

**Gandhigram**, near **Madurai** in **Tamil Nadu**, is a place deeply rooted in **Gandhian philosophy** and **rural development**, with a significant history linked to India's independence movement and post-independence nation-building efforts.

### ◆ Founding of Gandhigram

- **Year Founded: 1947**
- **Founders: Dr. T.S. Soundaram and Dr. G. Ramachandran**
- **Purpose:** To create a **rural development model** based on **Mahatma Gandhi's ideals**—self-reliance, village upliftment, health, education, and rural industry.
- **Support:** The initiative was supported by **Mahatma Gandhi himself** and later endorsed by **Jawaharlal Nehru** and **Vinoba Bhave**.

### ◆ Who was Dr. T.S. Soundaram?

- Daughter of freedom fighter **T.V. Sundaram Iyengar** (founder of the TVS Group).
- A physician, social reformer, and Gandhian.
- Played a major role in rural health, women's welfare, and education.
- Later served as **Union Deputy Minister for Education** in Nehru's cabinet.

### ◆ Key Institutions in Gandhigram

1. **Gandhigram Rural Institute (GRI):**
  - Established in **1956**.
  - Deemed to be a university.
  - Offers programs focused on **rural development, education, health, agriculture, and cottage industries**.
  - Aims to produce professionals who serve rural communities.
2. **Khadi and Village Industries:**
  - Promotes **handloom, handicrafts, and self-employment** in rural areas.
  - Strong influence from **Gandhian economic thought**.
3. **Health and Sanitation Programms:**
  - Community-based rural health work began here much before it became widespread in India.

### ◆ Gandhigram's Role in Modern India

- Became a **model village** for rural development.
- Influenced policies on **community health, basic education, and rural industries**.
- Attracted national and international attention for its integrated approach to rural upliftment.

### **Dr. G. Ramachandran (1904–1995)**

#### ◆ Early Life & Education:

- Born in **Nagercoil**, Tamil Nadu, in 1904.
- Initially educated in Christian institutions; later became deeply influenced by **Mahatma Gandhi** during his youth.

- A contemporary and close associate of many freedom fighters.

#### ◆ **Involvement with Mahatma Gandhi:**

- Became a **follower of Gandhi in the 1920s** after being deeply moved by his message of non-violence, truth, and rural self-sufficiency.
- Took part in the **Indian freedom movement** and was **imprisoned** multiple times.
- Strongly believed that true freedom could not be achieved without **uplifting rural India**.

#### ◆ **Contributions to Education and Rural Development:**

- **Key Advocate of Nai Talim (Basic Education):** This was Gandhi's idea of education that combines **literacy with productive manual labour**, helping students learn dignity of labour and self-reliance.
- Along with his wife **Dr. T.S. Soundaram**, he founded **Gandhigram Rural Institute (GRI)** in 1956.

GRI became a **centre of excellence for rural education**, embodying Gandhi's principles.

- Also worked on promoting **Khadi, village industries, rural health, and self-governance**.

#### ◆ **National and International Recognition:**

- Served in various **government and non-government positions**, including:
  - **Member of Parliament** (Rajya Sabha)
  - Leading roles in **Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC)**
  - Associated with **Sevagram, Wardha, and Vinoba Bhave's Bhoodan Movement**
- Represented India in many **international peace conferences** and forums on **rural development**.

#### ◆ **Philosophy and Vision:**

- Believed that **true Swaraj** (self-rule) meant **village swaraj** — where every village is self-reliant in basic needs.
- Deeply spiritual, committed to **Sarvodaya** (welfare of all), a Gandhian vision for a just and inclusive society.

#### ◆ **Legacy:**

- Though not as widely known as some of his contemporaries, Dr. G. Ramachandran's influence on **rural development, basic education, and Gandhian thought in practice** is immense.
- His life's work is embedded in the ongoing work of Gandhigram and GRI.

Dr. G. Ramachandran and Acharya Vinoba Bhave shared a deep bond rooted in **Gandhian philosophy**, and they **collaborated significantly** during the **Bhoodan Movement** and in promoting **rural upliftment** and Sarvodaya.

## Collaborations between Dr. G. Ramachandran & Vinoba Bhave

### ◆ 1. Shared Vision: Sarvodaya

- Both were **devout followers of Gandhi** and believed in *Sarvodaya* — "the upliftment of all," especially the rural poor.
- They sought to make Gandhi's **constructive program** (like khadi, rural industries, village education, sanitation, etc.) a practical, scalable model.

### ◆ 2. Bhoodan Movement (Land Gift Movement)

#### 📖 Background:

- Started by **Vinoba Bhave in 1951**, the Bhoodan Movement aimed to **persuade landowners to donate land** to the landless.
- It was **non-violent**, voluntary, and moral in nature — appealing to conscience, not law.

#### 🤝 Dr. G. Ramachandran's Role:

- As a committed Gandhian and rural reformer, Ramachandran **actively supported the movement**:
  - **Organized Bhoodan marches** in Tamil Nadu and southern India.
  - Helped create **awareness among landowners and villagers** about the value of sharing land.
  - Provided **logistical and organizational support** through Gandhigram networks.
- His institutions — like the **Gandhigram Trust** and **Gandhigram Rural Institute** — also acted as **ideological and practical bases** for Bhoodan work.

### ◆ 3. Promotion of Gram Swaraj (Village Self-rule)

- Both believed that **true independence** was not just political but also **economic and moral**.
- They collaborated in advocating **Gram Swaraj** — decentralized, self-sufficient village republics.
- Gandhigram became a **model village** demonstrating what Gram Swaraj could look like in action.

### ◆ 4. Sarvodaya Conferences & Networking

- Ramachandran worked with Bhave to **organize and attend Sarvodaya Sammelans (conferences)**, where like-minded workers and reformers met to discuss rural transformation.
- These platforms became spaces for **non-political, social reform** based on Gandhian ideals.

