

'Re-editing' Gandhi's Collected Works

The exercise to 're-edit' the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi is non-transparent and flawed, and displays an inefficiency and callousness that makes the revised publication incapable of being a standard reference. The new edition should be scrapped, and the original collected works reinstated as the only and most authentic version of the writings and utterances of Gandhi.

TRIDIP SUHRUD

Gandhiji had a unique capability of attracting men and women of great talent and commitment towards him and his cause. Maganlal Gandhi, Henry Polak, Herman Kallenbach, Imam Saheb Abdul Kadar Bavazir, Mahadev Desai, Pyarelal, Swami Anand, Vinoba, Kakasaheb Kalelkar, Kishorlal Mashruwala, Narhari Parikh, Miraben and many others like them were men and women of exceptional virtues. They were thinkers and servants of the people. Gandhiji was fortunate during his lifetime, and even after his assassination there were individuals and institutions ready to commit themselves to the preservation and propagation of his legacy.

It was a similar impulse that guided the project to compile all of Gandhiji's writings and make them available to readers. The project, which was conceptualised in February 1956, came to be known as the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (CWMG). The government of India decided to create an advisory board and vested all control and direction of the project in the board. Morarji Desai was the chairman of the board. At various points several individuals worked as members of the board. These included Kakasaheb Kalelkar, Devdas Gandhi, Pyarelal, Maganbhai Desai, G Ramachandran, Shriman Narian, Jivanji P Desai, P M Lad, R R Diwakar, Ramdhari Sinha 'Dinkar' and Shantilal Shah. From 1956 to 1959, Bhartan Kumarappa and Jairamdas Doulatram worked as the chief editor of the project. In February 1960, K Swaminathan – a man who was equally comfortable with the European literary and philosophical tradition, Sanskrit poetics and Tamil literature as well as the ashram of Ramana Maharshi – was appointed chief editor. He continued to work on the CWMG project till his eyesight

began to fail him in his early nineties. A project that was conceived in 1956 was closed in 1994 with the publication of the 100th volume. Men such as U R Rao, R K Prabhu and C N Patel assisted Swaminathan.

The task before the CWMG editorial team was not easy. Gandhiji's writings were spread over three countries – South Africa, India and England. They were in government files, in offices of newspapers, with thousands of individuals who corresponded with him and in the diaries of his companions like Mahadev Desai. Gandhiji wrote mainly in three languages, English, Gujarati and Hindi. The CWMG team decided to bring out these volumes at least in these three languages. The work on the Gujarati version, called *Gandhiji No Akshardeh*, was entrusted to the Navajivan Trust, and the publications division of the ministry of information and broad casting, was responsible for the English and Hindi versions. Each document had to be verified and authenticated. Gandhiji's associates, H S L Polak and Chhaganlal Gandhi were called in to verify and authenticate South African papers. The government, like other institutions, participated in the process of acquiring new material. The government, for example, acquired a substantial part of the Gandhiji-Herman Kallenbach correspondence at an auction in South Africa in the early 1990s. They tell a story of an abiding friendship.

The editors and the advisory board decided on three guiding principles: (a) the aim of the series would be to reproduce Gandhiji's actual words, (b) reports of his speeches, interviews and conversation in indirect speech would be included when they were proved to be authentic beyond doubt, and (c) later research was likely to lead to the discovery of more material – the Gandhi-Kallenbach correspondence –

and all such new material would be published as supplementary volumes. Of the 100 volumes, 1-90 reproduced Gandhiji's writings, speeches, letters, interviews, and notes in chronological order; volumes 91-97 were the so-called supplementary volumes which dealt with material that had become available later, while volumes 98-100 contained index of subjects, index of persons and a volume containing prefaces to the set. The CWMG has long since come to be recognised as one of the finest examples of editorial and translation work undertaken anywhere in the world. At least two generations of Gandhi scholars have expressed their deep indebtedness to these self-effacing men. Except for a fine biographical sketch by Ramachandra Guha it is very difficult to find any recent assessment of K Swaminathan, of C N Patel, there is nothing of consequence to be found in English. But the CWMG endured.

Until recently, that is. In 1998, the publications division decided to 're-edit' the CWMG. The exercise was aimed at bringing uniformity, strict chronology and authenticity. Uniformity meant that all volumes ought to be of the same size – of 500 pages each! Chronology required that all the material of the supplementary volumes be incorporated at its appropriate chronological order. The publisher's note in the revised edition of 2001 has this to say about authenticity: "The objective of the series is to reproduce Gandhiji's actual words as far as possible; reports of his speeches, interviews, conversations *which did not seem to be authentic have been avoided, as also reports of his statements in indirect form*" (emphasis added). The exercise thus involved a process of re-authentication and therefore subsequent deletion of material 'which did not seem authentic'. It also involved a process of realigning the material from supplementary volumes. The exercise, which began in 1998, resulted in the publication of a revised edition of 100 volumes of CWMG, in English and Hindi. A CD-ROM version was also published.

