

Please respond to all the four questions. Each question carries twenty marks and the break-up, where ever required, is given within parentheses. Please structure your answers with the skills you may have acquired while redacting your self-study assignment. You might want to use a page for ordering your thoughts and remember to keep an eye on the clock.

Question 1

A part of recent research in Gandhi Studies has focussed on reading motives and intentions into Gandhi's writings. Given below are three passages on writing by Claude Markovits, Arundhati Roy and MK Gandhi. What are the key questions/issues/themes embedded in these passages? Can you problematize these? (10) Write a succinct note on the effectiveness and perils of reading motives and intentions into Gandhi's writings with appropriate examples. (10)

Passage 1 Claude Markovits, 2004, *The un Gandhian Gandhi*, Delhi: Permanent Black.

"However, the real black hole in Gandhi's life is his stay in South Africa, despite the fact that it is well documented. [...] Both these narratives [*Satyagraha in South Africa* and *The story of my experiments with truth*] were written in the 1920s more than ten years after Gandhi's departure from South Africa, entirely from memory, without the help of written notes, and serious doubts exist as to the reliability of such personal memories uncorroborated by other testimonies. Particularly problematic is the lack of independent sources from Indians in South Africa. [...] Most biographers, with two exceptions, have therefore tended to closely follow Gandhi's own narrative without questioning the authenticity of his claims." (p. 46)

"[...] Gandhi soon shows a desire to keep control of his own legend." (p. 50)

"Written from memory, without the help of notes, the text presents itself as a succession of reflections and anecdotes that are intended to retrace a spiritual itinerary, not to narrate a life in all its worldly aspects. It is not a linear narration and there are numerous digressions which seek very deliberately to break the continuity of the account. Gandhi's aim is to make his reader ponder at each stage the deeper meaning of the episode narrated, to prevent him giving himself up to the flow of words. This structure allows Gandhi to select just those episodes he deems significant. [...] Gandhi managed to establish his text as the main factual source for all his later biographies, at least for the period of his life before 1920 (the year in which the autobiography ends). Astonishingly even Gandhi's most improbable statements have been accepted uncritically by most of his biographers." (p. 51)

"I have dwelt at length on this not in order to blame authors or defend a positivist conception of history, but to show the extraordinary authority attributed to Gandhi as the principal and often only factual source of his own life, in spite of his own denials regarding the nature of his project. Why do experienced biographers and historians abandon all critical sense when it comes to

Gandhi? The answer lies at least partly in the magic of Gandhi's writing, which casts a spell few can resist. Gandhi's narration [...] is as limpid and as free-flowing as some passages of the New Testament, so much so that one hesitates to break its continuity by raising questions of historical criticism: those appear so out of place. (p. 52)

Gandhi's writing strategy is not always easy to comprehend, but it is extra ordinarily effective. His writing is simple, verging on an austerity which yet does not prevent the text from being pleasant and full of such convictions to ensnare even the most hardened sceptic. (pp. 52-3)

[...] One can't help feeling that Gandhi was also trying to cover his tracks. He is keen to refute the widespread view of him as a Christian saint, [...] While recognizing the influence of his Christian friends, he took great care to reaffirm his attachment to Hindu texts. He even recounted an episode in which he compared Buddha and Christ, to the advantage of the former, because his love went out to all creatures, while Christ's reveals his desire to distance himself from the Christian image of him projected by his Western admirers. (p. 54)

[...] By writing the *Autobiography*, Gandhi sought to take charge of all subsequent representations of his own life, and to impose an interpretation in terms of spiritual quest which ought not to be seriously questioned afterwards. This was not a deliberate attempt by Gandhi to mislead the public. On the contrary, by insisting that he did not write an account of his life, but only of his spiritual itinerary, Gandhi pre-empted criticism directed at factual aspects of his narrative. There remains the lingering feeling that this caveat was of a mostly rhetorical nature. [...] To systematically deconstruct Gandhi's life, what is needed at first is a systematic deconstruction of that Urtext, the *Autobiography*." (p. 55)