### ◆ 5. Moral & Spiritual Alignment

- Their collaboration was not just administrative; they shared a **deep spiritual commitment** to service, non-violence, and simplicity.
- Ramachandran often referred to Bhave as a "**spiritual beacon**" and respected his ability to inspire mass moral action.

## Impact of Their Work Together

- Helped spread **non-violent social reform** in the post-Independence era, especially in **Southern India**.
- Inspired **hundreds of Gandhian workers** to settle in rural areas and serve villages.
- Created a **living example** of Gandhi's vision in practice — not just theory.

Here's how **Dr. G. Ramachandran** and **Jawaharlal Nehru** intersected—both symbolically and institutionally—in the post-Independence journey of India:

## Institutional Collaboration at Gandhigram

- **Inauguration of the Academic Block (1957)**  
The first major academic building of the **Gandhigram Rural Institute (GRI)**—founded by Dr. G. Ramachandran and Dr. T.S. Soundaram in 1956—was formally opened by **Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru** in December 1957.
- **Support for Rural Higher Education**  
GRI emerged as an experiment in rural higher education rooted in Gandhi's idea of **Nai Talim**, implemented under the guidance of Ramachandran. It blended practical skills with learning to serve rural communities.

## Philosophical Resonance

- **Bridging Visions: Gandhi, Tagore & Nehru**  
Contemporary commentary describes Dr. Ramachandran as weaving together the teachings of **Gandhi**, the spiritual ethos of **Tagore**, and the **dynamic humanism of Nehru**—highlighting his ability to align Gandhian values with modern nation-building ideals.

## Broader Context & Legacy

- **Government Recognition & Funding**  
From its inception, GRI was fully funded by the Government of India—a testament to the central administration's endorsement of Gandhian rural education efforts modelled by Ramachandran.

## Summary: Dr. G. Ramachandran & Nehru

Area	Details
<b>Institutional Support</b>	Nehru inaugurated GRI's first academic block in 1957.
<b>Shared Vision</b>	Ramachandran's approach fused Gandhian and Tagorean ideals with Nehruvian progressive humanism.
<b>Government Endorsement</b>	GRI received central funding, reflecting national-level support.

Here's what happened during **Martin Luther King Jr.** and **Coretta Scott King's** visit to **Gandhigram** (near Madurai) in **February 1959**:

### Visit at Gandhigram Rural Institute (February 20, 1959)

- The Kings were hosted at the **Gandhigram Rural Institute**, where they took part in a **Shanti Sena (Peace Army) rally** on the morning of February 20. After the concluding Friday prayer, **Dr. King delivered remarks**, followed by an **evening address** and a **cultural program** on campus.

### Personal Reflections in a Letter to G. Ramachandran

- On **May 19, 1959**, Dr. King wrote a heartfelt letter to **G. Ramachandran**, who as Secretary of the **Gandhi Smarak Nidhi**, had extended the initial invitation and helped coordinate the visit.
- In his letter, Dr. King expressed profound gratitude:
  - He praised Ramachandran's "**concise, and profound interpretations**" of Gandhi's teachings, saying they left "**an indelible imprint**" on his thinking.
  - He also shared that it was a "**great delight**" to spend time with Ramachandran's wife at Gandhigram.

Date	Event	Significance
<b>Feb 20, 1959</b>	Shanti Sena rally, prayer, King's speech, cultural program at GRI	Direct engagement with local Gandhian community and respectful exchange of ideas
<b>May 19, 1959</b>	Letter from King to G. Ramachandran	Deep personal and intellectual acknowledgment; King's appreciation for Gandhian pedagogy

Here is the full text of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s letter dated **May 19, 1959** addressed to Mr. G. Ramachandran of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi:

**May 19, 1959**  
Montgomery, Ala.

**Mr. G. Ramachandran**  
Gandhi Smarak Nidhi  
Rajghat  
New Delhi, INDIA

Dear Mr. Ramachandran:

Ever since returning from India, I have been intending to write you, but an extremely busy schedule has stood in the way of my intention. I came back to the office and found a flood of mail that had accumulated in my absence, plus several organizational matters that needed my attention.

Words are inadequate for me to express my appreciation to you personally, and the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi for making my trip to India such a meaningful one. I will long remember the fellowship we enjoyed together, and the whole experience will remain in my thoughts so long as the cords of memory shall lengthen. I only regret that circumstances made it necessary for

me to spend only one month in your great country, but I gain consolation in the fact that this does not have to be my last trip to India. I hope to return again when I can spend much more time.

I left India more convinced than ever before that the method of nonviolent resistance is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom and human dignity. In fact, there is no other lasting way. I have returned to America with a greater determination to achieve freedom for my people through nonviolent means. As a result of my visit to India, I believe that my understanding of nonviolence is greater and my commitment deeper. I have tried to get this message over America since I have returned to the country.

I might say to you that I was greatly impressed with your ability to interpret Gandhi. Out of the many people that I talked with in India, I left with the feeling that you had interpreted the life and teachings of Gandhi to us better than anybody else. Your clear, concise, and profound interpretations left an indelible imprint on my thinking. For this, I am deeply grateful to you.

You have my prayers and best wishes for continued success in the great work that you are doing through the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi. I was tremendously moved by the powerful, aggressive, and positive manner that the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi is going about to preserve the works and philosophy of the great saint. I will certainly want to keep in touch with you and your colleagues.

Please give my best regards to all of the fine people that it was my privilege to meet in India. I hope to get around to writing most of them personally very soon. Be sure to extend my best wishes to your charming and scholarly wife. It was a great delight to spend a few hours with her at Gandhigram. My wife, Coretta, and Dr. L. D. Reddick, join me in sending their best regards.

With warm personal regards, I am

Sincerely yours,

**Martin Luther King, Jr.**

This letter beautifully reflects Dr. King's deep admiration for the way Mr. Ramachandran interpreted Gandhi's teachings, as well as the profound impact that the Gandhigram visit had on his commitment to nonviolent resistance.

