lot of affection because of her good work during relief work, sought G.R's permission to add a line in the next speech as and when there would be a guest. G.R looked serious and evidently did not like this suggestion, that too coming from a student. One thing he resisted was that he never allowed anybody to edit or alter whatever he wrote. This was so because he used to make several drafts and was always careful about every word, every punctuation so much so there would not be anything to edit or substitute. As someone who worked with him for over twenty-five years I found that it was impossible to edit or substitute a word or line of his because he was very careful with the words and the kind of mastery he had in English was absolute a fact even his Professor, the Great C.F. Andrews, admitted. And he was proud of his style. And naturally when the student made the audacious suggestion many sitting there raised their eyebrows and someone who wanted to prove that he was more loyal than the others sitting there and he would not brook any attempt to show his master in a poor light, even chided the student, though mildly with a disapproving look. G.R after a pause asked her: "Well, tell me what is the change you would like me to incorporate in the text?" The girl was by no means dispirited by the mild rebuke, she looked at G.R and said, "Mama, it is a small sentence. To the line you are standing under the same canopy under which the great Jawaharlal, Rajan Babu, Rajaji and others stood and took the salute, can we add that "You are listening to the same

speech prepared by G.R. Mama when Pandit Nehru came and I am reading out now the same speech". There was a spontaneous laughter and the one who laughed loudly and boisterously for a few more minutes than the others was G.R. himself who said again and again that was one of the best jokes he had heard in those days. It might be of interest to remember in this context what G.R. said in one of his speeches on sense of humour.

"A keen sense of humour is the hall-mark of culture. When a person can crack a joke against himself, he raises himself at once in the estimation of his friends. There are people who can throw jokes at others but never take one thrown against themselves. This one way traffic is not really a high example of good humour. It is the essence of humour that there should be give and take in progress. Good humour is very often the test of tolerance. A fanatic is incapable of good humour. He is tearing others to pieces or getting himself torn all the time. Good humour defeats itself if there is malice in it or it is indulged in to hurt others. A joke should never hurt, who makes it and the person who has to take it, laugh together. That is why tolerance and culture are the sources of every good joke."

G.R.'s love of music was proverbial and he loved to recite poems that impressed him as also to listen to recital of poems, a quality that he inherited from Tagore. George Russel, Shakespeare. W.B. Yeats and Tagore were his favourite poets. His obsession with poetry sometimes led him to inflict his favourite poets

on even those who for official and reasons of courtesy could not say no to him. He used to recite and explain himself Tagore's famous poem beginning with, "Where there is ..." at the prayer gatherings. Another piece that he had fallen in love was Tagore's piece. "Leave this chanting and singing..."

A little known aspect of G.R. is that he himself was scribbling his own poems in his diary not meant for publications. A huge collection of such scattered poems were found recently and they were collected, edited and have been published recently under the title "Mother and Other Poems of Dr. G. Ramachandran". While editing that selection I found in some of the poems a quality that is usually associated with very serious and elevating poetry. Nobody, not even his closest friends knew at any time that G.R. was keeping a personal diary exclusively for jotting down poems almost regularly. Three pieces in the collection "Mother and other Poems" breathe exquisite qualities. They are 'Mother', 'On the First Anniversary of Sumitra', 'On the Death of a Kitten', the last two elegiac in nature leave very poignant images in the minds of the readers. Perhaps unless it is mentioned that the pieces are from someone who did not make any claim for any place in the world of poetry no one will be able to say that these are the occasional poems of someone who did not take poetry seriously.

Closely associated with his love of poetry lies the manner in which he believed that no education will be worth the name and no rural upliftment

would be possible unless rural arts, theatre arts and other forms of fine arts are encouraged, propagated and brought into the main focus of all efforts towards rural development. This again is a bit of a deviation from Gandhi. For Gandhi and Tagore had divergent perception of arts and here again, G.R struck a midway between his masters. It might be of interest here to remember in this context that the views attributed to Gandhi on Gandhi's perception of beauty and the place of arts were first elicited by G. Ramachandran in his famous interview with Gandhi. He loved theatre, both traditional and classical. The discussion he had with artists and scholars the encouragement he offered to theatre reveal G.R's understanding of the *Natyashastra* and the Indian Classical Theatre.

Dr. G. Ramachandran is one of the most authentic interpreters of Gandhian thought, peace and nonviolence and as the Secretary of Gandhi Peace Foundation and Gandhi Samarak Nidhi he traveled extensively, lecturing on Gandhi. In 1969 he presided over the Gandhi Centenary Celebrations in a number of world capitals including the UNESCO Conference in Paris. The Conference in London was presided over by Prince Charles and in Belgrade the Conference on Gandhi was presided over by President Tito. The lecture tours he made to the USA evoked considerable interest and he was honoured during one of his visits with the 'Key to the City of Dallas'.

A great votary of peace and nonviolence, G.R spent considerable time in educating his countrymen on the importance of all regions coming together to preserve peace and amity. He wrote, "Peace and nonviolence are convertible terms. The challenge to us in this century is to prove that men of the various religions in the world can work together more sincerely and more courageously for peace than can any other group of people anywhere. Gandhi defined nonviolence as "love in action".

G.R displayed a special ability to sum up even the most complex aspect of Gandhian philosophy. Nai Talim or Gandhi's views and practice of the New Education were not properly understood by many. The best interpretation of what is Nai Talim concept was made by G.R as below:

Nai Talim was the name Gandhi gave to education as he conceived it. This means new education. Leaving aside all the trappings and details, very necessary and relevant as they are, the following may be considered as representing the core of Nai Talim:

- (1) Education must set before itself not only the creation of a totally just, democratic and peaceful social order based on nonviolence sanctions but also indicate clearly and precisely the methods of achieving such an objective.
- (2) Such education must begin with the earliest years of childhood and run on throughout life.

- (3) The school should help in developing the full personality of the student, drawing out all his talents and bringing them into harmony with each other.
- (4) This means education of the mind and intellect concurrently with that of every physical and bodily skill. Gandhi used poetic words in this connection when he said that he wanted in this education not only thinking brain but thinking fingers. All culture and civilization arose from the co-influence of the brain and the finger of man. This leads to the rejection of any book-centered system of education and acceptance of a creative and life-centered system. Life and work are coeval. Life ends where work ends.
- (5) In a country like India a creative and life-centered system of education must keep productive work at the centre and such productive work must be carefully regulated from year to year in consonance with the aptitude and capacity of the growing child. Handicrafts producing useful and beautiful articles thus occupy the centre of the educational process for boys and girls in Nai Talim. Books are not discarded but kept in their proper place.
- (6) But the aim of Nai Talim is never simply the production of articles, however useful or beautiful. Productive work is only the means to the end which is the complete education of the child and the full development of its personality.

- (7) Education is drawn from three main sources constituting the catchments area of learning, i.e., the natural environment, the social environment and the processes of productive work each one of these three sources being of equal importance. The child thus grows in harmony with the nature, properly integrated with society and taking delight and pride in productive work because all such work is transmuted into the substance of learning. The child puts its roots into its own soil and then reaches out to an ever expanding vision of life, its purposes and duties.
- (8) The development of the sense of freedom, initiative and responsibility should be achieved through the self-government and self help of children inside the school community. Therefore, every school has its parliament and its chosen cabinet of ministers in charge of sanitation, punctuality, internal disciplines, making the school happy and bright and cultural and recreational programmes. The abolition of policeman's examinations must follow as a matter of course. Such examinations should be replaced by the continuous assessment of the achievement of the children throughout the year including a measure of self-assessment.
- (9) The school must be closely linked with the community and vice-versa. This means extension in the best sense of the word.
- (10) Children growing up in the love and pride of productive work learning through kinship with

nature and the social environment, getting trained in self-help and self-government and even self-assessment progressively become the free and co-operative citizens of a democratic society in which there will be no high and low, no distinctions of class and caste and standing for justice and peace. The schools thus become the starting point of a nonviolent revolution for a new social order.

The oratorical skill and the deftness with which he could keep his audience spell-bound were acknowledged even by Gandhi. Here is a sample of one of his speeches delivered in the Parliament.

"... the President in his address has made reference to the report of the Education Commission and expressed his hope that the recommendations of the commission would be fully implemented without delay. The President knows and many of us know that the Education Ministry is often the graveyard of some of the finest reports produced in this country. I am glad Sri. Faqrudin Ali Ahmed is sitting here, though he is reading some papers and not listening to what I am saying. I wish he were in the Education Ministry; then what I say might have gone straight into his mind, I was saying that the Education Ministry has been the graveyard of some of the finest reports on education that any country could have produced. There was the Radhakrishnan Commission report asking for a country-wide programme of multipurpose high schools. It came into the picture and then suddenly disappeared. I

had the honour of being the chairman of a Committee called the Basic Education Assessment Committee. I think we gave a good report. But that report is today dead and gone. Basic education itself is no longer in the picture. As an immediate alternative to Basic Education we were asked to frame another mid-way programme and I took on myself the responsibility of producing an orientation programme. It was started with a great deal of drum beating. But that also is completely dead and there is no orientation programme anywhere now. We started Rural Higher Education programme and it is not advancing one step further and even up to the point it has come, it is being confronted with serious difficulties. I am running a Rural Institute of Higher Education myself and I know exactly what is happening. So I am not at all optimistic that the Education Ministry will take up the recommendations of the Education Commission and implement them through as quickly and effectively as necessary."

Tagore was the first educationist in India who courageously rejected the book-centered system of education, he insisted that the fingers should keep pace with the brain in education. He was against the system of education being reduced to an exercise of acquiring knowledge. He believed that education should lead to the all-round development of the human personality in which the physical, intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual growth should be harmonised into one integrated process. He highlighted that freedom of the human mind is

required for boys and girls to be fearless, free and open-minded and self-reliant. The experiment the poet launched in 'Sriniketan' revealed his firm conviction that villages cannot be rebuilt with strength borrowed from outside but only from strength rediscovered within the village itself.

