

The world on Gandhi's reading list

M.K. Gandhi was the most prolific on M.K. Gandhi. The *Collected Works* of Mahatma Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, the Mahatma's letters, journals and essays are all well indexed. Then there is also a profusion of books on him, by both admirers and detractors. Yet, historian Ramachandra Guha managed to find a bit more about the making of the Mahatma, which he writes about in *Gandhi Before India*. Gandhi's years in London and South Africa, the two decades prior to his India phase, are when all his core ideas on interfaith harmony, ending caste discrimination, and philosophy of non-violence took shape, says Guha. The man from Kathiawar, who hadn't met many outsiders in his native place, suddenly found himself in an interracial household sharing space with associates of many faiths in South Africa. Guha writes about a couple, the husband Jewish and the wife Christian, who lived with the Gandhis in Johannesburg in 1905. They all influenced one another. He writes: "In Kathiawar itself Mohandas Gandhi could never have met or befriended these men, who became, as it were, unwitting agents of a transformative process whereby he moved from orthodoxy to heterodoxy in religion, from lawyering to activism in professional life."

That Gandhi was curious about other people's lives is evident from the books he himself appended for further reading in *Hind Swaraj*. He writes in his note to the reader: "I would like to say to the diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth, I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things."

Some of those new ideas were picked up from books. On the reading list at the end of *Hind Swaraj* is Leo Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, which rejects all sorts of violence including those sanctioned by the state or the Church, and espouses the need for simple living. Two other Tolstoy books are recommended: *What is Art?* and *The Slavery of Our Times*. Some of Gandhi's views may have been influenced by the works of American philosopher Henry David Thoreau, particularly his 1849 essay 'Civil Disobedience'. Thoreau's *Life Without Principle* cried foul against the excessive devotion to business and money, for "in merely making a living, the meaning of life gets lost." Thoreau, who was once asked why he was eternally curious about things, responded, "What else is there in life?" Wasn't Gandhi too always questioning, always curious?

The new U.S. Fed Chairman is unlikely to opt for policies that might upset the President's plan

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