<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/g-ramachandran-0>

Here's an excerpt from **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s radio remarks**, broadcast from All-India Radio in March 1959, shortly after his visit to Gandhigram and the Shanti Sena rally:

**“Leaders in and out of government, organizations, particularly the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi and the Quaker Centre, and many homes and families have done their utmost to make our short stay both pleasant and instructive.... First we think that the spirit of Gandhi is much stronger today than some people believe.... Secondly, I wish to make a plea to the people and government of India.... It may be that, just as India had to take the lead and show the world that national independence could be achieved non-violently, so India may have to take the lead and call for universal disarmament... Any nation that would take such a brave step would automatically draw to itself the support of the**

**multitudes of the earth, so that any would-be aggressor would be discouraged from risking the wrath of mankind.”**

## **Context & Highlights**

- **Celebration of Gandhian Legacy:** Dr. King recognized the enduring strength and institutional safeguards of Gandhi’s vision, citing efforts by organizations like the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi to preserve the Mahatma’s legacy.
- **A Bold Call for Disarmament:** Inspired by discussions with Vinoba Bhave during his India visit, Dr. King urged India to lead the world in disarmament—aggressively yet peacefully setting a moral precedent for global peace. He noted that such a courageous act would likely rally "the multitudes of the earth" behind it.
- **Deepened Commitment to Nonviolence:** He reaffirmed that nonviolent resistance remains the most powerful tool for oppressed people seeking justice and dignity.

While the exact transcript of Dr. King's speech delivered at the **Shanti Sena rally** (during the morning or evening sessions at Gandhigram on February 20, 1959) isn’t readily available online, the **All-India Radio address offers meaningful insight** into how profoundly the visit influenced him—and hints at the themes likely echoed in his live remarks: nonviolence, Gandhi’s enduring impact, and the imperative of global peace.

Here’s a detailed overview of who accompanied and hosted **Martin Luther King Jr.** (and his wife, Coretta Scott King) during their 1959 visits to **Chennai (Madras), Madurai, and Gandhigram:**

## **King’s Traveling Companions**

- Dr. King was joined on this historic journey by:
  - **Coretta Scott King**, his wife
  - **Lawrence D. Reddick**, his biographer and colleague

## **Reception & Hosts in India**

### **In Delhi:**

- **Reception at Gandhi Smarak Nidhi:** Upon arrival, King was greeted and hosted by the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, led by **G. Ramachandran**, and by **Sucheta Kripalani**.
- He also had the honor of dinners and meetings with:
  - **Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru**
  - **Vice President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan**<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/india-trip>

### **Across India:**

- King and his team received exceptional hospitality and met with numerous dignitaries, including:
  - **The President and Vice President of India**
  - **Prime Minister Nehru**
  - **Governors, Chief Ministers**
  - **Members of Parliament**

- **Writers, professors, social reformers**
- And notably, **at least one saint** was among those who received him

## Visits to Chennai, Madurai & Gandhigram

While detailed records of every individual attending in Chennai and Madurai are not publicly documented, the general pattern included:

- **Gandhian leaders** and activists (arranged by G. Ramachandran via the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi)
- **Academic and civic figures**, especially in Madurai and Gandhigram
- **Local dignitaries** and representatives from rural institutions

In **Gandhigram**, for instance, **Dr. G. Ramachandran** played a key role in hosting Dr. King and arranging his Shanti Sena visit. Coretta Scott King also spent time with Ramachandran's wife there highlighted in Dr. King's heartfelt letter expressing gratitude for their hospitality.

## Summary Table

Location	Accompanying Hosts and Attendees
<b>Chennai (Madras)</b>	Likely greeted by local Gandhian social reformers and university representatives
<b>Madurai / Gandhigram</b>	Hosted prominently by Dr. G. Ramachandran and the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi; presence of regional activists and academicians
<b>National (Delhi, etc.)</b>	Prime Minister Nehru, Vice President Radhakrishnan, members of Parliament, governors, social reformers, and others across India

<https://www.mkgandhi.org/Associates%20&%20Disciples/pilgrimage-to-india-when-martin-luther-king-jr-followed-in-gandhis-footsteps.php>

During Martin Luther King Jr.'s visit to India in February–March 1959, he was accompanied by his wife, **Coretta Scott King**, and his biographer, **Dr. Lawrence D. Reddick**. Their itinerary was coordinated by the **Gandhi Smarak Nidhi (GSN)**, which invited King and facilitated his interactions with key figures across India.

## Visit to Madras (Chennai)

Dr. King arrived in Madras on **February 18, 1959**, and was warmly received by:

- **Sri Kumar Menon**, Additional District Commissioner to the Governor of Madras
- **Thomas W. Simons**, Consul General of the United States in Madras
- Other local officials and dignitaries

He delivered lectures at **Presidency College** and **Srinivasa Shastri Hall** in Mylapore, discussing the universality of Gandhi's teachings and their application in the American civil rights movement. His speeches drew large crowds and were widely covered by the media.

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/when-an-apostle-of-nonviolence-came-calling/article6870785.ece>



## Visit to Madurai and Gandhigram

Dr. King and his party travelled to **Madurai**, where they visited **Gandhigram Rural Institute**. At Gandhigram, they participated in a **Shanti Sena (Peace Army) rally** and attended a cultural program. Dr. King delivered remarks at the rally and gave an address at the Institute.

<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-speaks-shanti-sena-rally-gives-address-gandhigram-rural-institute>

During their time in Madurai, they were hosted by **Dr. G. Ramachandran** and **Dr. T.S. Soundaram**, founders of Gandhigram. Dr. King expressed his gratitude to Dr. Ramachandran in a letter dated **May 19, 1959**, praising his "concise, and profound interpretations" of Gandhi's teachings.

