

An article about Shri Pranjivan Mehta

Dialogue October-December, 2010, Volume 12 No. 2

(A quarterly journal of Astha Bharati)

<http://www.asthabharati.org/>

The 'Reader' in Hind Swaraj, Dr. Pranjivan Mehta, 1864-1932

S.R. Mehrotra

Gandhi's own testimony

Speaking at Malikanda in Bengal (now in Bangladesh) on 21 February 1940 at a meeting of the Gandhi Seva Sangh, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi made a startling disclosure about the genesis of *Hind Swaraj*. He said:

You may not perhaps be knowing for whom I wrote *Hind Swaraj*. The person is no more and hence there is no harm in disclosing his name. I wrote the entire *Hind Swaraj* for my dear friend Dr. Pranjivan Mehta. All the argument in the book is reproduced almost as it took place with him. I stayed with Dr. Mehta for (more than) a month (at the Westminster Palace Hotel, 4 Victoria Street, London, S.W., in later 1909). Although he loved me, he had no opinion of my intellect (then). He thought I was foolish and sentimental. But experience had made me a little bold, and a little vocal also. Dr. Mehta was an intellectual giant. How could I pit my wits against his? But I did place my point of view before him. It appealed to his heart. His attitude changed. So I said let me write down the argument. I wrote down the discussion as it took place.¹

Confirmation of this discussion – which continued for more than a month – between Gandhi and Mehta in a London hotel is available in two letters of Gandhi to his South African friend Hermann Kallenbach. In his first letter, dated 21 July 1909, to Kallenbach, Gandhi said: 'I have not given myself sufficient sleep still. Dr. Mehta, a very old and staunch friend, is here. We have been discussing many important matters. But the only time I can give him is after 11 p.m., so that we have both been keeping late hours. I must talk to you about the discussions when we meet. You will like them I am sure'.² In his second dated 20 August 1909, Gandhi wrote to Kallenbach: '...I have been giving a lot of my time to Dr. Mehta – an old and valued friend. ... we talked away till 2 a.m. ...'.³

Gandhi recalled his dialogue with Mehta in the tranquility of his voyage back to South Africa on board the *S.S. Kildonan Castle* and hurriedly wrote it down in Gujarati on the ship's stationery – 276 manuscript pages in all – between 20 and 22 November 1909.⁴ On 25 November 1909 Gandhi informed Kallenbach: 'I have been working very hard on the steamer and have given myself no rest. ... I have translated a long letter from Tolstoy and written an original book in Gujarati.'⁵ The 'original book in Gujarati' was *Hind Swarajya* which was first published on Gandhi's return to South Africa in the *Indian Opinion* in two installments on 11 and 18 December 1909. It was issued as a booklet by the International Printing Press, Phoenix, Natal, in January 1910. Its English translation was published by the same press in March 1910 under the title *Indian Home Rule*. For reasons which can only be guessed, in the English translation the Gujarati word

'Swarajya' was changed to 'Swaraj', so from March 1910 onwards *Hind Swarajya* began to be called *Hind Swaraj*.

After Gandhi's clear and unequivocal disclosure of 21 February 1940 at Malikanda, which virtually amounted to his confessing that while he was the 'Editor' in *Hind Swaraj*, his 'dear friend Dr. Pranjivan Mehta' was the 'Reader' in it, all speculation about who the 'Reader' was in *Hind Swaraj* should have ceased. But, unfortunately, it has not. One main reason for this is that most of those who have written about the genesis of *Hind Swaraj* over the years knew very little about Dr. Pranjivan Mehta. It was not entirely their fault though, for not much was known about this avowedly greatest benefactor and friend of his to whom the 'Prophet' first chose to announce himself in a London hotel in July-August 1909. After years of patient and painstaking research the present writer is enabled to give the brief pen-portrait of Dr. Mehta which follows.