A comparison of the concepts and practices of education which Tagore and Gandhi experimented will reveal amazing similarity. Though their approaches appear to be different, there was the broad area of agreement so far as their vision and role of education in the social transformation are concerned. Speaking about the Shantiniketan ideal of education G.R wrote:

"The Shantiniketan ideal of education was not merely the transplanting of city education in a rural area. It was something much more and involved the deeper process of ruralising education so that it became, on the one hand, part of the peaceful rural background and, on the other, sought its synthesis with the main challenges of education in modern times. Shantiniketan proved that the highest education can be conducted in the midst of Nature and far away from the cities and under conditions of simple, clean, and truly artistic living. Open air classes and the boys and girls growing up in harmony with the rhythm and cadences of Nature are at the centre of the Shantiniketan experiment and these would have been impossible in a city setting. Poet Tagore also insisted from the very beginning on what has just now become fashionable

in our country, symbolically at least in the universities and colleges, namely, bodily labour to produce bodily needs."

What G.R said about Rural Reconstruction could be of interest to remember in this context.

"Objectively speaking there are certain ideas and methods in and for Rural Reconstruction from which no one can run away. Here are some of them:-

1. Village Reconstruction does not mean turning villages into towns. This is physically and mentally impossible. So village Reconstruction means improving and transforming the village as a village.
2. Village Reconstruction does not mean outsiders coming and improving the village. Only the villagers for villagers can improve the village. Outsiders can only help in such a process but not conduct it.
3. Any village improvement must not be a nine days wonder. It is a long range programme for lasting results. Therefore Village reconstruction is really educational work.
4. Village Reconstruction must touch the life of the village at all points and not at any one point only. Otherwise there is terrible waste of energy and resources.
5. Without adding to the income of the village farmer and the village artisan village reconstruction will be as writing on water.

6. Even economic improvement depends on a change of mind in the villagers. Let no one isolate therefore education from economic improvement. Both must become integral parts of the same process. Divide not only material resources but employment equitably if justice is to be done to everybody. This means decentralisation of production and distribution.
7. Let no one raise the false hope that life in the village for all people can be raised to the very high level as in concentrated industrial areas. At best reconstructed village life will be somewhere in the middle between a low level and a very high level. Raising the standard of life of the people in the villages must never mean making village people depend on foreign products for their daily needs. Any efforts to better the standards of life should be related to local resources and production."

In developing the Gandhigram complex of institutions G.R and his wife were guided by the Gandhi experiments in developing the ashram settlements both in South Africa and India.

Gandhi's ashrams have been his laboratories where Gandhi and his colleagues experimented with nonviolence as an alternative way of life. In these small monastic communities of men and woman living according to absolute vows he sought to lay the ground-work for an egalitarian social organisation and economy, and to develop an

education system that reflected the Indian genius. The ashrams provided economic and moral support as well as fostering the discipline and awareness necessary for their members to sustain grassroots civil disobedience. Gandhi saw the need in the tradition-bound rigidly hierarchical Indian society for a moral sanction able to inspire people to help them. He believed *ashramic* life, based on mutuality, simplicity and hard work, would nurture an asceticism that could be channeled through positive action to reform society.

The Phoenix Settlement and the Tolstoy Farm where Gandhi began his experiments provided him the basic tools and insights which enabled him transform himself from a prosperous Anglophile lawyer leading an agitation movement through legal channels, to a nonviolent activist living a simple communitarian existence with his followers and prepared to sacrifice his life for the cause he believed in. When Gandhi left South Africa in 1914 after two decades of experiments, he not only refined his asceticism, but also has set the standards of austerity he expected his followers to follow. At Tolstoy Farm it is argued that Gandhi reached the physical and spiritual peak which Pyarelal believed Gandhi never reached again in India.

Another important aspect concerning Gandhi's South African period is the growth of antagonism towards modern materialistic civilisation which had begun during his student days in London. "Hind Swaraj" published in 1908 marks a very crucial stage

in Gandhi's growth. Back in India, Gandhi could soon identify himself with the struggling masses lacing in India's 7,00,000 villages. He was convinced that a Sarvodaya society would remain a dream for ever until the aspirations, needs of the man at the bottom of the social ladder are met. He stressed that the Swaraj he dreamt was a poor man's Swaraj in which social and economic exploitation of the poor must be removed and where basic necessities of life were to be enjoyed by the weakest people in society.

The establishment of the Satyagraha Ashram (now known as the Harijan Ashram at Sabarmati) near Ahmedabad on 25th May 1915 is the expression of the determination of Gandhi not only to improve on his South African experiments but also to prepare a generation of people who will be ready to sacrifice even their lives to the realisation of the objectives he had outlined in his seminal work "Hind Swaraj". An extremely important and useful section in this period of Gandhi's work was the grim determination with which he was trying to shake the foundation of a society which otherwise was showing all signs of decadence and to some extent would even resist attempts for change. Gandhi's frontal attack on the citadels of status quo found its reverberations and echoes in the manner in which the Satyagraha Ashram was socially and financially boycotted by the villagers following Gandhi's firm stand on admitting a family of untouchable into the *ahsram*. Gandhi's known commitment to the eradication of untouchability which he considered a blot on

Hinduism and the attempts he had been taking not only to the creation of proper awareness among the victims and perpetrators of this crime took the ashram to the brink of collapse. Gandhi seemed to be enjoying the turn of events. The admission of the untouchables besides inviting public hostility brought open rebellion even from Kasturba and another woman. Gandhi was unyielding and even told Kasturba to leave the ashram if she could not adjust with his work, Gandhi through this convincingly demonstrated his unyielding determination to continue his work for the removal of untouchability against all kinds of odds. He had earlier announced that removal of untouchability and attainment of Swadeshi will be the two aims of his life and he would not let any force to deter him in this resolve.

Conclusion

It is well known that all what Gandhi did both in South Africa and in India was characterised by this kind of unyielding determination and the greatness of Gandhi was that he infused the same kind of vision in several of his followers who after Gandhi with courage of conviction continued to tread along the path the Mahatma desired them to choose. It is controversial and a matter of dispute now as to how many of them were able to live up to the expectations of the Mahatma.

The tendency among critics of Gandhi and Gandhian movement appears to be to cite a few instances and occasions when Gandhi was unhappy

and anguished and to argue that even when Gandhi was alive he knew he had become irrelevant and his own disciples had rejected him and, therefore, Gandhi has become irrelevant in modern India. This is the strategy many people who never cared to study Gandhi and realize the inexhaustible wealth of ideas and the innumerable possibilities Gandhi offered to the nation do systematically. Unfortunately this tendency seemed to have spread without rhyme or reason or probably the temptations of a materialistic culture that hijacked the general perception and aspiration of the average Indian aided by the fall in moral standards created a situation where the value-based politics, principled economic growth, religious tolerance and nonviolent social and personal transformation Gandhi aimed at went counter to the new order that was sought to be projected by the prophets of Unlimited economic and material growth. And it is natural that in such an atmosphere all what Gandhi stood for found very few takers. In such a scene of action Gandhi was not a good bidder and he or his disciples could not offer anything tempting and even in the knock-out stage Gandhi lost the game because in a battle where insistence of fair means and ends is at a premium and in a situation where reason has no place and emotion takes the upper-hand, in a culture where violence and violent tactics dictate the emerging politics, how could anybody imagine that a few hundred Gandhian Constructive workers who instead of getting themselves tempted by the spoils of power boldly took to social work as

Gandhi wished, could succeed? If at all any trace of influence is to be seen, it will be on the moral and spiritual plane.

The Gandhian Constructive Work was just a means and certainly not a package of panacea, and here again, it will be unwise to dismiss its importance with a casual remark. There is a Gandhi in everybody and the efforts should have been to discover this and foster it.

It is easy to say that the Gandhian workers failed in projecting Gandhi to the masses. But then, these workers, let it be understood, can function only in the existing or emerging socio-political milieu. Could it be possible for a few Gandhian Constructive workers to prevent the dangerous and alarming drift noticed in the Indian scene a decade or so after the Independence? And it has become the fashion among certain categories of intellectuals to blame the Gandhian Movement for all the failures of the nation. Now, it has become fashionable to add Nehru's name also among those who are responsible for all the ills the country is suffering from.

Independent and objective studies of the socio-political changes in India during the last four decades after Independence have drawn our attention to the fact that but for the impact Vinoba Bhave, the first individual Satyagrahi, who launched the Bhoodan Movement created in electrifying the nation by suitably modifying the Gandhian movement, an armed rebellion by the landless would

have become a reality. All the land reforms in the post-Independence period owe their inspiration to the revolutionary possibilities Vinoba Bhave demonstrated. The second factor is the tremendous influence of Gandhi on the collective psyche of the Indian masses who have not lost their belief in Gandhian nonviolence. A country of India's size and magnitude would have easily adopted violent tactics to ameliorate the several layers of social and other forms of injustice but for the nonviolent alternatives Gandhi demonstrated with success. It was the genius of Gandhi which stands between violence and orderly development. Though change is painfully slow, there is change. What one has to do is to quicken the process of change by lighting lamps of hope, lamps of dedicated efforts and some day these small sparks might assume the shape of bright flames.

Gandhigram is one such effort and it has now acquired a special reputation of unifying and synthesizing academic learning, productive work and village work and in making this experiment what it is today, the leadership Dr. G.R provided is inspiring and matchless. It is new India in the making. It affirms the Gandhian vision of a healthy India through the resurgence of over six lakhs of villages. Rightly the motto adopted by the Gandhigram Rural Institute is "the country progresses as the villages prosper". The golden bridge between Shantiniketan and Sabarmati can be nurtured only through cementing the power of dedicated efforts and vision of a unified India and

the emphasis Gurudev Tagore and the Mahatma attached to education cannot be underestimated. All the developed nations and societies in modern times began their efforts with the restructuring of their education system. Gandhi vigorously campaigned for a new education system and let us ask whether this country which prides itself in calling him the Father of the Nation has done anything seriously in implementing the Gandhian vision of education as a strategy for social and individual transformation.