<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/my-trip-land-gandhi>

## Reception at Gandhi Smarak Nidhi

On **February 10, 1959**, Dr. King attended a farewell reception at the **Gandhi Smarak Nidhi** in New Delhi. He met with **Vice President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan** and **Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru** during his visit.

<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-attends-reception-gandhi-smarak-nidhi-meets-sarvepalli-radhakrishnan-and-jawaharlal-nehru>

## Dr. King's 1959 India Itinerary

- **February 3:** Departed from New York.
- **February 10:** Arrived in New Delhi.
- **February 12–13:** Visited Patna, meeting with Governor Zakir Hussain and Chief Minister Sri Krishna Sinha.
- **February 14:** Visited Bodh Gaya and an ashram founded by Vinoba Bhave.
- **February 15:** Travelled to Burdwan and then to Shantiniketan, the centre founded by Rabindranath Tagore.
- **February 16:** Arrived in Calcutta, holding a press conference and attending a meeting at the Calcutta Gandhi Smarak Nidhi.
- **February 18:** Arrived in Madras (now Chennai), delivering lectures at Presidency College and Srinivasa Shastri Hall.
- **February 20:** Visited Gandhigram Rural Institute, participating in a Shanti Sena rally and attending a cultural program.
- **February 24:** Arrived in Bangalore.
- **March 10:** Departed from New Delhi.

## India Trip

February 3, 1959 to March 18, 1959

From the early days of the [Montgomery bus boycott](#), Martin Luther King, Jr., referred to India's Mahatma [Gandhi](#) as "the guiding light of our technique of nonviolent social change" ([Papers 5:231](#)). Following the success of the boycott in 1956, King contemplated traveling to India to deepen his understanding of Gandhian principles. To King, "India is the land where the techniques of nonviolent social change were developed that my people have used in Montgomery, Alabama and elsewhere throughout the American South" (Press Conference 02.10).

That same year, Pandit Jawaharlal [Nehru](#), India's prime minister, made a short visit to the United States. Though unable to meet with King, Nehru inquired through diplomatic representatives concerning the possibility of King traveling to India in the future. King's other obligations intervened with his schedule each time he intended to travel: traveling to Ghana, finishing the memoir [Stride Toward Freedom](#), and addressing [Izola Ware Curry](#)'s attack in Harlem. As he slowly recovered from this last near-fatal encounter, King decided it was opportune to move forward with his India plans.

King secured funds for his trip to India from the Christopher Reynolds Foundation, the [Montgomery Improvement Association](#), the [Southern Christian Leadership Conference](#), and [Dexter Avenue Baptist Church](#). Co-sponsors of King's trip, the [American Friends Service Committee](#) and the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi (Gandhi National Memorial Fund), headed by Secretary G. [Ramachandran](#), arranged King's meetings with Indian officials and Gandhian activists.

On 3 February 1959, King, his wife Coretta Scott [King](#), and his MIA colleague Lawrence [Reddick](#), departed for a five-week tour in India. After minor weather delays, the King party finally arrived in New Delhi's Palam Airport on 10 February, welcomed by [G. Ramachandran](#) and Sucheta Kripalani of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi.

King told a group of reporters gathered at the airport, "To other countries I may go as a tourist, but to India I come as a pilgrim" ([Papers 5:126](#)). During his time in Delhi, King discussed his perspectives on [nonviolence](#) with various heads of state: prime minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and vice president Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. According to Coretta Scott King, he compared the sessions with the founders of independent India to "meeting George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison in a single day" (*My Life With Martin Luther King, Jr.*).

King shared reminiscences with Gandhi's close comrades, who openly praised him for his efforts in Montgomery, influencing nonviolent philosophies in global spheres of conflict. King's meetings with satyagrahis and his interactions with the Gandhi family reinforced his belief in the power of passive resistance and its potential usefulness throughout the world—even against totalitarian regimes. In discussion with students at New Delhi University, King talked about the true nature of nonviolent resistance, noting that "we are going through the most exciting and most momentous period of history" ([Papers 5:234](#)).

As King left the capital, he ventured onto Patna and Gaya, discussing decentralist ideologies with independence activist Jayaprakash Narayan and visiting Budh Gaya's historic Buddhist temple. After passing through Shantiniketan to Calcutta, King inquired the press about their perspectives on problems in India and the persistence of Gandhian influences in society. In a crowded student meeting, he emphasized coloured people's struggle for freedom and justice around the world. "We have come a long, long way," King said, "but we have a long, long way to go" (Bristol's Diary).

In Madras, he met Swami Vishwananda, an individual at the heart of the nonviolent movement to eradicate untouchability ideologies. Vishwananda, like many others, expressed his gratitude for King's visit and his fight for justice and equality. On February 20th, King arrived at Gandhigram and listened to scriptures from Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Buddhist sources. Unlike other major addresses, King's devotional message was translated for his audience.

After leaving Gandhigram, the Kings visited the Gramdan and Harijan villages, where he engaged in discussions of policy decisions and inspirational leadership of the highest order. In conversations, King joined in common Indian practices and witnessed how N.E.S Block Workers provided aid to villagers. Traveling to the southern tip of India, the Kings briefly journeyed to Cape Comorin near Trivandrum. He later accounted, "This is the point where the land of India ends and the vast and rolling waters of the ocean have their beginning. It is one of the most beautiful points in the world." By the time they flew to Bangalore on 24 February, Bristol had observed that "both the Kings (especially King himself) are JUST PLAIN EXHAUSTED and very understandable have been so for months before coming to India" (*Bristol's Diary*).

One of King's most memorable experiences was residing at Mani Bhaven, Gandhi's Bombay residence. He noted in the guestbook: "To have the opportunity of sleeping in the house where Gandhiji slept is really an experience I will never forget" ([Papers 5:134](#)). At a later meeting with African students in Bombay, King defended the use of nonviolence as a more effective tool of resistance. "They felt that non-violent resistance could only work in a situation where the resisters had a potential ally in the conscious of the opponent," King accounted. Instead, he discovered that "they, like many other students, tended to confuse passive resistance with non-resistance" ([Papers 5:234](#)).