Mehta's early years and his contacts with Gandhi before 1909

Pranjivandas Jagjivandas Mehta, the youngest of four brothers, was born in 1864 at Morvi in a prosperous Jain family of merchants and professionals which was spread all over Kathiawar. One of his elder brothers, Revashankar Jagjivan Mehta, better known by the surname 'Jhaveri', was vakil (lawyer) of the Raja of Morvi. In consequence of a quarrel with his king, he left Morvi and settled as a jeweller in Champagali, Kalpadevi, Bombay, under the trade name Messrs Revashankar Jagjivan & Co. He later built a large house in the city at Labournum Road, Gamdevi, called Mani Bhuvan, which became from 1920 the centre of Gandhi's political activities while in Bombay and now houses a famous Gandhi museum. The brother who was immediately older to Revashankar was called Papatbhai. His daughter Zabakben was married to the greatest Jain savant of modern times, Shrimad Rajchandra (1867-1901), who influenced Gandhi greatly and whom the latter rated higher than even Leo Tolstoy and John Ruskin as a spiritual being.⁶ After completing his early education at Morvi and Rajkot, Praanjivan joined the Grant Medical College in Bombay, from where he earned his L.M.S. (Licentiate in Medicine and Surgery) degree with a gold medal in 1886. The state of Morvi gave him a scholarship for higher studies in Europe. He arrived in Europe in the spring of 1887 and was admitted to the Free University of Brussels (Universite Libre de Bruxelles) in Belgium. He got his M.D. (Doctor of Medicine) degree from this institution in 1889 with distinction in Surgery. Mehta was an extremely intelligent and industrious person. While studying medicine in Brussels, he also enrolled himself at London's Middle Temple in order to qualify as a barrister. He was called to the Bar in London soon after his brilliant performance in Brussels. There were not more than two hundred Indian students in Europe at that time. Most of them lived and studied in Britain. The fact that Mehta studied in Europe at the non-denominational Free University of Brussels, where the political and social atmosphere was far more liberal and radical than in any university in Britain, made a lasting impression on him. In late 1889 Mehta returned to India. After practising as a physician on his own for a few years, he became the chief medical officer of Idar state.

The first meeting between Gandhi and Mehta took place at the Victoria Hotel, near Trafalgar Square, in London, on the evening of Saturday, 29 September 1888, the day Gandhi arrived there to study for the Bar. Gandhi had come to know of Mehta's whereabouts in Europe from mutual friends and had kept him informed about his movements. Dressed in a white flannel suit in late September and therefore looking a little odd, dazzled by the splendour of the rather expensive hotel in central London, where he was staying, Gandhi had hardly settled down when Mehta called on him at his room in the hotel around eight o'clock in the evening. Gandhi has given a rather vivid account of this first encounter between the two would-be lifelong friends in his

autobiography.⁷ Mehta and another Kathiawari friend from Rajkot, Dalpatram Shukla, who was already there studying for the Bar, acted as Gandhi's mentors during his early days in London. As was customary, the two saw to it that the newcomer was suitably lodged, introduced him to the English way of life, and helped him go about in London.

However, though Gandhi had come to know Mehta in England in 1888-9, real intimacy developed between the two only when in the summer of 1891 Gandhi stayed for some time, at Mehta's insistence, at the latter's residence in Bombay, on his return from Enland.⁸ It was there that he met for the first time Shrimad Rajchandra, who reinforced the religious quest that had already been awakened in him while he was in England through his involvement with vegetarianism and theosophy.⁹

In 1893 Gandhi went away to South Africa, where he soon became involved in the struggle of the people of Indian origin against the policies of the ruling white minority based on racial discrimination. He did not, however, lose contact with Mehta. In the latter half of 1896, when Gandhi visited India for about five months to gather support for the cause of the Indians in South Africa, he stayed with the family of Mehta whenever he happened to be in Bombay. In late 1898 Mehta, while returning from Europe to India, took the old Cape route, visited Gandhi in Durban and stayed with him for some time. 'He was well received by the Indian community and feted by the prominent members.'¹⁰

In 1899 Mehta migrated to Burma and settled in Rangoon not only as a barrister and doctor, but also as a diamond merchant. He soon became the richest and most prominent citizen of the country. He took a keen interest in the public life of his adopted country. He was president of Hindu Social Club and the Shri Ramkrishna Society of Rangoon, a member of the All-India Congress Committee from Burma and President of the Burma Provincial Congress Committee, founder secretary of the Burma Social Service League, and a mentor of the early Burmese nationalists. In 1906 he established an Anglo-Gujarati weekly paper called United Burma which was edited by V. Madanjit, who had formerly been the publisher of the Indian Opinion in Durban. A Government report on the press in Burma in 1911 described the purpose of the paper to be 'to befriend the fallen, poorer classes ... it deals with political, general and National Congress matters. ... An ardent advocate of Swadeshi and boycott; hence needs watching' .¹¹ He took up the cause of the poorly paid Indian dock workers and earned the wrath of the foreign navigation companies. With the help of a south Indian economist, Narayan Rao, he organised trade unions in Burma.