The relevance of all Dr. G.R did during his eventful and unbelievably dynamic life could be assessed better on the basis of what has been happening in the rest of India. I would like to close this presentation with a quotation from him, "There is no greater revolution than education to transform the society. Such a revolution will and must represent the integration of character, health, learning, productive work, community living and service, aesthetics, research and extension. The aim should be nothing less than the creation of a casteless and classless society through truthful and nonviolent means".

What G.R 'Mama' emphasised in his classic statement on the occasion of his 80th birthday in Trivandrum perhaps re-states with clarity and precision what he has been striving for all his life. I reproduce below excerpts of that historic document since nothing else would sufficiently amplify the essential G. Ramachandran, his passion, determination, conviction and courage.

The greatest good fortune of my life has been that I was alive in the Gandhian era of India's history. I was not only alive but under God's grace I came close to Mahatma Gandhi, lived with him for many years, was trained by him to be a Constructive Worker and Satyagrahi and worked in different parts of India under his guidance.

Looking back on the 60 years of my active life, I realize that what I was called upon to understand and to do was full of the adventures of living in a dynamic period. Mahatma Gandhi's Constructive Programme called me to a life full of adventures and discoveries from day today. The Gandhian era gave this same opportunity to hundreds of thousands of young people, men and women, who thus found life worth living. The Constructive programme touched the life of India on every side and allowed us to go deep into the problems of the people. Khadi work with which I began my public life sixty years ago and in which I was involved full-time for six years, took me to hundred of villages in Tamilnadu and Kerala. I saw the life of the people face to face and heard the rumblings of human minds whose lives were shattered and who were striving for a better existence. Then came six years of service in the Harijan Sevak Sangh and I became personal witness to the sufferings and tragedies of the Harijans scattered in different parts of India. I was also involved in the work among women under the Kasturba National Memorial Trust. I

realized then that the sufferings of the women of India were heart breaking.

Then came six years of work in Basic education under the leadership of Dr. Zakir Hussain, who later became the President of India. This was National Education in the true sense of the world. My role in Education Reconstruction took me on towards Rural Higher Education and the founding of the first Rural University in India, i.e. the Gandhigram Rural University. It was a revelation to me to see how village boys and girls were as capable of Higher Education as those from the town and cities. Our greatest human treasures certainly are in our villages. We are only now coming back to the central principles of Basic Education after years of neglect. I was for another six years the General Secretary of the All India Village Industries Association in Wardha. In this programme, I saw how diversified are the handicrafts of India and what marvelous skills have been developed in our country through the centuries.

Under Gandhiji there was established a clear blood relationship between Constructive work and Satyagraha. Satyagraha was nothing less than nonviolent battle unto death against every kind of social injustice and political degradation. Thus millions of people were plunged into nonviolent battles for justice and freedom. My baptism in nonviolent battle began with the Salt Sathyagraha in Vedaranyam when I was hardly

26 years of age. I discovered the power of collective nonviolence and knew that in it lay the solution of the problems of the world which were baffling the people in many countries and not only in India. Out of all this I emerged with an unalterable faith, which has sustained me all through life. The testament of my faith, therefore, is that the future of man is bound up with the study and practice of Gandhian nonviolence. I use the phrase Gandhian nonviolence because it has a significance all its own. The world is only slowly realizing the significance of Gandhian nonviolence as it faces total annihilation in a probably nuclear war. The choice is not between violence and nonviolence but between nonviolence and the total death of mankind. It is however, impossible to believe that mankind will tamely submit to annihilation when there is the saving power of Gandhian nonviolence available to it. My faith is unshakable that every people in the world will come to accept Gandhian nonviolence sooner than later.

This faith of mine inevitably leads to a certainty. After a grand spell of nonviolence under Gandhiji, India is now floundering in violence of every kind. Not a day passes without storms of violence raging in some part or other of our sub-continent. How Gandhiji's India has come to this tragic situation is explainable, only in terms of the retreat of a tidal wave in our history. A retreating tidal wave muddies and soils everything on earth as it sweeps down. It is not

necessarily true that if India fails in nonviolence, the world will never take it up. It can sometimes happen that another country, rediscovering Gandhian nonviolence, might take it up with greater conviction and go ahead with it towards a future without wars and mass slaughter of human beings. Buddhism has spread more outside India and taken the message of the Buddha to millions of other people. Christ is not to be found in Jerusalem today but in the lives of many millions of Christians in Europe and America. Gandhiji might be taken away by historic forces to other countries and someday return to India with greater power of the spirit than ever before. This might well be only a pious wish. But, Mahatma Gandhi discovered the truth and lived the truth so vitally and affected so many millions of people in his own life time that I have the certainty that the supreme impact of his life and work will not be in vain, cannot be in vain and must not be allowed to be in vain.

As mankind engulfed in escalating violence in drawn irresistibly to its doom, it will be compelled to look at Gandhi and listen to his gentle but mighty voice. The next few years will be critical in the history of the world. In another ten years at the latest mankind would have either perished in a nuclear holocaust or pulled itself up to a higher destiny. My certainty is that mankind will not perish, but save itself before it is too late. Peacemakers throughout the world are gathering strength. Only the people can or will make peace

in the world. No Government will ever do it. And before the people do so, they will have to throw out their own Governments of today through revolutions of the people, by the people and for the people. As this historic inevitability deepens and moves forward, we shall see the mighty little figure of Gandhi marching at the head of the world's peace columns. Gandhi was not simply a physical body. He was above all a tremendous mind and spirit and these are deathless. Each one of us has a duty in this historic crisis. Each one of us can and must stand with Gandhian nonviolence with unshaken faith. Each one of us must live in the certainty that God's grace and the spirit of Gandhi will combine to save mankind and lead it to a great destiny. I have lived in this Faith and I shall die in this Certainty.

I can only bow my head before God and be grateful to have lived through the era of Tagore and Gandhi and to have had the rare and sacred privilege of knowing them closely and growing up in the radiance of their greatness.

Well, the essential Dr. G. Ramachandran, an uncompromising crusader for social justice and change and his passionate efforts to make education a powerful instrument of change is what is reflected here. Let us be worthy of him.



G. RAMACHANDRAN: AN IDEAL EDUCATIONIST

K.D. GANGRADE

I had known Dr. G. Ramchandran from mid-fifties and continued interactions with him till his death. I found in him a highly intellectual and enlightened person. He was an excellent orator. He would keep his audience spell bound for hours. He had the gift of clarity in his ideas and their exposition.

He was committed to develop "villagers" rather than "villages". Towards this end he established Gandhigram as an institution to directly work with villagers. The Gandhigram became an outstanding institution to train dedicated and devoted workers.

He and members of his team during their work realized that it is the community of beneficiaries, the poor and the deprived, to which the development has to be related. It has not to be left to the outsiders like Social Workers or Extension Agents, but taken up by the people themselves. The process of awakening and conscientisation has to be harnessed to develop power to the people through their own

organizations and institutions. In a world, dominated by power of exploitation, the power of redemption has to be harnessed and wedged.

Can Rural Social Work profession measure up to this requirement for Social change? As it exists today in the many academic institutions, with little roots in the Indian culture and mostly woven around theories from the West, it is ill-equipped to face the challenge. This is not only true in India, but also most of the developing countries of Asia. A radical re-thinking is called for to make changes in its values, attitudes, approaches, methods and service contents.

My head bows down to G. Ramchandran that through the instrument of Gandhigram he has totally revolutionised the curriculum and the practical content of the training programmes of Gandhigram.

He believed that among many programmes for change, some of them do not require the participation of people in any other way than doing work for acceptable wages. The great ports and airports are built and rail and train highways constructed without great mental and emotional involvement of the thousands of persons who will furnish necessary physical manpower. Such is not the case with the rural development programme, for they require not only sanctions but the participation of millions of persons and hundreds of thousands of village groups. The changes conceived and promoted for their improvement and development

must not be only acceptable to the people but accepted and put into practice by them.

He has been the Architect of the above concept which we should keep in mind to prepare Rural Workers. He wanted elitism to be eradicated from the Indian education system.



MAMA, THE INSPIRER

E.P. MENON

My first meeting with 'Mama GR' dates back to those days when I was part of the Bhoodan Padayatra of Acharya Vinoba Bhave in 1957. The Sarva Seva Sangh had established its temporary 'mobile' Southern Regional office at Tirupur. Vallabhaswami and I had to co-ordinate the work and we kept moving back and forth from Vinoba's camp to Tirupur and other parts now and then. One such stop was Gandhigram for two days. It was a hot summer afternoon we got off the bus and walked into the guest house.

"Welcome to Swamiji and the young man. I hope your journey was comfortable. Too hot. First you take some rest. I shall arrange for some tender coconut water; then some tea for the young man; I know he would like it." That was GR who had walked into the room in a spotlessly white *chudidar pajama* and long *jubba* in thick khadi. He stood in the *namaste* mode with a beaming smile. I instantly 'fell in love' with the man.

Dear 'Mama' G. Ramachandran

In fact I had heard about GR from two other great sons of this land - Prof. S.K. George and Mr. Ravindra Varma, during the Wardha days. SKG was editing THE FFT QUARTERLY (a Journal of the Fellowship of Friends of Truth) and GR used to write short, crisp articles in that. As I used to assist SKG to meet the hurried datelines, to read Mama's pieces was always a pleasure. It was great to know that Mama and SKG had co-authored a few books. As they were both products of Shantiniketan as well as close followers of Gandhian Philosophy, I discovered an enviable closeness of their friendship

That first visit to Gandhigram created an unforgettable impression in me. The campus was always alive and active. Neatly maintained rooms and surroundings for hundreds of trainees who came from all over India. Staff houses and administration buildings without any ostentation and relevant to the need and philosophy of utility and simplicity. Different centers of production of certain basic necessities of life, well conceived and managed green sprawling agricultural land around, bordered by a range of hillocks. All these put together was an integral UNIVERSITY of a resurgent India which had several promises to keep for its teeming rural millions, who had been enslaved by various forces for centuries. GR and his resourceful wife Soundaram had accepted these challenges voluntarily and formed the driving force behind the young generation of learner-educators.