King delivered one of his most moving speeches at the Bombay public meeting on the 27th, during which he challenged the assumption of "people being adjusted to their environment." Instead, Bristol recalled King speaking of "the suffering, the exploitation, the injustice, and the degradation of human beings" (*Bristol's Diary*). Calling upon the people to resist the social evils of their time, King moved the crowd with his words as the room buzzed with a sense of chemistry. On March 1, the Kings travelled to Ahmedabad, where they visited the Sabarmati ashram founded by Gandhi and where he began his 1930 Salt March to the sea. Vishwananda recalled that "the Kings had a great experience going round the hallowed place and meeting in prayer the six hundred" residents, many of whom were untouchables. On 3 March, King drove to Kishangarh, where they met with Vinoba Bhave, the leader of the Indian Bhoodan movement. King pressed Bhave about the limitations of nonviolence, to which he responded, "non-violence and its effective appeal to others require faith. Mere arguments and persuasion are not enough" ("Bristol to Johnson")

King finished off the last leg of his trip by returning to Delhi. On 9 March, he made a farewell address to reporters at the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, which later broadcasted on All India Radio. During the speech, King reflected "that the spirit of Gandhi is much stronger today than some people believe" (Farewell Statement).

Throughout King's travels, he began reflecting on the similarities and differences between India and the United States. He observed that although India was rife with poverty, overpopulation, and unemployment, the country nonetheless had a low crime rate and strong spiritual quality. Moreover, the bourgeoisie—whether white, black, or brown—had similar opportunities. Upon his return from India, King compared the discrimination of India's

untouchables with America's race problems, noting that India's leaders publicly endorsed integration laws. "This has not been done so largely in America," King wrote. He added, "Today no leader in India would dare to make a public endorsement of untouchability. However, in America, every day some leader endorses racial segregation" ([Papers 5:143](#)).

In India, King, Coretta, and Reddick received invitations to hundreds of engagements. "We received a most enthusiastic reception and the most generous hospitality imaginable, King would recall. "Almost every door was open so that our party was able to see some of India's most important social experiments and talk with leaders in and out of Government, ranging from Prime Minister Nehru to village councilmen and Vinoba Bhave, the sainted leader of the land reform movement" ([Papers 5:143](#)).

The coverage of the Montgomery bus boycott by Indian publications fostered King's popularity through the nation, welcoming supporters at every leg of the trip. "We were looked upon as brothers with the colour of our skins as something of an asset," King remembered. "But the strongest bond of fraternity was the common cause of minority and colonial peoples in America, Africa and Asia struggling to throw off racialism and imperialism" ([Papers 5:233](#)). The African American and Indian overlapping minority experiences drove conversations of racialism and imperialism. Shared philosophies of liberation sparked numerous conversations as King shared his views on the race question before numerous public meetings.

King's trip to India had a profound influence on his understanding of nonviolent resistance and his commitment to America's struggle for civil rights. In a radio address made during his final evening in India, King reflected: "Since being in India, I am more convinced than ever before that the method of nonviolent resistance is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for justice and human dignity. In a real sense, Mahatma Gandhi embodied in his life certain universal principles that are inherent in the moral structure of the universe, and these principles are as inescapable as the law of gravitation" ([Papers 5:136](#)).

## Footnotes

Account by Lawrence Dunbar Reddick of Press Conference in New Delhi on 10 February 1959, in [Papers 5:125–129](#).

James E. Bristol to Dorothy Bristol, 25 February 1959.

James E. Bristol to Corinne B. Johnson, 17 April 1959.

James E. Bristol's Tour Diary with Martin Luther King, Jr., February—March 1959

Introduction, in [Papers 5:4–7](#).

King, Farewell Statement for All India Radio, 9 March 1959, in [Papers 5:135–136](#).

King, "My Trip to the Land of Gandhi," July 1959, in [Papers 5:231–238](#).

King, Statement Upon Return from India, 18 March 1959, in [Papers 5:142–143](#).

(Scott) King, *My Life with Martin Luther, Jr.*, 1969.

Vishwananda, "I Go Round with the Kings," p. 7.

Source: [kinginstitute.stanford.edu/india-trip](http://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/india-trip)

## "My Trip to the Land of Gandhi"

**Author:** King, Martin Luther, Jr.

**Date:** July 1, 1959 to July 31, 1959

**Location:** Chicago, Ill.

*In his account of his India tour published in Ebony magazine, King notes that Gandhi's spirit is still alive, though "some of his disciples have misgivings about this when . . . they look around and find nobody today who comes near the stature of the Mahatma."<sup>1</sup> Lamenting India's pervasive economic inequalities, King observes that "the bourgeoisie—white, black or brown—behaves about the same the world over," and he calls upon the West to aid India's development "in a spirit of international brotherhood, not national selfishness."*

For a long time, I had wanted to take a trip to India. Even as a child the entire Orient held a strange fascination for me—the elephants, the tigers, the temples, the snake charmers and all the other storybook characters.

While the Montgomery boycott was going on, India's Gandhi was the guiding light of our technique of non-violent social change. We spoke of him often. So as soon as our victory over bus segregation was won, some of my friends said: "Why don't you go to India and see for yourself what the Mahatma, whom you so admire, has wrought."

In 1956 when Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, India's Prime Minister, made a short visit to the United States, he was gracious enough to say that he wished that he and I had met and had his diplomatic representatives make inquiries as to the possibility of my visiting his country sometime soon. Our former American ambassador to India, Chester Bowles, wrote me along the same lines.<sup>2</sup>

But every time that I was about to make the trip, something would interfere. At one time it was my visit by prior commitment to Ghana.<sup>3</sup> At another time my publishers were pressing me to finish writing *Stride Toward Freedom*. Then along came Mrs. Izola Ware Curry. When she struck me with that Japanese letter opener on that Saturday afternoon in September as I sat autographing books in a Harlem store, she not only knocked out the travel plans that I had but almost everything else as well.