In late 1901 Gandhi returned to India from South Africa hoping to settle permanently in the country, making his living as a lawyer and combining it with such public work as was possible, a hope that was later belied because of insistent calls from his community in South Africa. He attended the annual session of the Indian national Congress at Calcutta in December 1901 and stayed on there for another month canvassing support for the cause of the Indians in South Africa, first at the India Club and later as the guest of Gopal Krishna Gokhale, then a member of the Viceroy's legislative council, at his residence. Some idea of how popular Gandhi had already become in India because of his work in South Africa can be had from the reception that was accorded to his two lectures at the Albert Hall, Calcutta, on 19 and 27 January 1902 by the press and the public, and by the fulsome praise of him by Gokhale, whom he had come to regard as his 'rajguru', seconding a vote of thanks to him at the conclusion of his first lecture on 19 January 1902.¹² In the last week of January 1902 Gandhi travelled from Calcutta to Rangoon and stayed with Mehta for about a week.

Gandhi's plans to settle for good in India in 1902 – first at Rajkot and then at Bombay – were, however, rudely disturbed when he was suddenly recalled to South Africa in the November of that

year. He thought he would be away only for a short time, so he went alone, leaving his family behind in India. But he was detained in South Africa until July 1914 and could not return to India until 9 January 1915. recalling the events in his *Autobiography*, Gandhi wrote in a mood of wise resignation: ‘...God has never allowed any of my own plans to stand. He has disposed them in His own way.’¹³

The making of the Mahatma and the writing of ‘Hind Swaraj’

The second phase of Gandhi’s stay in South Africa, from late 1902 to mid-1914, was far more significant than the first. In 1903 Gandhi began publishing *Indian Opinion*. To the influence of vegetarianism and Tolstoy on Gandhi was added that of Ruskin in 1904 and the Phoenix settlement was born on the model of the Trappist monastery in Pinston, near Durban. In 1906 Gandhi took the vow of *brahmacharya*. The same year saw the birth of *satyagraha*. In 1908-9 Gandhi was imprisoned three times. This gave him the solitude and the leisure to study and think steadily and as a whole about his ‘theory of life’ or *weltanschauung*, which was embodied in *Hind Swaraj* in late 1909.

Though *Hind Swaraj* was written at the conclusion of Gandhi’s abortive four-month (July-November 1909) trip to England, it was not the result of Gandhi’s ‘reading’, ‘pondering’ and ‘observation’ in England alone.¹⁴ Like the Mahatma, *Hind Swaraj* had long been in the making. By the time Gandhi left for London in late June 1909, as a part of the two-member Indian deputation, his views were firmly formed on most ethical, religious, social and political subjects. Several influences had contributed to this outcome: his Kathiawari heritage; the home atmosphere of his early childhood; his Hindu Vaishnav upbringing overlaid with his mother’s Pranami cult; his legal education in England; his active involvement with the vegetarian movement; his encounters with Theosophy and Christianity in England and South Africa; his association with the Jain scholar Shrimad Rajchandra; his discovery of his own religion and culture in an alien environment; his study of Tolstoy, Ruskin, Mazzini, Salter and Thoreau; his bitter experience in and out of jail in South Africa; and his disillusionment with Western civilization as witnessed in England and South Africa. There is hardly an idea in *Hind Swaraj* which Gandhi had not articulated in earlier years and on earlier occasions. It is ridiculous to suggest, as has been done by some writers, that *Hind Swaraj* was the outcome of a sudden illumination which seized Gandhi immediately after he boarded the *S.S. Kildonan Castle* on 13 November 1909 on his return voyage to South Africa from England.¹⁵ The crystallization of Gandhi’s philosophy of life, which is embodied in *Hind Swaraj*, took place during his three prison terms in South Africa in 1908-9.¹⁶ Its first detailed and systematic exposition occurred in Gandhi’s conversations with Mehta in July-August 1909. Gandhi’s stay in England during July-November 1909 only confirmed him in his views and underlined the necessity of making them public as soon as possible. In a summary form they were communicated by Gandhi to his friend and fellow-seeker, H.S.L. Polak on 14 October 1909.¹⁷ Tolstoy’s approval of these views –first indirectly and then directly¹⁸ – hastened their publication.