My second most memorable meeting with Mama was in 1959 when he invited the War Resisters International to hold its triennial world conference at Gandhigram. Those ten days were of great educational, cross-cultural, participatory experience to many youth like me who got the opportunity of being members of Indian delegation. It was here I saw the best of Mama's managerial skills. Any time of the day or night one could spot him at different places, looking to the nitty-gritty of organizational matters, taking care of the varied needs of hundreds of guests, and acting as a moderator when certain crucial global problems of War and Peace were discussed on and off the stage. At no time one could see any sign of exhaustion or frustration on his face. When a restless rebellious leader, Bayard Rustin from New York thundered from the podium, asking all non-Americans to "pack a small measure of food and send it to our President Eisenhower in Washington as a symbol of your solidarity with the starving Americans, while our country is producing nuclear weapons and armaments to kill innocent humans everywhere", it was Mama who jumped up first from his chair and hugged Bayard and led the shower of applause from the vast audience. He articulated the voice of India much better than many.

Three years later when I myself had set foot from Gandhi-Samadhi for the global Peace March aiming at Moscow, Washington and Hiroshima, GR was one of those leaders in Delhi who gave his

unreserved blessing and encouragement because he believed in the "Youth power which has tremendous potential to make effective change in the world." A few months later he himself had made a trip to Moscow to urge the Soviet Govt. to show restraint from exploding the atom bombs, in the name of humanity and peace.

As a true Gandhian he championed the cause of Khadi and travelled to every nook and corner of the country and gave encouragement to all producers and organizers because he did not want to weaken that basic economic foundation of the freedom movement. Later when Vinoba started the *Bhoodan Movement* he never hesitated in joining hands with the new "spirit of Indian revolution", as he described it at the Kancheepuram Conference. Where there was a chance of generation of peopled power from below, there one could see Mama standing at the forefront and giving inspiring speeches to encourage the youth. One particular story I have heard from GR's mouth several times was that of the legendary "*Valliamma* in South Africa who had the guts to stand against rain of bullets and *lathis* and thus proved the power of non-violent resistance." He was a great supporter of women's participation. With great confidence and conviction he began to give shape to the Shanti Sena Movement after 1957 when Vinobaji gave a call to create such a National Defense Force which would have no need of taking guns in their hands to protect and promote the interest of the country. It is a different matter

that Shanti Sena Movement did not succeed because right from day one of India's independence there was this dichotomy in the minds of Indian leadership whether the established value system of the society, which had thousands of years of history and experience behind, would be able to adopt the theory of non-violent Defense in its true meaning and spirit!

The last one decade of Mama's retired life not only provided another insight to his personal philosophy, but also gave an eternal message to the chaotic world and violent human beings on earth. Being a practical thinker, he knew his final requirement would be only "six feet of land". It was guaranteed at the back of the house which he had inherited from his beloved mother. Having realised that most of human conflicts have their roots in the material relationships and concept of 'private ownership' Mama had decided long before his death that the entire property, inherited as well as earned in his life-time, would be constituted into a Public Trust, which would undertake public service activities, especially in the interest of needy and exploited women and children. Thus came into existence the Madhavimandirum Lok Seva Trust. He closed his eyes with such a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment in life because he knew that there were capable and trustworthy hands that would uphold and carry on the torch he had lighted and left behind. Therefore, today we can see that moderate abode of Mama in the beautiful setting of Neyyattinkara as a home of comfort, solace and peace

to each and everyone who happens to relate with this great man and his mission in life.

I feel privileged and happy to have had close association with such an intellectual giant, a fountain of inspiration, a man of high principles and dedication and a motherly figure to thousands of people around the world. He has lighted hope in the restless souls of many a youth. A life well spent indeed.



G.R - THE LUSTROUS LINK

Dr. DEVENDRA KUMAR

There are two very important things that I have learnt in my life from two great masters under whom I have worked. One is "How to think" and the other "How to express what you think". The former I learnt under the late Dr. J.C. Kumarappa and the latter from Sri. G. Ramachandran. The three years that G.R was the Secretary of the All India Village Industries Association at Wardha were very luminous years of that institution. Under his magic touch the institution came to new life. The training, research and public education in the field of the village industries got a great impetus under him.

Educator of great repute as he is, he took no time to realise the potentialities of training through the village crafts. He drew out not only the educational potentialities of the various crafts but also the potentialities that were latent in all of us who were working in those industries for well-nigh a decade.

—Dear 'Mama' G. Ramachandran—

His motto was 'Form is as important as the content'. It looked very new to us who had been brought up under the old Ashram discipline. It took us some time before we could reconcile ourselves to the synthesis between the two. We had seen, experienced and concluded that there is a conflict between the stress for form and that for the content, between the quantitative and the qualitative. We had found that usually one is sacrificed for the other. But G.R never believes in this. His perpetual striving has been to prove that properly understood and executed the two have no quarrel with each other, that actually the two cannot live without each other. The thesis of Ramachandran is not an easy one to prove but his greatness lies in the fact that he risks his all to prove what he believes in and the 'Gandhigram' is a living example of his belief.

This balance between the seemingly conflicting is a great art and requires a great capacity for harmonizing and balancing of forces not easily reconcilable. There are people who are good in one and not in the other and vice versa. To put them all together is the most difficult task. The artist from Shantiniketan, the ascetic from an Ashram, the academician from a University, the administrator from a high office, the social worker on a very idealistic plane, the organizer of a very practical temperament do not complete the list of incompatibles that go with its making of a great institution -- making of the process of life as such--of the total individuality of a man, so to say. There are

others - the young and the old, the man and the woman, the plebian and the aristocrat, the conservative and the forward, the provincial and the internationalist. The list can be lengthened almost ad infinitive. The beauty and greatness of G.R. lies in his handling all these in a way that the individuality of each of them remains intact and your balances itself in the pattern of the collective.

He has the faculty of assimilating the spirit of each of the component and so express it in his inimitable and rich way that it takes a hue and shape that illuminates and dazzles those very people who have contributed to make it. His power of speech is not only convincing but is endowed with a magnetic quality that arrests the hearer and penetrates his heart. He pictures the scene before the audience and makes the drama unfold through spoken word. There is nobody else whom I have met who has so great power of communicating through words the ideas and emotions, the ideals and methods and the philosophy and politics of the Gandhian thinking.

He knows how to handle men and how to handle words. But more than anything else it is his affection and humanism that has won him enduring friends and admirers. He is basically a fighter and as he is developing in his moral stature day by day, his fight is getting evolved from the gross to the subtle. From the fight of independence on the political plane to the fight for equality for the downtrodden on the economic plane, to the fight for nonviolent society

in a spiritual plane, from the problems of the urgent and immediate to the immediate and universal to the ultimate and universal - the progress goes on in the life of a great man.

I feel proud and fortunate in having linked myself with such a person because by so doing I have contributed to my self development as well. He has touched life at so many of its points - an agitator and Satyagrahi, as a minister and political leader, as a teacher and educationist, as an author and journalist, as a social worker and organizer of great institutions of socio-economic revolution, as an international bridge between various faiths, as a peace maker among the biggest international forces on earth, and as a legislature in the highest tribunal of the country. I humbly salute him and wish that the years to come will be made all the more rich by his prolific past experience.

This disciple of Tagore and Gandhi - probably the only link that forward the two, which so brightly shines ever to-day will continue to benefit humanity with its healthy influence for many more years and each new year more lustrous than the past. According to ancient Indian calculations G.R has come half way on his earthy journey. The second half will be the real flowering of his talents and spirits. May all of us have the good fortune to have amongst us the inspiring force that he has always been to us, for many an era.

(60th birthday tribute)



G. RAMACHANDRAN: A SHORT PEN-PICTURE

G. VENKATACHALAPATHY

G. Ramachandran, Director of Gandhigram, completed 60 years of age on the 8th of October, 1964. From 1921, when he left college at the call of Gandhiji in the Non Co-operation Movement up till now, it can be said that, Sri. Ramachandran never walked on any beaten track. He has always broken new ground and lived a life of courage and adventure. Those who know him are sure he will continue to do this all his life.

He first broke away from tradition when he left college, fought with a stern and affectionate father, almost broke the heart of his saintly mother and went away from Trivandrum to Shantiniketan to join the Viswabharati. During his four years as student at the Viswabharati he earned a name as a up-coming speaker and writer of distinction. It is also on record that his rebellious spirit did give some head aches to Gurudev Tagore himself and certainly to his Professor the late C.F. Andrews. His articles began to appear even then in Indian magazines like

—Dear 'Mama' G. Ramachandran—

"Current Thought," "Modern Review" and "Young India". Graduating with distinction from the Viswabharati in 1925 Ramachandran took the next unexpected step. From Shantiniketan he went straight to the Satyagraha Ashram in Sabarmathi armed with a kindly letter of introduction from Gurudev Tagore himself. Gandhiji took young Ramachandran in hand and put him through one full year of hard training and discipline under his personal care. After literature, philosophy and sociology which he learnt in the Viswabharati, he now became in the Satyagraha ashram a trained scavenger, spinner, weaver and Constructive Worker. In 1927 Gandhiji sent him to the Jamia Milia, which was then developing under the brilliant leadership of Dr. Zakir Hussain, to learn Islamic history and culture and to teach spinning and Indian philosophy. It was after this that in 1928 Gandhiji launched Ramachandran into the difficult ocean of Constructive Work. Gandhiji's aim was, as he himself wrote to Ramachandran's father, to make him an all-round Constructive Worker. Now look at the record that followed.