After I recovered from this near-fatal encounter and was finally released by my doctors, it occurred to me that it might be better to get in the trip to India before plunging too deeply once again into the sea of the Southern segregation struggle.

I preferred not to take this long trip alone and asked my wife and my friend, Lawrence Reddick, to accompany me. Coretta was particularly interested in the women of India and Dr. Reddick in the history and government of that great country. He had written my biography, *Crusader Without Violence*, and said that my true test would come when the people who knew Gandhi looked me over and passed judgment upon me and the Montgomery movement.

The three of us made up a sort of 3-headed team with six eyes and six ears for looking and listening.

The Christopher Reynolds Foundation made a grant through the American Friends Service Committee to cover most of the expenses of the trip and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Montgomery Improvement Association added their support.<sup>4</sup> The Gandhi Memorial Trust of India extended an official invitation, through diplomatic channels, for our visit.<sup>5</sup>

And so, on February 3, 1959, just before midnight, we left New York by plane. En route we stopped in Paris with Richard Wright, an old friend of Reddick's, who brought us up to date on European attitudes on the Negro question and gave us a taste of the best French cooking.<sup>6</sup>

We missed our plane connection in Switzerland because of fog, arriving in India after a roundabout route, two days late. But from the time we came down out of the clouds at Bombay on February 10, until March 10, when we waved goodbye at the New Delhi airport, we had one of the most concentrated and eye-opening experiences of our lives. There is so much to tell that I can only touch upon a few of the high points.

At the outset, let me say that we had a grand reception in India. The people showered upon us the most generous hospitality imaginable. We were graciously received by the Prime Minister, the President and the Vice-President of the nation; members of Parliament, Governors and Chief Ministers of various Indian states; writers, professors, social reformers and at least one saint.<sup>7</sup> Since our pictures were in the newspapers very often it was not unusual for us to be recognized by crowds in public places and on public conveyances.<sup>8</sup> Occasionally I would take a morning walk in the large cities, and out of the most unexpected places someone would emerge and ask: "Are you Martin Luther King?"

Virtually every door was open to us. We had hundreds of invitations that the limited time did not allow us to accept. We were looked upon as brothers with the colour of our skins as something of an asset. But the strongest bond of fraternity was the common cause of minority and colonial peoples in America, Africa and Asia struggling to throw off racialism and imperialism.

We had the opportunity to share our views with thousands of Indian people through endless conversations and numerous discussion sessions. I spoke before university groups and public meetings all over India. Because of the keen interest that the Indian people have in the race problem these meetings were usually packed. Occasionally interpreters were used, but on the whole I spoke to audiences that understood English.

The Indian people love to listen to the Negro spirituals. Therefore, Coretta ended up singing as much as I lectured. We discovered that autograph seekers are not confined to America. After appearances in public meetings and while visiting villages we were often besieged for autographs. Even while riding planes, more than once pilots came into the cabin from the cockpit requesting our signatures.

We got a good press throughout our stay. Thanks to the Indian papers, the Montgomery bus boycott was already well known in that country. Indian publications perhaps gave a better continuity of our 381-day bus strike than did most of our papers in the United States. Occasionally I meet some American fellow citizen who even now asks me how the bus



boycott is going, apparently never having read that our great day of bus integration, December 21, 1956, closed that chapter of our history.

We held press conferences in all of the larger cities—Delhi, Calcutta, Madras and Bombay—and talked with newspaper men almost everywhere we went. They asked sharp questions and at times appeared to be hostile but that was just their way of bringing out the story that they were after. As reporters, they were scrupulously fair with us and in their editorials showed an amazing grasp of what was going on in America and other parts of the world.

The trip had a great impact upon me personally. It was wonderful to be in Gandhi's land, to talk with his son, his grandsons, his cousin and other relatives; to share the reminiscences of his close comrades; to visit his ashrama, to see the countless memorials for him and finally to lay a wreath on his entombed ashes at Rajghat.<sup>9</sup> I left India more convinced than ever before that non-violent resistance is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom.<sup>10</sup> It was a marvellous thing to see the amazing results of a non-violent campaign. The aftermath of hatred and bitterness that usually follows a violent campaign was found nowhere in India. Today a mutual friendship based on complete equality exists between the Indian and British people within the commonwealth. The way of acquiescence leads to moral and spiritual suicide. The way of violence leads to bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers. But, the way of non-violence leads to redemption and the creation of the beloved community.

The spirit of Gandhi is very much alive in India today. Some of his disciples have misgivings about this when they remember the drama of the fight for national independence and when they look around and find nobody today who comes near the stature of the Mahatma. But any objective observer must report that Gandhi is not only the greatest figure in India's history but that his influence is felt in almost every aspect of life and public policy today.

India can never forget Gandhi. For example, the Gandhi Memorial Trust (also known as the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi) collected some \$130 million soon after the death of "the father of the nation." This was perhaps the largest, spontaneous, mass monetary contribution to the memory of a single individual in the history of the world. This fund, along with support from the Government and other institutions, is resulting in the spread and development of Gandhian philosophy, the implementing of his constructive program, the erection of libraries and the publication of works by and about the life and times of Gandhi. Posterity could not escape him even if it tried. By all standards of measurement, he is one of the half dozen greatest men in world history.

I was delighted that the Gandhians accepted us with open arms. They praised our experiment with the non-violent resistance technique at Montgomery. They seem to look upon it as an outstanding example of the possibilities of its use in western civilization. To them as to me it also suggests that non-violent resistance *when planned and positive in action* can work effectively even under totalitarian regimes.