Mehta recognizes in Gandhi the future liberator of India

In India the political situation in 1909 was grim. The Indian National Congress after Surat was not only divided, but, it was widely feared, also disintegrating. An increasing number of English-educated young Indians were being drawn to the cult of the bomb and the pistol, which the British government was trying to suppress with all its might. The eyes of most politically-conscious Indians were turned to South Africa, where under Gandhi’s leadership a heroic struggle was being

waged through non-violent means. It represented ‘the splendour of something afar from the sphere of their sorrow’. Mehta, who had known Gandhi since 1888 and who had also visited South Africa in 1898, had been watching Gandhi’s career with more than usual interest. As a result of his discussions with Gandhi in London in July-August 1909, Mehta was not only converted to his views, he also began to look upon him as the future liberator of India. Some idea of what Mehta thought of Gandhi at this time can be had from a letter which he wrote to Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the foremost leader of the Indian nationalist movement at the time, on 8 November 1909, soon after his return to Rangoon.

During my last trip to Europe (Mehta said in his letter to Gokhale) I saw a great deal of Mr. Gandhi. From year to year (I have known him intimately for over twenty years) I have found him getting more and more selfless. He is now leading almost an ascetic sort of life—not the life of an ordinary ascetic that we usually see but that of a great Mahatma and the one idea that engrosses his mind is his motherland. It seems to me that anyone who desires to work for his country ought to study Gandhi and his latest institutions – Phoenix Colony and Phoenix School. The passive resistance movement as carried on in the Transvaal under his guidance can also be better studied on the spot. Mr. Polak, who is now here and living with me, tells me that the “Servants of India” are doing excellent work. It seems to me that the study of any worker for India is not complete unless he has studied Gandhi and his institutions. His work after this study will be more effective and thorough. If you agree with me in the above view, I would request you to send one of the “Servants of India” to pay a visit to South Africa and put himself absolutely at the disposal of Mr. Gandhi. If I may be permitted, I am willing to bear all his expenses of the trip and the stay in that country. Mr. Polak speaks to me very highly of Mr. (V.S. Srinivasa) Shastri. I should very much like that he should be the first to go to that country. ...Mr. Polak desires me to add that if you make up your mind to send anyone, he should be Mr. Shastri or some Tamil man.¹⁹

Gokhale’s reply to this letter of Mehta’s, if any, is not available.

We get an even better idea of what Mehta had begun to think of Gandhi after his discussions with him in London in later 1909 from another letter which he wrote to Gokhale almost three years later. Mehta had met Gokhale in Vichy, France, where the latter was recuperating, in late August 1912. They had naturally talked about Gokhale’s impending visit to South Africa in the coming winter, and also about Gandhi. During the course of the conversation, Gokhale seems to have made some remark about Gandhi’s ‘capacity’ which Mehta did not like. On 28 August 1912, while on his way back to Rangoon from Europe, Mehta wrote a long letter to Gokhale from Port Said in which he said, among other things, the following:

You will soon have an opportunity of meeting and discussing things with him (Gandhi). From what little conversation we have had about him, I was led to think that you had not studied Gandhi quite well. In my humble opinion, men like him are born on very rare occasions and that in India alone. As far as I can see, it seems to me that India has not produced an equally far-seeing political prophet like him during the last five or six centuries and that if he was born in the 18th century, India would have been a far different land to what it is now and its history would have been altogether differently written. I shall be anxiously waiting to hear from you that your present view of his capacity has altered considerably since coming in greater personal contact with him and that you see in him one of those rare men who are occasionally born to elevate humanity in the land of their birth.²⁰

Plans for the future

It would appear that before Mehta parted from Gandhi in late September 1909 he had persuaded Gandhi to agree to the following plan of action:

- (a) Gandhi would leave South Africa and return to India as early as possible, preferably by the end of 1911.
- (b) The leadership of the Indian struggle in South Africa would be handed over by him to some other competent person, preferably a relative of his, and if it was thought necessary that he should get his training by spending some time in England, Mehta would pay for this. After his training he would be required to serve the community at least for ten years.
- (c) Henceforward Gandhi would train at Phoenix only those satyagrahis whom he was to take with himself to India. Mehta would bear the full cost of this training programme.
- (d) Arrangements should be made for the widest possible distribution and sale of the Reverend J.J. Doke's forthcoming biography of Gandhi, titled *M.K. Gandhi: An Indian Patriot in South Africa*, which carried an 'Introduction' by Lord Ampthill, formerly Governor of Madras (1900-6) and acting Viceroy of India (1904).
- (e) Twenty thousand copies of Tolstoy's famous 'Letter to a Hindoo', of which Mehta himself had procured a copy from his friend in Paris, S.R. Rana, should be printed and distributed worldwide. The entire cost was to be borne by Mehta.
- (f) An essay competition should be organized in England and India on 'the ethics and efficacy of Passive resistance', with a decidedly Tolstoyan orientation, for which Mehta would give, without his name being disclosed, a prize of £ 50 each to the best essay in England and in India.²¹
- (g) Gandhi was to give up his legal practice and Mehta was to pay for the upkeep of his family and himself.
- (h) As a precautionary measure, Gandhi was to destroy all the letters received from Mehta after reading them, (Mehta was not a revolutionary, but he had contacts with the so-called Indian revolutionaries in Europe. He knew that the Indian intelligence agencies regarded him as an 'extremist' and kept a close watch on his movements.)