From 1928 to 1933 he worked in the All India Spinners Association in Tamilnadu and Kerala with two years as the Manager of Shri. Rajaji's Gandhi Ashram at Tiruchengode in Salem District. It was during this period Shri. Ramachandran was in and out of prisons three times in the Freedom Movement. He has often said that one of his proudest moments of life was when he was appointed fourth leader in

succession to Shri. C. Rajagopalachariar in the Salt Satyagraha movement in Vedaranyam in 1930. Then followed five years of hard work in the Harijan Sevak Sangh as provincial Secretary of the Sangh in Tamilnadu and in Kerala. It was during this period that Ramachandran took a prominent part in achieving temple entry for Harijans in the Travancore State. After this apprenticeship in Khadi and Harijan service, Gandhiji recalled him to Wardha and put him into the Hindustani Talimi Sangh as one of its Secretaries. During the next three years he pioneered in Basic Education in Tamilnad, Andhra and Mysore, starting the first Basic Teachers Training Schools in these areas as also the first group of Basic Schools in them. But this period became memorable in Ramachandran's life because of his marriage at this time with Dr. Soundram. From then on Shri Ramachandran was never alone in any adventure of his life and he had with him a new partner of equal courage and devotion. At the time of his marriage Shri. Ramachandran was an exile from Travancore but after a few months he and his wife settled down in Trivandrum. There was however no peace vouchsafed to him even then. The freedom movement in Travancore seized him and he was in and out of prisons three times again. When the Quit India Movement under Mahatma Gandhi broke out he was detained in the Trivandrum Central Jail indefinitely and he was released only after the general jail delivery in India later on. Immediately on release, Shri Ramachandran and Dr. Soundram started Gandhigram which in the last 17

years has grown up to be one of the biggest Gandhian Institutions in India. It was at this time that the late Dr. J.C. Kumarappa invited him to become the General Secretary of the Village Industries Association in Wardha. But he could not answer this call straightaway. Instead he fought in the elections to the Travancore Assembly, won a seat, and became a Minister in the first Thanu Pillai Cabinet. Even this phase did not last long. He went back to Wardha and became the Secretary of the all India Village Industries Association in which capacity he worked during the next three years. This was his first All India job and he went to every part of India to meet workers and organize Cottage and Village Industries. He came back at the end of three years to take over the place of Director in Gandhigram. Then Shri Rajaji appointed him Educational adviser to the Madras Government of which he was then the Chief Minister. He resigned from this work only after the resignation of the Rajaji Cabinet at the time. In 1958 the Board of Trustees of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi unanimously elected Shri Ramachandran as the Secretary of the Nidhi. From 1958 to 62 he stayed in Delhi and was also the Secretary of the Gandhi Peace Foundation and the Editor of "Gandhi Marg". In 1962 he had to come back to Gandhigram again to take over the Directorship of the Institution as Dr. Mrs. Soundram Ramachandran became the Deputy Minister of Education in the Central Government. But he continued to be the Secretary of the Gandhi Peace Foundation and the Editor of "Gandhi Marg". In

1964 the President of India nominated him as a Member of the Rajya Sabha.

Among the interludes during the last many years are his visits to Europe and America in 1955 when he lectured at many Universities on the life and teachings of Gandhiji, his Chairmanship of the Basic Education Assessment Committee of the Government of India, his participation in the World Peace Brigade Conference at Beirut in 1962 and his visit to Russia sometime later long with Shri. U.N. Dhebar to plead with Prime Minister Khrushchev for the cessation of nuclear tests. He was also the Joint Editor of the "Indian Express" in Madras for some time.

Shri. Ramachandran has been a prolific writer in journals and magazines and his special subjects have been Education, Community Development and Rural Reconstruction. He is the author of four books i.e. "Glimpses of the Indian Renaissance", "A Sheaf of Gandhi Anecdotes", "The Man Gandhi" and "A guide to Gramasevaks". He has also earned a name as a first class English speaker.

Outside office and power here is a life of nearly forty years of dedication and service to the people. Among those who have looked upon Shri. Ramachandran with deep affection may be mentioned Tagore, Gandhi, Rajaji, Nehru, Dr. Radhakrishnan, Dr. Zakir Hussain, C.F. Andrews, Thakkar Bapa, J.C. Kumarappa, Governor Giri and many others.



G. RAMACHANDRANJI: AN APOSTLE OF GANDHIAN THOUGHT - A PERSONAL RECOLLECTION

T.K.N. UNNITHAN

My contact with Sri. G. Ramachandranji, popularly and affectionately known as 'G.R.', dates back to 1956 when I returned to India from my studies abroad. My stay abroad for almost four years made me homesick and also infused in me a sense of pride for India. In my school and college days I was intimately associated with the Indian Students Congress, particularly its progressive wing. So I was more than thrilled by the attainment of India's independence in 1947. Soon after India's independence and the tragic assassination of Mahatma Gandhi I went abroad for higher studies. I went with the intention to gain more knowledge and to come back to serve India in whatever way I could. I was full of enthusiasm, drive and patriotic feelings. In an unGandhian and immature manner I even derived vicarious pleasure in seeing Englishmen who were our 'colonial masters' doing menial jobs in England like polishing shoes, wiping the floor, cleaning baths and toilets, etc.

All these factors influenced the choice of the topic of my dissertation for the doctorate degree, "Social Change in India with Reference to Gandhian Ideas". After successfully completing courses in Cambridge, England and taking my doctorate from the University of Utrecht (the Netherlands) I came back to India in 1956.

One of the first contacts after I returned was with Sri. G. Ramachandranji. He was then secretary of the *Gandhi Smarak Nidhi*, New Delhi. Sri. Ramachandranji gave me a lot of encouragement with his very warm and affectionate consideration for me. I used to participate in whatever functions were organized by the *Gandhi Samrak Nidhi*. Sri. G. Ramachandranji, being the moving spirit behind all the Gandhian programmes organized in those days, influenced me deeply. I still remember that Sri. Ramachandranji took me, a very junior person, to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the then Vice President of India to participate in a meeting held to decide the establishment of the Gandhi Peace Foundation.

Sri. G. Ramachandran became the first Chairman of the Foundation, which grew into an active centre for the promotion of Gandhian values of peace and nonviolence. Through the publication of '*Gandhi Marg*' the setting up of a Research Cell, organizing lecture series, seminars, symposia and conferences and through undertaking action programmes in nonviolent social reconstruction, the Gandhi Peace Foundation under the distinguished guidance of Sri. Ramachandranji, became a beehive

of activities. The International hostel at the Peace Foundation facilitated interaction of many Indian and International scholars interested in Gandhian ideas. It was under the auspices of the Gandhi Peace Foundation that Dr. Om Prakash Gupta and I were sent to Kerala on an enquiry about the violent agitation directed against the first Communist Government in Kerala. Our report never saw the light of the day in spite of the fact that it was forwarded to the then Congress President, Mr. U.N. Dhebar, perhaps because of our findings that the Congress though preaching nonviolence, was mostly responsible for the violent agitation. G. Ramachandranji appreciated the report for its objectivity and thoroughness.

The contributions Sri. Ramachandranji made for the establishment of the Gandhi Peace Foundation as well as the various activities he has promoted for the dissemination of Gandhian ideas and action programmes are well known.

His contact with Gandhiji had made a deep impact on Sri. Ramachandranji. He has imbibed all Gandhian values so much so he has become a personification of Gandhi. I regard him as one of the greatest apostles of Gandhian thought. Ramachandranji's is a life fully dedicated to the Gandhian path, he has ardently tried to promote Gandhian ideas through lectures, seminars and conferences in India as well as abroad. I have had an opportunity to meet him in the U.S.A where he delivered a series of lectures in American

Universities. Even in the Rajasthan University where I eventually shifted from Delhi, G. Ramachandranji was good enough to come and inaugurate a programme of extension work to promote Gandhian studies.

It is his deep commitment to build up a nonviolent social order that promoted him to establish one of the best Gandhian institutions in the world, namely the Gandhigram Rural University at Madurai. One has to visit this great institution to understand its potentialities and to admire the vision of Sri. Ramachandranji in setting it up.

Whether he was the Secretary of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, Founder Chairman of the Gandhi Peace Foundation, First Education Minister of Kerala, Secretary to Mahatma Gandhi, Founder Chancellor of Gandhigram University or a Freedom *Satyagrahi*, Sri. Ramachandranji will remain for ever first and foremost an excellent teacher and educator. That is the image I have of him; I have always learnt from him. To me he remains the true educator, as indicated by Thomas Huxley (Oxford, 1922), "His body is the ready servant of his will and does with ease and pleasure all the work that, as a mechanism, it is capable of; whose intellect is a clear, cold logic engine with all of its parts of equal strength, and in smooth working order; ready, like a steam engine to be turned to any kind of work, and spin the gossamers as well as forge the anchors of the mind; whose mind is stored with knowledge of the great fundamental truths of nature and of the laws of

her operations 'one who, no stunted ascetic, is full of life and fire, but whose passions are trained to come to heel by a vigorous will, the servant of a tender conscience; who has learned to love all beauty, whether of nature or of art to hate all vileness and to respect others as himself." Ramachandranji was an ideal teacher with a life-long mission of teaching Gandhian thought. At the same time he imbibed and transmitted the values of nonviolence through his relentless pursuit of the goal of ushering in a peaceful world social order based on Gandhian principles.

G. Ramachandranji is not only an ideal Gandhian but also a wonderful human being; and ideal Gandhian can indeed only be a wonderful person. His very presence radiates love and compassion just as Gandhiji's did. His sense of humor is so infectious that at any public meeting he addressed the audience will roar with laughter. His personal conversation is always full of wit and wisdom. Often he drives home in a lasting manner serious points on nonviolence through his informal and humorous anecdotes.

Today when I am trying to promote Gandhian ideas through the Sarvodaya Party or through other small contributions I consider it is on account of the influence of Sri. Ramachandranji on me.