The entire exercise is deeply flawed. We are not informed who the chief editor of this set is, the editorial team and advisory board remains a mystery. What, if any, were the measures adopted to ascertain the authenticity of material that has been omitted? We are not even given a listing of the material that has been thus found inauthentic and deleted.

Table: List of Missing Items

Number	Vol No (old)	Vol No (revised)	Sr No As Per Old Vols	Date	Description
1	97	10	2	1909	Letter to Chhaganlal Gandhi
2	97	26	addenda 3	March 17, 1922	Letter to Mazharul Haq
3	97	26	45	March 18, 1922	Letter to Prabhudas Gandhi
4	97	26	46	April 2, 1923	Letter to Kashi Gandhi
5	97	26	47	April 8, 1923	Letter to Narandas Gandhi
6	97	56	209	August, 28, 1932	Letter to Nirmala Gandhi
7	97	80	330	April 22, 1941	Letter to Prabhudas Gandhi
8	97	80	331	May 23, 1941	Letter to Prabhudas Gandhi
9	91	21	addenda 14	November 18, 1920	Letter to Narhari D Parikh
10	91	21	addenda 15	November 18, 1920	Letter to Anasuyaben Sarabhai
11	91	22	addenda 16	February 26, 1921	Letter to Anasuyaben Sarabhai
12	91	27	addenda 21	April 8, 1924	Letter to Manilal Doctor
13	91	30	addenda 23	February 21, 1925	Letter to Rameshwardas Birla
14	91	32	addenda 25	August 14, 1925	Letter to G D Birla
15	91	36	addenda 29	After October 10, 1926	A Talk
16	91	37	addenda 30	1926	Letter to Haribhau Upadhyaya
17	91	38	addenda 31	January 24, 1927	Letter to Mridula Sarabhai
18	91	42	addenda 38	Before August 1, 1928	A Letter
19	91	6	50	On or after February 25, 1907	Letter to Chhaganlal Gandhi
20	91	6	51	February 10, 1907	Letter to Chhaganlal Gandhi
21	91	6	52	February 20, 1907	Letter to P S to Governor, Transvaal
22	91	6	53	March 1, 1907	Letter to Chhaganlal Gandhi
23	91	19	230	March 23, 1920	Telegram to Mathurdas Trikumji
24	91	23	269	Before June 30, 1921	Letter to Kunvarji Anandaji Kapadia
25	91	26	306	March 6, 1922	Letter to S A Brelvi
26	91	26	308	After March 21, 1922	Letter to Baba Lakshmandas
27	91	26	309	Before August 24, 1923	A Note
28	91	27	310	February 28, 1924	Message to Romain Rolland
29	91	27	311	March 4, 1924	Letter to C Vijayaraghavachariar
30	91	27	312	March 12, 1924	Telegram to Jawaharlal Nehru
31	91	27	313	On or after March 13, 1924	Letter to Ramdas Gandhi
32	91	27	314	March 17, 1924	Letter to Ramdas Gandhi
33	91	27	315	March 24, 1924	Letter to Mahadev Desai
34	91	27	316	March 25, 1924	Letter to Radha Gandhi
35	91	38	554	January 23, 1927	Letter to Ramkrishna Chandiwala
36	91	38	555	January 24, 1927	Letter to Anasuyaben Sarabhai
37	91	38	556	January 31, 1927	Letter to Anasuyaben Sarabhai
38	91	38	557	February 3, 1927	Letter to Motiram Shaukiram Adwani
39	91	38	558	February 6, 1927	Letter to Motilal Roy
40	91	38	559	February 7, 1927	Message to International Congress against imperialism
41	91	40	614	After November 25, 1927	Letter to Anasuyaben Sarabhai
42	93	74	332	October 10, 1938	Letter to Mathurdas Trikumji
43	93	74	333	October 13, 1938	Letter to Pyarelal
44	93	74	374	January 21, 1939	Letter to Mathurdas Trikumji
45	95	26	43	March 5, 1922	Letter to the Editor, <i>The Survey</i> , New York
46	95	26	44	December 1922	A Letter (Presumably to Madan Mohan Malaviya)
47	95	27	45	March 31, 1924	A Silence Day Note
48	95	27	46	Before April 3, 1924	Letter to Anasuyaben Sarabhai
49	95	32	53	August 21, 1925	Letter to C Ramalinga Reddy
50	95	32	54	On or before August 31, 1925	Letter to Haribhau Upadhyaya
51	95	32	55	After September 23, 1925	Fragment of a letter
52	95	35	63	May 12, 1926	Letter to Amy Jacques Garvey
53	95	38	70	Before January 10, 1927	Letter to Vasumati Pandit
54	95	38	71	January 10, 1927	Letter to Vasumati Pandit
55	95	38	72	After February 2, 1927	Letter to Vasumati Pandit
56	95	38	73	After February 2, 1927	Letter to Vasumati Pandit
57	95	43	90	December 18, 1928	Letter to Benarsidas Chaturvedi
58	95	45	94	March 23, 1929	Letter to Prabhavati
59	95	80	154	May 14, 1941	Letter to Venkataswami Naidu
60	95	84	163	August 27, 1944	Telegram to M A Jinnah
61	96	4	1	July 3, 1905	Letter to Millie Graham Polak
62	96	9	2	September 19, 1908	Letter to Herman Kallenbach
63	96	9	3	February 9, 1909	Letter to Herman Kallenbach
64	96	9	4	April 5, 1909	Letter to Herman Kallenbach
65	96	9	5	June 19, 1909	Draft Will and Testament
66	96	9	6	June 21, 1909	Letter to Herman Kallenbach
67	96	9	7	June 22, 1909	Letter to Herman Kallenbach
68	96	9	8	June 23, 1909	Letter to Herman Kallenbach
69	96	9	9	July 3, 1909	A Letter