Mehta's work in support of Gandhi and his ideas, 1910-14

Mehta not only gave liberal financial support to Gandhi, he also raised funds in Burma for the cause of Gandhi's satyagraha in South Africa. What is more important is the fact that after Hind Swaraj was banned in India – both in its Gujarati and English versions – in the first half of 1910, Mehta tried his best to popularize the man and his message through other means. He was the first Indian to write a biography of Gandhi which was published in early 1911 under the title *M.K. Gandhi and the South African Indian Problem*.²² Besides containing intimate details about Gandhi's life and the development of his personality, he very cleverly acquainted his readers with the basic thoughts contained in his banned booklet Hind Swaraj. Later in 1911 he published another book titled Hindu Social Ideals, in which he tried to show what Gandhi did not have the time to do, that is, the superiority of ancient Indian civilization over modern Western civilization.²³ Next year, in 1912, he published a Gujarati translation of Doke's biography of Gandhi, with a preface which was longer than the translation of Doke's book.²⁴

Mehta's support to Gandhi on his return to India

Gandhi's final return to India was delayed until 9 January 1915. he received a hero's welcome from all sections of his countrymen. But his hope that he would find a readymade political base in Gokhale's Servants of India Society, Poona, and to whose presidency he would succeed after

Gokhale's death, which was expected to be imminent, was cruelly belied. A dying Gokhale could not impose his will on the members of the Society, who were firmly opposed to Gandhi's admission to the Society even as an ordinary member. Being 'left without a shelter through revered Gokhale's death' 25, Gandhi turned to his Aladdin's lamp, Dr. P.J. Mehta. He arrived Rangoon on 17 March 1915 and stayed with Mehta for eight days. Mehta not only accorded him a royal welcome, he also assured him of whatever financial help he needed for his own ashram which he proposed to establish at Ahmedabad. Gandhi often said that the Sabarmati Ashram, without which satyagraha was not possible, was his 'greatest creation'. But he also said that Mehta was not only 'the pillar of the Ashram, without him the Ashram would not have come into existence at all'.²⁶ Mehta came to attend the session of the Indian National Congress held at Bombay in December 1915 and spent several weeks with Gandhi. At that time he was planning to spend half the year with Gandhi and the rest in Rangoon, to earn money in Burma and give it to Gandhi for his needs. He also got a house, named 'Lal Kothi' or 'Red Bungalow', built near the Sabarmati Ashram. In early 1917 he published in two parts a pamphlet titled *Vernaculars as Media of Instruction in Indian Schools and Colleges*, which was issued as the first of Sabarmati Ashram's 'Self-Government Series', and carried an 'Introduction' by Gandhi.²⁷ It made a powerful plea not only for the adoption of the regional languages as the medium of instruction in educational institutions at all levels, but also for the adoption of Hindi as the national language of India.