MAMA: A PRAGMATIC GANDHIAN, A COMPASSIONATE MAN

DR. FRANCIS ABRAHAM

The year was 1957. Just when my SSLC examination results appeared, I came across an advertisement from Gandhigram Rural Institute inviting applications for the Diploma course in Rural Services. During my final year in High School I was actively involved in Bhoodan and Sarvodaya movements. Naturally I was intrigued by the opportunity to study at Gandhigram. Another compelling reason was that Gandhigram was founded and managed by Dr. G. Ramachandran who was once known as "*Travancore Gandhi*". I discussed my interest with one of my teachers who was proud of my academic and extra-curricular achievements. He told me that Gandhigram was similar to Shantiniketan, and "if you cannot go to Vishwabharati, then Gandhigram is your second best. That is all what I wanted to hear.

So in July of 1957 I joined Gandhigram to begin an innovative four-year program in rural services. Gandhigram was like no other place. It was a living

community which bonded people regardless of caste, creed, political affiliation, religious beliefs, language or province. The atmosphere was one of ancient Gurukula system in which teachers and students lived, worked, studied and worshipped together. Students in rotating batches cleaned not only their dormitories but also the surroundings, classrooms and streets; they cooked, served food and washed dishes. We had spinning, Shanti Sena and regular service projects in the villages. We had our own Student Assembly which met every month and elected a Speaker and a Chief Minister who formed his cabinet to manage every aspect of our community life.

I graduated in 1961 and worked for almost an year as a Tutor. When Gandhigram started the two-year Post-graduate Diploma in Rural Sociology and Community Development I joined the program. Soon after graduation I was appointed as Lecturer in Extension, and I worked three years in this capacity. Thus I studied and worked in Gandhigram for over ten years from 1957 to 1967 and later I returned there almost every year. My wife is a niece of Dr. G. Ramachandran who adopted her as a daughter and we lived in the GR House for many years. Therefore, I have many fond memories as well as some unique glimpses of the complex personality of G.R whom we affectionately called Mama.

While we were students, Mama spent much of the time in New Delhi where he was fully involved with the work of Gandhi Smarak Nidhi and Gandhi

Peace Foundation. But whenever he came to Gandhigram, everyone knew that "Mama was in station" because the overpowering influence of his towering personality was pronounced everywhere. We all knew that he paid meticulous attention to every minute detail. It was as though he inspected every shrub and every tree along the streets and every toilet in every dormitory. He had inherited Tagore's sense of beauty and Gandhi's keenness for cleanliness. Whenever he drove by if he spotted a group of students in front of the dormitory, he would stop to chat and dialogue which will almost invariably end with an inspection of our common toilet facilities. Since the students were responsible for sanitation, he would say that Mahatma Gandhi insisted that the bathrooms should be so spotlessly clean that one would not hesitate to eat there. GR wanted his students not only to develop a sense of cleanliness but self-help and responsibility. Education, according to him, was not text-book learning. It had to be socially relevant and functionally appropriate. It must be rooted in life's experiences and help build an well-rounded personality.

Mama was a first-rate diplomat and born democrat. Whenever he was in town he never failed to attend the Student Government Association or Assembly where we discussed our problems and elected our representatives. He always gave the students a free hand to debate and resolve major issues. I remember an episode during my second year

as a graduate student. All graduate students lived in a separate dormitory and were given the freedom to develop their own charter of self-government. We had inserted a clause that the college authorities shall not take any disciplinary action against any graduate student without consulting their elected representative. GR was away in Delhi when the draft was presented to the Administration; the official in charge of approving the document was not comfortable with the clause. When GR returned the matter was placed before him in the graduate students' forum. Without a moment's hesitation he approved the document and made a statement to the effect that if we cannot transform our graduate students into responsible adults, then the failure was ours.

Another great quality of GR was his easy accessibility. Any student at any level could approach him for any reason at almost any time. He was never too big or too busy to meet even the youngest student. He always listened to them with patience and understanding. He was always a mentor, a friend, philosopher and guide to anyone, high or low, who sought his advice. I have known students who have gone to meet with him late at night to "unload" some personal or family problems. GR always took a personal interest in his students and found the time to mentor them in spite of his numerous commitments at home and abroad.

The inter-religious prayer every evening which was attended by all members of the community was

a unique experience. There were readings from the Koran, Bible and Hindu scriptures. But it was not the prayer or the readings which inspired me. The atmosphere was one of peace and harmony, a fellowship of faiths and reconciliation. There was another important dimension to the prayer meeting. At the end of prayer GR always spoke in his inimitable language of wit and wisdom. He would want to open the window on the world, as he put it, and let all the positive feelings and ideas penetrate our minds. Because of the presence of Mama, we were fortunate to meet and hear a steady stream of outstanding men and women, national leaders, world-renowned scholars and thinkers. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King spoke about the civil rights movement in the United States. Great evangelists like Earl Stanley Jones spoke of their life with Gandhi. Great literary figures, Nobel laureates and national leaders frequented Gandhigram. Since GR was above politics he attracted a wide spectrum of leaders in every political party. I remember the occasion when Shri C. Subramanian, then Union Minister and Shri E.M.S. Namboothirippad, then Chief Minister of Kerala spoke at the same forum. On at least two occasions I had the opportunity to listen to Gora, a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi and a well-known atheist. Gora would wait until the prayer is over and give a thundering lecture on Gandhian philosophy and argue why there is no God. GR wanted his students to think critically and evaluate every message and messenger.

GR was probably the most pragmatic Gandhian in India. His Gandhi was not a god to be worshipped, or a prophet to be revered or even a great leader to be implicitly followed. Gandhi was a man of action whose life was his example. There was no place for dogmatism or mental slavery. He accepted Gandhian thought and action as an integrated system. He was appalled when people, many Gandhians included, pulled out tidbits of Gandhian philosophy to justify this or that position. I would like to give two illustrations. When the idea of family planning was first mooted in India, many Gandhians felt that it was a violation of Gandhian ideology. Dr. G.R and his wife, Dr. Soundram felt that family planning in India would promote health and welfare and thus the Gandhian concept of community well-being. When other progressive thinkers were still debating the issue, Gandhigram accepted the Ford Foundation assistance to launch one of the first comprehensive family planning programs in the country.

I was with GR when the news broke that Vinoba Bhave has started fast unto death to force a ban on cow slaughter. Mama was visibly upset. "That is not Mahatma Gandhi's way", he told me. He said Gandhiji had made it clear that just as it was wrong for others to ask him to give up his vegetarianism, "it was against the spirit of nonviolence for me to expect others to give up their meat-eating habit." Gandhi never imposed his personal preferences on others. Meat was never cooked or served in the community kitchen. But Gandhi never prohibited

individuals from eating meat. Indeed, whenever Maulana Azad came to meet Gandhiji, mutton was always brought from outside and served to him. Maulana would say that was not necessary and Gandhi would reply "but you are used to it." When Abdul Ghaffar Khan's son lived with Gandhi, arrangements were always made for him to have his regular supply of meat. Dr. GR made no secret of the fact that he enjoyed non-vegetarian foods and he relished them almost until the very evening of his life. GR did not think that either Gandhian philosophy or his own moral ideal would justify the imposition of one's personal or religious beliefs on others.

GR had a great sense of humor which was at once disarming and contagious. I have never known anyone who could poke fun of even Presidents and Prime Ministers with such felicity. I remember his introducing Shri Jagjeevan Ram, then Union Minister for Railways, at the end of a prayer meeting. He said, "I have always told my students that black is beautiful. The darker you are the more beautiful you look. If you need any proof of that just look at Shri Jagjeevan Ram, the most handsome face you have ever seen."

GR was a true Gandhian who lived a very simple life. His requirements were minimal. In Gandhigram he lived in a two bedroom thatched hut which was sparsely furnished. When he was the Chairman of Khadi and Village Industries Commission in Bombay he could have rented the

best house on Malabar Hill but he chose to live in small cottage on Juhu Beach. He never had any personal bank account. Not a single paisa was saved or deposited in any bank. He never claimed full salary either as Chairman of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission or as Vice Chancellor. He took just enough to meet the basic needs. Any money that was left over was given away. Having lived in the GR household for many years I knew he merely subsisted. An old noisy, rickety table fan was on always at his side, providing the only "comfort" he enjoyed.

Together with his wife, Dr. Soundram, GR founded Gandhigram. He built the place, literally, brick by brick. It began as a small center for basic education, Khadi and village industries but the place has now grown into a vast educational complex with numerous training and academic programs from pre-kindergarten to post-graduate study and research. Just like Gandhi, GR also took ordinary men and women under his wings and transformed them into great leaders dedicated to the cause of rural development. He mentored hundreds of average men and women and led them to great heights of glory. He gave them all he had. However, in the evening of his life he was largely deserted by his close associates. When the original Gandhigram built on Gurukula system, community living was transformed into a large university, external forces which valued power, position, money, and prestige undermined many of the traditional value systems

and loyalties. Finally, GR left Gandhigram and returned to his ancestral home in Neyyattinkara. GR was the most magnanimous man I ever encountered. He was fully aware of the attempts to malign him but he remained gentle, kind and compassionate to the very end. He was never bitter. Never uttered an unkind word. Indeed, the people who turned against him received greater praise, love and blessings from him. Mama was an embodiment of compassion, a fact no one can deny.



MY GURU DEV - A BIRTH CENTENARY TRIBUTE

R. RAMACHANDRAN NAIR

It is rightly said that seeing, hearing and reading but not thinking, is like not eating and not digesting. It is Mama, especially his Gandhigram Annapoorna Pandal evening post-prayer discourses that initiated me to this process of thinking at my teenage. He is my Guru Dev in that respect. It is a Divine Grace that I am in Thiruvananthapuram during this Birth Centenary Year of Mama and pen down a few words as a Birth Centenary Tribute to my Guru Dev.