(Contd)

Table: List of Missing Items (Contd)

Number	Vol No (old)	Vol No (revised)	Sr No As		Description
			Per Old Vols	Date	
70	96	9	10	July 3, 1909	Letter to Herman Kallenbach
71	96	9	11	July 7, 1909	Letter to Herman Kallenbach
72	96	9	12	July 17, 1909	Letter to Herman Kallenbach
73	96	9	13	July 21, 1909	Letter to Herman Kallenbach
74	96	9	14	July 30, 1909	Letter to Herman Kallenbach
75	96	10	15	August 7, 1909	Letter to Herman Kallenbach
76	96	10	16	August 12, 1909	Letter to Herman Kallenbach
77	96	10	17	August 20, 1909	Letter to Herman Kallenbach
78	96	10	18	August 28, 1909	Letter to Herman Kallenbach
79	96	10	19	August 30, 1909	Letter to Herman Kallenbach
80	96	10	20	September 10, 1909	Letter to Herman Kallenbach
81	96	10	21	September 17, 1909	Letter to Herman Kallenbach
82	96	10	22	September 24, 1909	Letter to Herman Kallenbach
83	97	10	23	October 1, 1909	Letter to Herman Kallenbach
84	97	10	24	October 27, 1909	Letter to Herman Kallenbach
85	97	10	25	November 14, 1909	Letter to Millie Graham Polak
86	97	10	26	November 15, 1909	Letter to H S L Polak
87	97	22	286	January 22, 1921	Letter to H S L Polak
88	97	23	287	April 10, 1921	Letter to Herman Kallenbach
89	97	24	290	September 29, 1921	Letter to Herman Kallenbach
90	97	72	311	December 28, 1937	Telegram to Herman Kallenbach
91	97	74	319	January 20, 1939	Letter to Herman Kallenbach
92	97	75	320	February 5, 1939	Letter to H S L Polak
93	97	75	321	March 2, 1939	Telegram to Amrit Kaur
94	97	75	322	March 8, 1939	Letter to Herman Kallenbach
95	97	75	323	March/April 1939	Notes to Herman Kallenbach
96	97	75	324	March/ April 1939	Note to Herman Kallenbach
97	97	81	327	August 30, 1941	Letter to H S L Polak

the sense of providing a new 'improved' translation, improving Gandhiji's writings. One chance evidence shows that such an exercise might have been attempted. Following are two excerpts of a letter to G D Birla, which was written in Hindi, a comparison of the two shows that linguistic changes might have also been attempted.

Bhaishri Ghanshyamdasji,

God has given me mentors. I consider you as one of them. Many of my children, many sisters and elderly people such as you and Jamnalalji want to see in me perfection. Knowing this how could I be distressed by your letter. I want you always thus to caution me.

You have three complaints: (i) that I absolve the Swaraj Party of the charge of corruption; (ii) that I gave a certificate to Suhrawardy; and (iii) that I have been trying to make Sarojini Devi the president. In the first place, it is a man's duty to hold fast to truth as he sees it after due striving, even if it should appear a mistake to the world. He cannot become fearless otherwise. I desire nothing so much as moksha. But I would shun even moksha if it went against truth and non-violence (CWMG, Vol 91, pp 525-26).

Dear Shri Ghanshyamdas,

God has provided me with conscience-keepers. You, I think, are one of them. Some of my own children, some ladies and a few grown-ups like Jamnalalji and

yourself want to make me a perfect man. Regarding you thus, how could I be offended by your letter? In fact, I want you always to caution me in this manner.

You complain against three things: One, my absolving the Swaraj Party of the charge of corruption; two, my giving a testimonial to Suhrawardy; and, three, my trying to get Sarojini Devi elected as [Congress] president.

In the first place, it is one's duty to say only that which, after a painstaking inquiry, one has come to regard as the truth, even if the world considers it to be an error. In no other way can one become fearless. I cannot consider anything dearer to me than moksha. Yet even that moksha I would renounce if it were to conflict with truth and non-violence (CWMG, E book, Vol 29, p 29).

If this is any indication, it proves that the exercise has been not just of re-arranging and deleting but also of re-editing the textual matter.

Such callousness to a work of archival nature cannot be tolerated by any individual committed to academic and intellectual integrity. It is our demand that the revised edition, including the CD-ROM, be recalled and scrapped, the original CWMG be reinstated as the only and the most authentic version of the writings and utterances of Gandhiji. The government must take statutory steps to ensure that no attempt to re-edit or recast the CWMG is made even in future. [E]