In 1917-18 Mehta became very active in Burmese political life. He vigorously supported the Burmese nationalists' contention that Burma should not be denied the benefit of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms proposed for India. He advised and aided the Burmese deputation which visited Britain in 1918. the newly-appointed arch-reactionary Lieutenant-Governor of Burma, Reginald Craddock, believed – and rightly so – that Mehta was the principal carrier of the contagion of the Indian nationalist movement in the province from which he wanted to protect it. Having been the home member in the Government of India he was also in the know of the fact that Mehta had contacts with the Indian revolutionaries based in Paris, whom he described as 'the Paris gang'.²⁸ Taking advantage, therefore, of a minor labour unrest in Rangoon amongst the dock workers, which evidently had Mehta's sympathy and support, Craddock served on him an externment order on 6 October 1918, requiring him to leave Burma within seven days, even though Mehta was hospitalized at that time for treatment of diabetic carbuncles. Craddock's order was severely condemned by the press and public bodies in Burma, India and Britain.²⁹ Edwin Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, had to intervene,³⁰ and the externment order was first suspended and then withdrawn. This is probably the only instance in British Indian history of an externment order having been revoked because of public protest. Mehta himself put up a spirited defence of his actions and successfully refuted the charges of the Burmese government. In 1919 Mehta visited Britain and worked on behalf of both the Burmese deputation and the Indian National Congress. The 14 November 1919 issue of *India*, the organ of the Congress in Britain, carried a group photograph of the 'House of Commons Luncheon Party to Representatives of the Indian National Congress' which showed Mehta sitting in the second row with such stalwarts of the Congress as B.G. Tilak, V.J. Patel, and Sarojini Naidu. Ceaseless activity and incessant toil exacted their inevitable toll, and Mehta suffered a stroke in mid-1920 when he was at the top of his public career. He had to spend the best part of 1920 and 1921 in Europe for treatment. On 29 September 1921 Gandhi wrote to Kallenbach: 'Do you know that Dr. Mehta cannot speak and cannot write?'³¹ But, though his political career was thus cut short, Mehta continued to take a lively interest in Gandhi's activities. He was greatly excited when Gandhi launched the non-cooperation movement in 1921 and wanted to return to India in order to take part in it. He was terribly

concerned about the poverty of India, especially that of the debt-ridden Indian peasantry, and often sent Gandhi practical suggestions for the social and economic improvement of the masses, especially that of the rural poor. In a letter to Gandhi, dated 8 September 1920, he urged upon him the urgent necessity of a widespread and vigorous agitation against the salt tax, question in which he had been interested for years.³² Mehta rallied a little in the later 1920s. He visited India in 1926 and again in 1929, But his public career had ended. In March 1929 when Gandhi visited Burma for the third time, Mehta, though crippled and in frail health, accompanied him everywhere. When Gandhi began his famous Dandi march, Mehta secured his permission to come to India and join in the salt satyagraha in late 1932.³³ But that was not to be. In mid-July 1932, Mehta, while walking about his bed-room in search of a book with a tablelamp in his hand, dropped the lamp on his foot and cut it with a piece of glass. The cut was neglected while Mehta went about for three days inspecting his fields and attending to other business. The wound became septic, and his leg had to be amputated.³⁴ Gandhi had a premonition that Mehta's latest illness would prove fatal.³⁵ On 3 August 1932 Mehta died at 9 p.m. in the Rangoon General Hospital.

Gandhi, who had been in Yeravda jail since 4 January 1932, paid his tribute to the departed friend in a message which he sent to Narandas on 7 August 1932:

If I were in the Ashram just now, I would have said a few words about this holy soul. He was my oldest friend. ... I saw Doctor continually progressing in such virtues as firmness of mind, courage, generosity, purity, love of truth, ahimsa and simplicity. Once he had made up his mind to do something, he would never change. His word, therefore, was trusted by people who had dealings with him. And he was always fearless. ... Doctor's liberality knew no bounds. His house was like a dharmasala. No deserving poor ever returned empty-handed from him. He had helped and supported a number of people. There was no ostentation in his help. He never boasted about it. It knew no limits of caste or community or province. ... Doctor had enough wealth and to spare, but he was not proud of it. He spent very little of it on pleasures for himself. ... During the last many years of his life he loved *brahmacharya*. In his early life, Doctor had little interest in reading religious books, but in his later life his love for such books increased. ... Doctor had scrupulously followed truth both in his business and his legal practice. I know that he had great hatred of falsehood and hypocrisy. His ahimsa was visible on his face and could be read in his eyes, and it was becoming deeper day by day. Of course the *atman* in man never dies, but Doctor has become, through his virtues, immortal in a special sense.³⁶

To Polak, who had known Mehta since 1909, Gandhi had written on 4 August 1932, 'I have lost a lifelong faithful friend.'³⁷ On the same day he had written to Mehta's nephew, Manilal R. Jhaveri: 'I know that all of you will feel the loss of Doctor. But my sorrow is peculiar. I had no greater friend than Doctor in this whole world.'³⁸

Gandhi's great affection for Mehta would be evident from the following two letters of his. On February 1924 Gandhi was released from Yeravda jail after an emergency appendicitis operation. On 7 February 1924, while he was still in Sassoon Hospital, he wrote to Mehta:

Bhaishri Pranjivan,

I thought of you constantly. Hardly a day passed in the jail when I did not remember you. Having protested to the Government on the issue of my correspondence and stopped writing letters altogether, how could I make an exception in your case and write to you? Today is the third day since my release. There is some strength in my hand and the very first letter I am writing is to you.