We argued this point at some length with the groups of African students who are today studying in India.<sup>11</sup> They felt that non-violent resistance could only work in a situation where the resisters had a potential ally in the conscience of the opponent. We soon discovered that they, like many others, tended to confuse passive resistance with non-resistance. This is completely wrong. True non-violent resistance is not unrealistic submission to evil power. It is rather a courageous confrontation of evil by the power of love, in the faith that it is better to be the recipient of violence than the inflictor of it, since the latter only multiplies the existence

of violence and bitterness in the universe, while the former may develop a sense of shame in the opponent, and thereby bring about a transformation and change of heart.

Non-violent resistance does call for love, but it is not a sentimental love. It is a very stern love that would organize itself into collective action to right a wrong by taking on itself suffering. While I understand the reasons why oppressed people often turn to violence in their struggle for freedom, it is my firm belief that the crusade for independence and human dignity that is now reaching a climax in Africa will have a more positive effect on the world, if it is waged along the lines that were first demonstrated in that continent by Gandhi himself.<sup>12</sup>

India is a vast country with vast problems. We flew over the long stretches, from North to South, East to West; took trains for shorter jumps and used automobiles and jeeps to get us into the less accessible places.

India is about a third the size of the United States but has almost three times as many people. Everywhere we went we saw crowded humanity—on the roads, in the city streets and squares, even in the villages.<sup>13</sup>

Most of the people are poor and poorly dressed. The average income per person is less than \$70 per year. Nevertheless, their turbans for their heads, loose flowing, wrap-around *dhotis* that they wear instead of trousers and the flowing saris that the women wear instead of dresses are colourful and picturesque. Many Indians wear part native and part western dress.

We think that we in the United States have a big housing problem but in the city of Bombay, for example, over a half million people sleep out of doors every night. These are mostly unattached, unemployed or partially employed males. They carry their bedding with them like foot soldiers and unroll it each night in any unoccupied space they can find—on the sidewalk, in a railroad station or at the entrance of a shop that is closed for the evening.

The food shortage is so widespread that it is estimated that less than 30% of the people get what we would call three square meals a day. During our great depression of the 1930's, we spoke of "a third of a nation" being "ill-housed, ill clad and ill fed." For India today, simply change one third to two thirds in that statement and that would make it about right.

As great as is unemployment, under-employment is even greater. Seventy per cent of the Indian people are classified as agricultural workers and most of these do less than 200 days of farm labour per year because of the seasonal fluctuations and other uncertainties of mother nature. Jobless men roam the city streets.

Great ills flow from the poverty of India but strangely there is relatively little crime. Here is another concrete manifestation of the wonderful spiritual quality of the Indian people. They are poor, jammed together and half-starved but they do not take it out on each other. They are a kindly people. They do not abuse each other—verbally or physically—as readily as we do. We saw but one fist fight in India during our stay.<sup>14</sup>

In contrast to the poverty-stricken, there are Indians who are rich, have luxurious homes, landed estates, fine clothes and show evidence of over-eating. The bourgeoisie—white, black or brown—behaves about the same the world over.



And then there is, even here, the problem of segregation. We call it race in America; they call it caste in India. In both places it means that some are considered inferior, treated as though they deserve less.

We were surprised and delighted to see that India has made greater progress in the fight against caste "untouchability" than we have made here in our own country against race segregation. Both nations have federal laws against discrimination (acknowledging, of course, that the decision of our Supreme Court is the law of our land). But after this has been said, we must recognize that there are great differences between what India has done and what we have done on a problem that is very similar. The leaders of India have placed their moral power behind their law. From the Prime Minister down to the village councilmen, everybody declares publicly that untouchability is wrong. But in the United States some of our highest officials decline to render a moral judgment on segregation and some from the South publicly boast of their determination to maintain segregation. This would be unthinkable in India.

Moreover, Gandhi not only spoke against the caste system, but he acted against it. He took "untouchables" by the hand and led them into the temples from which they had been excluded. To equal that, President Eisenhower would take a Negro child by the hand and lead her into Central High School in Little Rock.

Gandhi also renamed the untouchables, calling them "Harijans" which means "children of God."

The government has thrown its full weight behind the program of giving the Harijans an equal chance in society—especially when it comes to job opportunities, education and housing.

India's leaders, in and out of government, are conscious of their country's other great problems and are heroically grappling with them. The country seems to be divided. Some say that India should become westernized and modernized as quickly as possible so that she might raise her standards of living. Foreign capital and foreign industry should be invited in, for in this lies the salvation of the almost desperate situation.

On the other hand, there are others—perhaps the majority—who say that westernization will bring with it the evils of materialism, cut throat competition and rugged individualism; that India will lose her soul if she takes to chasing Yankee dollars; and that the big machine will only raise the living standards of the comparative few workers who get jobs but that the greater number of people will be displaced and will thus be worse off than they are now.

Prime Minister Nehru, who is at once an intellectual and a man charged with the practical responsibility of heading the government, seems to steer a middle course between these extreme attitudes. In our talk with him he indicated that he felt that some industrialization was absolutely necessary; that there were some things that only big or heavy industry could do for the country but that if the state keeps a watchful eye on the developments, most of the pitfalls may be avoided.

At the same time, Mr. Nehru gives support to the movement that would encourage and expand the handicraft arts such as spinning and weaving in home and village and thus leaving as much economic self-help and autonomy as possible to the local community.

There is a great movement in India that is almost unknown in America. At its centre is the campaign for land reform known as Bhoodan. It would solve India's great economic and

social change by consent, not by force. The Bhoodanists are led by the sainted Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan, a highly sensitive intellectual, who was trained in American colleges.<sup>15</sup> Their ideal is the self-sufficient village. Their program envisions

1. *Persuading* large landowners to give up some of their holding to landless peasants;
2. *Persuading* small landowners to give up their individual ownership for common cooperative ownership by the villages;
3. *Encouraging* farmers and villagers to spin and weave the cloth for their own clothes during their spare time from their agricultural pursuits.