When, where and how did I meet Mama? It was sometime in October 1965 at Gandhigram. I went to Gandhigram to join Gandhigram Rural Institute's College of Post graduation as an office staff. I got this job at Mama's instance and I was introduced to Mama by Madhu, son of Visala and Kesavan Nair. I subsequently learnt that Visala was an adopted daughter of Mama and Amma and Kesavan Nair was Mama's Personal Assistant when he was a Minister in Kerala. Their son Madhu was a class fellow and good friend of my younger brother Reghu.

I was then 18 years of age. After Pre-University Course and passing Kerala Government Higher Diploma in English Shorthand and Typewriting I was teaching English Shorthand and Typewriting at Alphonsa Institute of Commerce at Kesavadasapuram. My father was a School Teacher and he was to retire next year. As the eldest of his six children I knew I have the responsibility to look after them. After a Higher Diploma in Shorthand and Typewriting I could easily get a job as a reporter in Kerala State Legislative Assembly, for which I had to wait for more than a year to write Public Service Commission Test and get appointment. I could not afford that long waiting. This made me desperately search for a good job anywhere in India. My introduction to Mama came to me as a blessing and a crucial turning point in my life in all respects.

I had no opportunity to personally work directly under Mama. My first brief meeting with him had a lightning impact on me. Thereafter I made it a point to visit him periodically to pay my respects and also was very particular to listen to his post-prayer discourses. All these changed me a lot. In spite of all compelling demands from home, I started thinking that life is much more than a job and a secured regular earning. While working in Gandhigram I had several opportunities to know Mama intimately.

I worked in Gandhigram from October 1965 to March 1966. Then I was taken to Delhi by Mama to work with R. R. Diwakarji for the National

Committee for Gandhi Centenary. One afternoon at Gandhigram, I was walking towards Children's Home. Suddenly from behind a jeep came and gave a sudden break. It was Mama on the wheels and he ordered me to get in. I got in and the jeep moved. During this brief journey Mama enquired if I was willing to go to Delhi. "You have to work with a great man and you should take notes in English and transcribe the same in French". He meant my not making too much mistakes while taking notes and typing.

I worked for National Committee for Gandhi Centenary from its inception until it was wound up and thereafter I shifted down to Sewagram to work for Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences, which was stated as a Gandhi Centenary Project for experiments in medical education from a rural area.

Mama was then a Member of Parliament, Secretary of Gandhi Peace Foundation and a member of both the Executive Committee and National Committee for Gandhi Centenary. Therefore his visits to Delhi used to be frequent and gave me an opportunity to be in constant touch with him.

As a youngman he encouraged me to express my views freely, which is seldom done by the older generation of people then and now. Also Mama encouraged taking my own decisions after thinking about all pros and cons. During 1965-1972, I had

innumerable opportunities to join Government Services and in good industries and all the time whenever I mention about it he would leave the decision to me. He used to tell me it is not money or job title or placement sector - government or private that matters and all that matters is what you like and not like and what is good for you or not. You have my blessings, whatever is your final decision.

In the year 1980 I decided to leave Sewagram and join OXFAM for a wider experience. That time I did not tell Mama about it. At the same time while giving OXFAM two references I made it a point to give the names of Mama and Dr. Sushila Nayar. Mama sent OXFAM an excellent reference and even enquired from OXFAM as to how they managed to snatch me away from Sewagram. This is Mama.

A rare quality I have seen in him is that youngsters could beg to disagree with him and even criticize him. Once when he made a thundering speech in Rajya Sabha about corruption and the same was reported in the press, I made it a point to write a letter to him with a desire to get a written reply. During his Rajya Sabha address he mentioned that taking one's salary and not doing one's allotted work also amounts to corruption. I wrote and enquired if that is not happening in Gandhian institutions also. He agreed with me. Also, he agreed with me that one did not become a Gandhian by simply wearing Khadi or spinning or participating in ritualistic prayer meetings.

On October 2, 1967 I decided to marry Vijayam, who came to Delhi after a long training in Kasturbagram, Indore to work for Gandhi Centenary in the Sub-Committee for the welfare of Women and Children. She is the daughter of Freedom Fighter V. R. Gopalan Ezhuthachan. I was then 20 years of age and Vijayam 19 years. We thought that we could make our parents agree to it. My parents were agreeable to this alliance but said that the marriage should be after my completing 25 years. Vijayam's parents were totally against this alliance. When both of us failed to convince our parents for an early marriage, I decided to mention it to Mama and asked Vijayam to mention it to Dr. Sushila Nayar. When I mentioned this to Mama, he spontaneously said that if our parents did not agree he would arrange the marriage. He discussed the matter with Dr. Sushila Nayar and made the arrangements for the marriage. We got married in a Gandhian way on 10th March 1968 in the presence of distinguished guests like Mr. & Mrs. Sanjiva Reddy, Mr. & Mrs. Raghuramiah, Mr. & Mrs. K.L. Rao, Rukmini Devi Arundale, Lakshmi Devadas Gandhi, Mr. & Mrs. C.D. Deshmukh and others. I can never forget Mama and his role.

Mama encouraged me for studies. While on job I attended evening classes and took the degrees of B.A. from Delhi University in 1970 and LL.B. from Nagpur University in 1980.

Although I had no opportunity to meet them, Mahatma Gandhi, J.C. Kumarappa and Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore inspired me a lot through their

writings and teachings. But for Mama I would not have been able to enter into the world of their teachings.

As far as I am concerned Mama is not dead. He is very much alive. He is guiding me at all times from everywhere and encouraging me to take my own courageous decisions. Who would not love to have such Gurus?

Jai Guru Dev.



TRIBUTE BY WORLD LEADERS

Dr. S. RADHAKRISHNAN
(Former President of India)

Shri G. Ramachandran's work at Gandhigram is a monument of his love of learning, interest in rural development and intense patriotism. I hope that he may live for many years and make greater contribution to the progress of our country.



Dr. ZAKIR HUSSAIN
(Former President of India)

Ramachandran has been interested in many things, and now his Gandhigram comprehends many types of educational and constructive activities. But I believe Khadi and Village Industries and Basic Education have been his major fields of work. I agree whole-heartedly with the underlying principles of Gandhiji's constructive programme, but the ardor, intellectual as well as emotional, with which Ramachandran believes in this programme

and in Basic Education is something I can envy but never emulate. His love for the village is so intense, his dedication to the service of the rural people so complete! He is, beyond doubt, one of Gandhiji's heirs and successors, and he has added to this heritage the eloquence of Gurudev.



C. RAJAGOPALACHARI

(Statesman and First Indian Governor General)

I have had many sincere and loyal men working with me during my long life. Shri G. Ramachandran was one of the most if not the most sincere and wholehearted of them all. This wholeheartedness is in his very nature.



V. V. GIRI

(Former President of India)

I always consider Shri Ramachandran as one of the great men of India, who rendered services to the country all these years with a spirit of selflessness. He is an embodiment of all that is good and great. His integrity and affection for the common man are recognized throughout this country by all sections of the people. His partner in life, Mrs. Soundram Ramachandran, is a source of inspiration in his great work and both of them have built the institution - Gandhigram - which will live for all time.

I want Shri G. Ramachandran to finish his century so that the country can have the benefit of his wisdom and ripe experience. He will continue to be an ideal to both young men and women who desire to serve their country.



INDIRA GANDHI

(Former Prime Minister)

You have had an eventful life as freedom fighter, editor, educationist and parliamentarian. Through your articulation and your dedicated work, especially in Gandhigram, you have upheld principles and causes dear to our nation.



M. C. CHAGLA

(Eminent Jurist and former Cabinet Minister)

Gandhigram is a unique complex of institutions which have been doing valuable work in the important field of rural uplift, including education. Since its inception, its activities have expanded and gathered strength in several directions, thanks to the devoted work of its Director and his colleagues.



S. R. DAS
(Eminent Social Activist)

Shri Ramachandran had the rare privilege of sitting at the feet of and taking lessons from both Gurudev and Gandhiji - two of the greatest personalities of modern India. The cause of the country has always been dear and near to Shri Ramachandran's heart and his services to our mother-land stretch over a varied field for a long number of years.



K. SANTHANAM
(Editor)

Shri G. Ramachandran has been one of our steadfast freedom-fighters and idealists. He participated in the Sathyagraha campaigns and his services after freedom, particularly in the field of education, has been even more distinguished than his sacrifice in the struggle for freedom.



D. SANJIVAYYA
(Former President of AICC)

The services of Shri G. Ramachandran, in the cause of the uplift of the down-trodden are well known and it is needless for me to recapitulate them.

One of the true and staunch disciples of Mahatma Gandhi, he has distinguished himself in the welfare activities for the good of the poorer sections of the community. By honouring him we are honouring ourselves and it is therefore fitting that his services to the country are recognised appropriately.



SUCHETA KRIPALANI
(Former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh)

Ramachandranji's contribution in the field of Basic and Rural Education is immense and very valuable. I well remember the early days when Gandhiji was evolving a pattern of basic education for India and the pioneering work that the Aryanayakams and Ramachandranji did in that regard. He carries my best wishes in the good work that he is doing.



MURIEL LESTER
(English Social Activist)

What a lot of joy Ramachandran has given me once we met about thirty years ago.

He was working and living among the untouchables and he got a few of them to give me a party in a little tent, to enter which necessitated crawling under the flap. I still have the letter of greetings on hand-made paper which they presented

me with; though their lovely gift of hand-made clothes which I had made into a dress wore out long ago; though like all khadar it wore well.



HORACE ALEXANDER
(Peace Activist, U.S.A)

I am sure he knows how widely he is admired by his friends in many lands. We look to him to continue to speak out with courage, even when what he says may not be popular. The foundations of a world where men and women may live without fear in true harmony to cling to - of which perhaps nationalism is the most difficult to renounce, but Ramachandran is one of those who has seen through most of these bad mental habits. We look to him to keep us on the alert; to educate the new generation to think for themselves, and overcome the prejudices even of some who have been leaders in our times. He has broken free from many ancient taboos; may he go on to find more barriers to break down, more new horizons to reveal to our sights.