As we are both unwell, who should enquire about whom. My health is improving. The wound has not healed completely. ...

Revashankarbhai and the others who had been to see you tell me that you are much better now. Write to me yourself only if you can write letters with your own hand, otherwise dictate to someone. I shall certainly like seeing you when I am well. Do you think your health will permit your coming?

Vandemataram from Mohandas³⁹

The day after Mehta's death, Gandhi wrote to Mehta's eldest son, Chhaganlal P. Mehta, who was in Rangoon:

Your conduct henceforth should show to others that you understand the true significance of Doctor's death. His many virtues are his real will. They are your legacy. I hope you will do nothing which may make your younger brothers unhappy in the slightest degree. I feel unhappy that, at a time when my lifelong friend had passed away, I am as helpless as a cripple. If I had been free, I would be by your side now. Perhaps Doctor would have drawn his last breath in my lap. But God is ever jealous of our wishes.⁴⁰

Notes and References

1. The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (hereafter CWMG), LXXI, 238.
2. Ibid., XCVI, 20.
3. Ibid., 23
4. Following the 'Chronology' given on page 535 of CWMG, X, most writers on Hind Swaraj have said that Gandhi wrote the booklet between 13 and 22 November 1909. This is not correct. Soon after boarding the S.S. Kildonan Castle on 13 November 1909, Gandhi busied himself for the first seven days with the translation of Tolstoy's 'Letter to a Hindoo' into Gujarati and writing two 'Prefaces' to it – the first in Gujarati and the second in English, both published in the Indian Opinion of 25 December 1909. Hind Swaraj was written by him during the subsequent three days, 20 to 22 November 1909.
5. CWMG, XCVI, 58.
6. See 'An Autobiography', CWMG, XXXIX, 74-6; also CWMG, XIII, 143, XXI, 427-35, XXXII, 1-13.
7. 'An Autobiography', CWMG, XXXIX, 41-3.
8. Ibid., 74-6.
9. Ibid.; also CWMG, XXI, 427-35, XXXII, 1-13.

10. Ibid, III, 109. While the English version of Gandhi's 'Autobiography' (CWMG, XXXIX, 215) says that Dr. Mehta had come 'to see me', the Gujarati version says that he had come 'to take me back' (Ibid., 495).

11. Home Political, June 1912, 75 B, p.2. National Archives of India, New Delhi.

12. Gokhale was reported by the *Indian Mirror*, 26 January 1902, to have said on the occasion that 'he first met Mr. Gandhi in 1896, when the latter gentleman paid a brief visit to Poona, and he distinctly remembered the impression which Mr. Gandhi then made on his mind by his manner, at once so gentle and yet so firm ... since that time ... he had followed Mr. Gandhi's career with the deepest interest and with profound admiration, and having studied every utterance of his and watched every movement in which he had any share, ... he could say without any hesitation ... that Mr. Gandhi was a man made of the stuff of which heroes were made ... Mr. Gandhi had set an example to the people of India as to how they ought to work in the cause of their country. ... If Mr. Gandhi settled in this country, it was the duty of all earnest workers to place him where he deserved to be, namely, at their head.'

13. 'An Autobiography', CWMG, XXXIX, 202.

14. The Gujarati version of Hind Swaraj had: 'I have read much, I have pondered much. Also during my four months' stay in London in connection with the work of the Transvaal Indian deputation, I discussed things with as many of my countrymen as I could.' In the English translation of 1910 it became: 'I have read much, I have pondered much, during the stay, for four months in London, of the Transvaal Indian deputation. I discussed things with as many of my countrymen as I could.' CWMG, X, 6.

15. See, for example, C.D.S. Devanesan: 'At this moment inspiration suddenly seized him. He hurried to the warm lounge, pulled out some of the ship's stationery and began to write like one possessed.' *The Making of the Mahatma* (New Delhi, 1969), 370. Also A.J. Parel: 'And the Gandhi wrote as if under inspiration. ... Critics speak of Gandhi's "profound experience of illumination" on board the Kildonan Castle and compare it to Rousseau's on the road to Vincennes.' *M.K. Gandhi: Hind Swaraj and other writings* (OUP, 1997); 'Introduction, XIV.