Since these measures would answer the questions of employment, food and clothing, the village could then, through cooperative action, make just about everything that it would need or get it through barter or exchange from other villages. Accordingly, each village would be virtually self-sufficient and would thus free itself from the domination of the urban centres that are today like evil loadstones drawing the people away from the rural areas, concentrating them in city slums and debauching them with urban vices. At least this is the argument of the Bhoodanists and other Gandhians.

Such ideas sound strange and archaic to Western ears. However, the Indians have already achieved greater results than we Americans would ever expect. For example, millions of acres of land have been given up by rich landlords and additional millions of acres have been given up to cooperative management by small farmers. On the other hand, the Bhoodanists shrink from giving their movement the organization and drive that we in America would venture to guess that it must have in order to keep pace with the magnitude of the problems that everybody is trying to solve.

Even the government's five-year plans fall short in that they do not appear to be of sufficient scope to embrace their objectives. Thus, the three five-year plans were designed to provide 25,000,000 new jobs over a 15-year period, but the birth rate of India is 6,000,000 per year. This means that in 15 years there will be 9,000,000 more people (less those who have died or retired) looking for the 15 million new jobs<sup>16</sup>. In other words, if the planning were 100 per cent successful, it could not keep pace with the growth of problems it is trying to solve.

As for what should be done, we surely do not have the answer. But we do feel certain that India needs help. She must have outside capital and technical know-how. It is in the interest of the United States and the West to help supply these needs and *not attach strings to the gifts*.

Whatever we do should be done in a spirit of international brotherhood, not national selfishness. It should be done not merely because it is diplomatically expedient, but because it is morally compelling. At the same time, it will rebound to the credit of the West if India is able to maintain her democracy while solving her problems.<sup>17</sup>

It would be a boon to democracy if one of the great nations of the world, with almost 400,000,000 people, proves that it is possible to provide a good living for everyone without surrendering to a dictatorship of either the "right" or "left." Today India is a tremendous force for peace and non-violence, at home and abroad. It is a land where the idealist and the intellectual are yet respected. We should want to help India preserve her soul and thus help to save our own.

<sup>15</sup> Four weeks after returning from India, King prepared a draft of this article (Draft, "My trip to India," April 1959; see also Maude L. Ballou to Lerone Bennett, 17 April 1959). Nine

photographs accompanied it, including pictures of King meeting Prime Minister Nehru and the Kings and traveling companion Lawrence Reddick placing a wreath at the site of Gandhi's cremation.

<sup>2</sup> Bowles to King, 28 January 1957; see also Homer Alexander Jack to King, 27 December 1956, in *Papers* 3:496, 498.

<sup>3</sup> In March 1957 King attended the Ghanaian independence celebrations. For more on King's trip to Ghana, see Introduction in *Papers* 4:7-9.

<sup>4</sup> The Reynolds Foundation provided \$4,000 for the trip, SCLC provided an additional \$500, and the MIA and Dexter Avenue Baptist Church presented the Kings with a money tree at a "bon voyage" celebration in their honour on 26 January (AFSC, "Budget: leadership intervisitation, visit to India by Martin Luther and Coretta King," February-March 1959, and "The Kings Leave Country," *Dexter Echo*, 11 February 1959).

<sup>5</sup> See G. Ramachandran to King, 27 December 1958, in *Papers* 4:552-553.

<sup>6</sup> Wright, an African American novelist, had lived in Paris since 1947. In a draft of this article, King had crossed out the reference to Wright. For more on King's visit with Wright, see Introduction, p. 4 in this volume.

<sup>7</sup> Among those King met were Nehru, President Rajendra Prasad, Vice President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, and member of Parliament Sucheta Kripalani. King also refers to Gandhi's disciple Vinoba Bhave.

<sup>8</sup> King's draft phrased this differently: "Our pictures were in the newspapers very often and we were recognized by crowds at the circus and by pilots on the planes." The draft did not include the subsequent sentence or the following two paragraphs.

<sup>9</sup> See King to Ramdas M. Gandhi, 8 August 1959, pp. 255-256 in this volume.

<sup>10</sup> This sentence and the remainder of the paragraph were not included in King's draft.

<sup>11</sup> King's draft added the following sentence: "They, like many others, seem to feel that nonviolent resistance means non-resistance, do nothing." The remainder of the paragraph and the following paragraph were not included in the draft.

<sup>12</sup> King's draft included the following paragraph: "We also learned a lot from the India journalists. Our practice was to divide the time of our press conferences between questions they asked us and questions we asked them."

<sup>13</sup> King's draft added the following: "The people have a way of squatting, resting comfortably (it seemed) on their haunches. Many of the homes do not have chairs and most of the cities have very few park or street benches."

<sup>14</sup> In King's draft, he had stricken the following two paragraphs: "There is great consideration for human life but little regard for labour and time. We saw men mending shoes almost without tools. Five persons may be sent to bring down a package that one could carry. Human muscles there do many jobs that our machines do here. Moreover, nobody seems to be in a

hurry, and it is surprising when arrangements and appointments come off according to schedule.

Young boys accost you everywhere, persistently offering to supply you with just about anything your heart could desire, and your pocketbook can pay for. Begging is widespread though the government has done much to discourage it. But what can you do when an old haggard woman or a little crippled urchin comes up and motions to you that she is hungry?"

<sup>15</sup> For King's 1959 interview with Vinoba Bhave, see Vinoba, "Dr. Martin Luther King with Vinoba, *Bhoodan* 3 (18 March 1959): 369-370; see also King to Narayan, 19 May 1959, pp. 209-211 in this volume.

<sup>16</sup> King's draft indicated that ninety million more people would be looking for work.

<sup>17</sup> In his draft, King marked the following sentence for deletion: "Her people are remarkably patient but many of them are looking toward their neighbour to the North and noting that China under the discipline of communism seems to be moving ahead more rapidly than India."

**Source:** *Ebony*, July 1959, pp. 84-92.

Source: [kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/my-trip-land-gandhi](http://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/my-trip-land-gandhi)