REVEREND MICHAEL SCOTT
(Peace Activist, U.S.A)

Ramachandran personifies to me many of those ideas and ideals which were wrought out of India's struggle to free her from British rule.

May, Ramachandran, be fearless in thought and action, and keep young in mind and body. The world needs desperately all that he and his country has to offer, wrought-with what suffering-out of the physical and spiritual struggle between my people and his, now nearly a generation ago.



STUART NELSON
(Peace Activist, U.S.A)

G. Ramachandran provides an inspiring example of single-hearted dedication during an adult lifetime to a great, universal but sharply delineated spiritual ideal.



RICHARD B. GREGG

(Author and Specialist in Nonviolence)

During his last year as a student of Santiniketan, in the spring of 1925, at the request of C. P. Andrews, Ramachandran kindly let me share his room for several weeks. That was the beginning of our friendship. The next time we met was at Gandhiji's Sabarmati Ashram in the autumn and winter of 1925-26.

I returned to the U.S.A. in the late autumn of 1928: In the winter of 1949-50, during the time of

World Pacifist Meeting, we met at Sevagram at Wardha and had good talk together. In the early 1950s, he came to America and we met at a conference in Pennsylvania. He then invited me to come and teach a bit in Gandhigram. In 1956 I accepted his invitation, and in October of that year, my wife and I came to Gandhigram. He arranged for me to talk to the students there on non-violent resistance and on the economic aspects of Gandhiji's programmes. After we went to New Delhi that autumn, he became the Secretary of Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, and under those auspices I saw him from time to time at Rajghat. Then I returned home in the spring of 1958. Ramachandran has served India long and well.



SAMUEL MATHAI
(Former U.G.C. Secretary)

I hold Shri Ramachandran in the highest esteem as a dedicated servant of the country and as a man of great ideals and a true disciple of Mahatma Gandhi. He has rendered service of the highest order to the Nation in many ways, and his work on the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, Gandhigram etc., has been very significant. Gandhigram, under his leadership, has developed into a model institution and community organisation.



MARGARET BARR

(Leading Member of War Resisters International)

I first met Ramachandraji in 1937 when staying in Travancore with his and my dear friends S K. and Mary George. And ever since then I have found in him a tower of strength and mine of inspiration and encouragement, throughout the long years that I have tried, in a small way and an outlandish spot, to further the cause of Basic Education.

This it is, our common faith in and work for Basic Education that forms the strongest link between us. But it is by no means the only link. At least two more of the causes which he serves with distinction are of vital importance to me also—the cause of world peace and the cause of inter-religious fellowships. As fellow members of the War Resisters' International for many years, and of the Fellowship of the Friends of Truth since, its inception, we have remained in fairly close touch throughout the years, and whenever I have called on him for help or guidance or encouragement, he has never let me down. This is a personal testimony which I am sure could be echoed by dozens, if not hundreds, of others.



KANU GANDHI
(Grand Nephew of Mahatma Gandhi)

Mahatmaji, while preaching about 'Nai Talim' used to say "Every person, right from his conception till death is a student". Ramachandranji has truly grasped the meaning of this sentence and his constant endeavour in life is to put it in practice. And I firmly believe that to be the key to success in this life and all his works.

Shri Ramachandranji is a student in the true sense of the term and therefore, he has been a great and real teacher. His desire, may, his hankering to know each and every aspect of a thing is indeed very great, he would not leave a stone unturned to gain perfect knowledge. Thus his own personal interest and effort enhances his knowledge of all the pros and cons of the subject and that is the reason why, after giving it a perfect analytical form he can impart it beautifully to others.

We must also try to follow in his footsteps to be a real student and procure the key to success.



KAKASAHEB KALELKAR
(Sarvodaya ideologue)

Like Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, Shri Ramachandran is an outstanding product of the National Education movement which was part of the Non-cooperation programme. I have watched

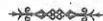
the career of Shri Ramachandran ever since he came to the Ashram at Sabarmati. I found him to be a man of high ideals. His devotion to duty was equal to his penetrating understanding of the social and political forces working in India. His tact and winning manners and sympathy are a result of his deep understanding of human nature.

I understood Ramachandran much better when I visited his great educational institution at Gandhigram where he and his gifted wife have patiently built social and cultural forces that are bound to influence the future of our country. I would not be surprised if it becomes an international centre of Gandhian influence.



K. P. MADHAVAN NAIR
(Sarvodaya Leader)

I join you all in your prayer to vouchsafe Shri Ramachandran health and life to continue his services to the people for many more years to come.



R. K. NARAYANA PILLAI
(Gandhian Scholar)

Who am I to pay tribute to Sri G. Ramachandran the torch-bearer of the Travancore State Congress in its struggle for the establishment

of responsible Government in the erstwhile Travancore State - the redoubtable champion of the weak and the oppressed - the valiant and disciplined soldier in the cause of freedom and peace - the devout and conscientious follower of Mahatma Gandhi in the implementation of the various items in the Constructive programme chalked out by him and the relentless fighter against injustice, oppression and tyranny.



K. R. ELANKATH
(Former Minister of Kerala)

A true interpreter of Gandhian philosophy, Ramachandran has been endeavouring his best to implement the programmes of social and economic development of the country. Through his active and effective association in such committees on the national level as Harijan Sevak Sangh, Peace Foundation, Village Industries Association, All India Charka Sangh and Gandhi Smarak Nidhi he has done yeoman service to the nation.

The service of persons of the caliber of Shri G. Ramachandran are needed most at a time when we have reasons to apprehend that a tendency is growing among the people to recede from the high ideals for which the Father of the Nation lived and wrought for.



E. M. S. NAMBOODIRIPAD
(Freedom Fighter and Communist Leader)

I have had the privilege of knowing Shri Ramachandran for nearly three decades. Despite the differences in the fundamental outlook between a convinced adherent of the Sarvodaya Philosophy and an equally convinced follower of Marxist Philosophy, I have seen in him an efficient and competent worker for several causes which we have in common. I have always found it profitable to exchange views with him on issues on which we have a common outlook, as well as on those where we differ sharply.



K. M. CHERIAN
(Gandhian Leader)

After Buddha and Asoka, the golden era of Indian history was when Gandhi and Nehru took the leadership of our land. The generation that lived during these days has been extremely lucky. Ramachandran is easily the leader among those who had the singular fortune of being the satellites of such a mighty luminary as Gandhi. It is a matter of pride for all Malayalees that Ramachandran still shines as a beacon light dispelling the veil of darkness that encircles us now.



Dear 'Mama' G. Ramachandran

A. P. UDAYABHANU
(Writer and Editor)

I feel that Ramachan's best and abiding work is the building up of Gandhigram in partnership with his talented and dedicated partner. Gandhigram is a living synthesis of all that is best in Gandhiji and Tagore. The many-faced constructive activities embracing every aspect of our national life and thought are achieved in an atmosphere pervading with aesthetics. Austerity without ruggedness, work without drudgery, achievements without tears - this is what one finds there.



R. VENKATARAMAN
(Former President of India)

Dr. Ramachandran is an old friend and colleague of mine. I have the highest regard for him and his selfless service.



DR. T. S. SOUNDHAM
(Former Union Minister and wife of
G. Ramachandran)

"...His name is remembered always by his contribution not only in spreading Gandhian Philosophy but in various other ways including Basic Education, Khadi, etc..."



Dear 'Mama' G. Ramachandran

SRI. P. RAMACHANDRAN
(Former Governor of Kerala)

Dr. G. Ramachandran is a man of many splendoured achievements. He has been steadfast in his dedication to the Constructive Programme and the cause of nonviolence and peace of which Gandhiji was the living embodiment. Dr. Ramachandran is one among the last of a distinguished generation which grew to greatness not merely because of involvement in the struggle for freedom but because of the high sense of mission which inspired it.



K. KARUNAKARAN
(Former Chief Minister of Kerala)

As an ardent disciple of Gandhi as a freedom fighter, as a parliamentarian, as an educationist and author, Dr. Ramachandran has made valuable contributions.



K.P. RAMACHANDRAN NAIR
(Former Health Minister of Kerala)

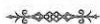
Dr. Ramachandran is a well known true follower of Gandhi.



N. SREENIVASAN

(Former Excise Minister of Kerala)

Dr. Ramachandran is a living symbol of the Gandhian era. His activities are spread over the last six decades. In him, we find a happy blend of the great ideals of the two towering personalities - Gandhi and Tagore. Dr. G. Ramachandran will remain a beacon light for the young generation for many years.



DR. AMLAN DATTA

(Former Vice Chancellor, Viswabharati)

A disciple of two great teachers, Rabindranath and Gandhi, Dr. Ramachandran is himself an outstanding personality. People in Viswabharati community felt that he belonged to them and he, in turn, treated them as his own. Young people will need to be reminded of the message of Tagore and Gandhi - who could do that better than Dr. G. Ramachandran?



T.S. AVINASHILINGAM

(Former Minister of Tamilnadu)

We were together in Vellore Jail. He has made a permanent contribution to the development of the country and particularly in the fields of Education, Village Industries and Rural Development.



GLENN. D. PAIGE

(Peace Activist, U.S.A)

A great man, standing humbly in the shadow of two great Men. Dr. G. Ramachandran, who had come to the East-West Centre to make an inspired plea for social scientists to dedicate themselves to uplifting the impoverished masses, was the first Gandhian I had met. His life stands as a challenge and inspiration to educators for all time to come. May his beloved Shanti Sena be transplanted to every University in the world.



DR. HOMER A. JACK

(Former Minister,

Unitarian Universalistic Society, Illinois)

G. Ramachandran made his mark on India and the world. He has interpreted the word and philosophy of Gandhiji for our times and for the modern generation. He has dedicated his entire life to interpret Gandhi's message in the context of the emerging realities without compromising on the core values of Gandhi.



Note on contributors

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Shri G. Ramachandran's work at Gandhigram is a monument of his love of learning, interest in rural development and intense patriotism. I hope that he may live for many years and make greater contribution to the progress of our country.

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(Former President of India)