16. This fact is revealed only by P.J. Mehta in his *M.K. Gandhi and South African Indian Problem* (Madras 1911, 44, and in his 'Bhashantarkartani Prastavna', to his Gujarati translation of J.J. Doke's biography of Gandhi, *Dokekrita Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (Dakshina Afrikawala Hindi Deshbhakta) No Janma Vrittanta* (Mumbai, 1912), 38-9.

17. CWMG, IX, 319-21.

18. See Tolstoy's 'Letter to a Hindoo', in Christian Bartolf (ed.), *Letter to a Hindoo* (Berlin, 1997).

19. The Servants of India Society Papers, Nehru memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

20. G.K. Gokhale Papers, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

21. This was later dropped on Tolstoy's advice that 'A competition, i.e. an offer of a monetary inducement in connection with a religious matter would, I think, be out of place,' See *CWMG*, IX 445, and Appendix XXVII, 593.

22. P.J. Mehta, *M.K. Gandhi and the South African Indian Problem* (Madras, 1911).

23. P.J. Mehta, *Hindu Social Ideals* (Madras, 1911).

24. P.J. Mehta, *Dokekrita Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (Dakshin Afrikawala Hindi Deshbhakta) No Janma Vrittanta* (Mumbai, 1912).

25. Gandhi to D.B. Shukla, 2 March 1915, *CWMG*, XIII, 31.

26. Gandhi to Narandas Gandhi, 9 April 1933, *CWMG*, LIV, 357-8. We shall probably never know how much money Mehta gave during his lifetime to Gandhi, for his Ashram and other needs. On 23 August 1911 he wrote to his nephews, Chhaganlal and Maganlal Gandhi: 'It is unlikely that the time will ever come when we shall be living in real poverty. Dr. Mehta's help stands in the way. As long as this fount flows on, I feel we shall not enjoy the rare privilege of knowing that we have not a pie left for the next day and wondering what will happen.' *CWMG*, XI. 150. On 19 October 1936, Gandhi wrote to his second son, Manilal: 'The Doctor's purse was always at my disposal.' *CWMG*, LXIII, 378. We. However, know that Mehta often gave more than what Gandhi demanded. On 1 July 1911 Gandhi wrote to Mehta that if he gave an additional grant of £1000 he could further extend his programme of training satyagrahis at Phoenix. See *CWMG*, XI, 117. By the return of post Mehta sent him a draft for £1500. See Gandhi to Chhaganlal, n.d., *CWMG*, XCVII, 250. On 2 July 1918 Gandhi asked Mehta for 'a large amount of money' which Mehta readily gave. *CWMG*, XIV, 467-8. But in early 1921 he gave Rs. 1,50,000 for the Ashram of his own accord. See Gandhi to Maganlal, 16 March 1921, *CWMG*, XIX, 438. On Mehta's death in 1932 several newspapers wrote that 'his public charities amounted to about 10 lakhs of rupees'. See, for example, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 5 August 1932, and *Bombay Chronicle*, 5 August 1932. These, however, related to his donations to such institutions as the Gujarat Vidyapitha, Ahmedabad (to which again he gave two and a half lakhs in 1922 for a hostel), The Rashtriyashala and the Jain Dharmashala at Rajkot, the Balmandir (Gharshala) at Wadhwan, and the Gujarati School at Rangoon.

27. P.J. Mehta, *Vernaculars as Media of Instruction in Indian Schools and Colleges*. 2 Parts (Bombay, 1917).

28. R. Craddock to Lord Chelmsford, 18 October 1918, Chelmsford Papers, India Office Library, London.

29. See, for example, *Rangoon Mail*, 10 October 1918; *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 13, 19 October 1918; *Bombay Chronicle*, 10, 19 October 1918, 10 January 1919; *India*, 6, 20 December 1918, 17 January 1919.

30. E.S. Montagu to Lord Chelmsford, 23 December 1918, Chelmsford Paper, India Office Library, London.

31. *CWMG*, XLVI, 279.
32. Letter No. 225, National Gandhi Museum, Rajghat, New Delhi.
33. *The Diary of Mahadev Desai, Vol. I, Yeravda-Pact Eve, 1932 (Ahmedabad, 1933)*, 268.
34. *Ibid.*, 287.
35. *Gandhi to Narandas Gandhi, 2 August 1932, CWMG*, L, 337.
36. *Ibid.*, 335-6. Gandhi always referred to Mehta as 'Doctor'.
37. *Ibid.*, 328.
38. *Ibid.*, 329.
39. *Ibid.*, XXIII, 202-3.
40. *Ibid.*, L, 331-2.