Passage 2 Arundhati Roy, 2014, "The doctor and the saint" in Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, critical edition by S. Anand, Delhi: Navayana

"[...]] That Gandhi is a hero in South Africa is as undeniable as it is baffling. [...] In order for Gandhi to be a South African hero, it became necessary to rescue him from his past, and rewrite it [possibly referring to *Satyagraha in South Africa* and Gandhi's autobiography]. Gandhi himself began that project. Some writers of history completed it." (p. 88)

Passage 3 M.K. Gandhi *Autobiography*, Part V chapter 11 "Intimate European contacts" (1925-9)

When I began writing it, I had no definite plan before me. I have no diary or documents on which to base the story of my experiments. I write just as the Spirit moves me at the time of writing. I do not claim to know definitely that all conscious thought and action on my part is directed by the Spirit. But on an examination of the greatest steps that I have taken in my life, as also of those that may be regarded as the least, I think it will not be improper to say that all of them were directed by the Spirit. [...]

Now again, as I start on this chapter, I find myself confronted with a fresh problem. What things to mention and what to omit regarding the English friends of whom I am about to write is a serious problem. If things that are relevant are omitted, truth will be dimmed. And it is difficult to

decide straightway what is relevant, when I am not even sure about the relevancy of writing this story.

I understand more clearly today what I read long ago about the inadequacy of all autobiography as history. I know that I do not set down in this story all that I remember. Who can say how much I must give and how much omit in the interests of truth? And what would be the value in a court of law of the inadequate *ex parte* evidence being tendered by me of certain events in my life? If some busybody were to cross-examine me on the chapters already written, he could probably shed much more light on them, and if it were a hostile critic's cross-examination, he might even flatter himself for having shown up 'the hollowness of many of my pretensions.'

I, therefore, wonder for a moment whether it might not be proper to stop writing these chapters. But so long as there is no prohibition from the voice within, I must continue the writing. I must follow the sage maxim that nothing once begun should be abandoned unless it is proved to be morally wrong. I am not writing the autobiography to please critics. Writing it is itself one of the experiments with truth. One of its objects is certainly to provide some comfort and food for reflection for my co-workers. Indeed I started writing it in compliance with their wishes. It might not have been written, if Jeramdas and Swami Anand had not persisted in their suggestion. If, therefore, I am wrong in writing the autobiography, they must share the blame.

Question 2

Critics of Gandhi have rightly pointed out that Gandhi sought to ingratiate himself with the British Empire. With the life and work of Gandhi in the background, explain how the trial of 1922 may/may not have been a milestone in Gandhi's life in his transformation from a stretcher-bearer of the empire into an ardent disaffectionist. (20)

Question 3

What do you understand by satyagraha? (4) Write a crisp note comparing and contrasting Gandhian satyagraha in South Africa and India. (8) Explain the constructive nature of Gandhian satyagraha and the treatment of the other (the adversary/opponent) in Gandhian satyagrahas (4 + 4).

Question 4

4.1 What were the challenges that Gandhi faced on his road to the discovery of the charkha as well as spinning and weaving of Khadi. (5) Why was Gandhi unsatisfied with the *swadeshi* movement? (5)

4.2 A.K. Saran in his study *On the promotion of Gandhian Studies at the University Level* argued that

“Gandhian thinking was radical, deeply human and highly subversive in relation to status quo. [...] the most sophisticated danger from which it has to be preserved is –the university. A sure, smooth, and ‘non-violent’ way to kill the spirit of Gandhian thinking is to introduce it into university syllabi. If I am serious about Gandhian thinking, I would save it from the deadly hands of our universities: maybe there are some exceptions, but most of our universities are dead and deadly places-stricken areas from which all living things have to be kept at a safe distance. [...] the mighty, indomitable forces of co-option and suction will slowly and steadily maim and undermine the spirit, the meaning, and the potential élan of the Gandhian way.”

In the light of this devastating assessment of Gandhi Studies at the University, critique the course “Gandhian Thoughts” that you have recently engaged with. How have we (the students and instructor of this course) contributed to Saran’s apprehensions/fears?
(10)