

Film Review**Gandhism to Gandhigiri****Vidya Balakrishnan**

“Lahe Raho Munnabhai” - This is an entertaining movie that captures the heart and soul of young and old alike. Giving a ‘Panchatantra’ coating of humour to serious issues of life situations, the movie has created a new idiom for achieving positive results through that unique weapon with which Gandhiji fought for India's freedom – non-violence. It is the story of Munnabhai, a street fighter becoming an ardent follower of Bapu (Gandhiji) and transforms himself to a unique personality admired by one and all and bringing positive changes in the thoughts and life style of many in the process. A new idiom “Gandhigiri” has also been generated to connote the opposite of “Dadagiri” or rowdiesm. Vidya Balakrishnan, a young journalist turned College Lecturer presents a review of this value adding cine exercise of modern India. – Editor

As the cinematic story unrolls, the spectators are led to a massive library dedicated to Bapu. The steps lead to a lone idol of a man clad in dhoti with his walking stick occupying its cavernous entrance. Each row, section, nook and corner of the vast place is plugged in by books about the Mahatma, written by many, voicing the ideals of one. Old fashioned fans, dimly lit walls and adorned by larger than life portraits of the father of our nation, the place is reflective of peace, tranquility and serenity, quite like the man himself. Unfortunately, quite like the memory of the man, the place is deserted, abandoned and forsaken for good. Satyagraha, non-cooperation, Truth and non-violence have given way to the i-pod and mp3 generation. Or has it? The silence surrounding the abandoned library is loud and speaks to our Hero who trudges in unwillingly and opens up a generation to the greatness that is the Mahatma. Lage Raho Munna Bhai in ways more than one opens the doors of our heart and of our mind to

Mahatma Gandhi. Directed by Rajkumar Hirani, the movie was the second installment to the very popular Munaabhai-Circuit series. An out and out comical escapade, the movie tracks the life of Munna, the Professor in History who specializes in the life and works of Gandhi and tries to impress his lady love. Except for a simple hitch, he is not a Professor in History, or even finished schooling for that matter. He is the loveable gangster Munna Bhai and apart from October 2nd being declared Dry Day, our protagonist has no inkling to the makings of the father of the nation. In order to impress his lady love, he has to learn about Gandhi and how!

A charming, funny and cleverly written script brings to life the reality that is India where the ‘new generation’ has less or no idea of Mahatma Gandhi. To woo his lady love, he makes his way to a massive library and reads up on Gandhism. Is his greatness contained only within text books and portraits embellishing administrative offices? From the lone idol, the

desolate library, the lone librarian and the lone man in the movie who can hear the voice of Gandhi, the constant theme of loneliness is rather apt to reflect the memory of Gandhi and of life. Each to his own beliefs and each to his own journey of life. How would you convince some of the greatness of the Mahatma? How would you convince a fast paced era the values represented by an icon? Enter Munna. In this day and age when History is only part of the curriculum and not a reflection of our past, Lage Raho Munna Bhai strikes the cord of bringing the two together. In his witty and wonderful way, he converts Gandhism into Gandhigiri even translating the Hindi spoken by Bapu to a much 'cooler' colloquial mix of Hindi and English.

Amidst the backdrop of a version of Vande Mataram and the soulful stirrings of Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram, a stream of light, a spotlight almost, falls on the Mahatma as he shows himself to Munna through his books and his works and Munna now knows his job, to spread the word... Gandhi is alive. Transforming Gandhism to Gandhigiri, the gangster applies ideals of truth and non-violence to everyday situations and helps people in their regular problems through a radio show. He applies Gandhism to solve simple problems. Be it fighting against the demolition of an old-age home through non-violence or asking for forgiveness from his beloved Circuit. Bapu leads the way. A particular listener recounts a recurrent problem of a neighbour spitting at his doorstep without a hint of remorse. Munna asks him to smile back after the latter spits and clean the mess in front of the neighbor. This goes on for a while after which the 'spitting' neighbor stops and even apologizes. Though clichéd, the message is effective. It is not difficult to think of being patient and non-violent. Like Bapu himself

says in the movie "my methods will guarantee results but they are not easy." In many ways, the movie reflects our fast-food generation, eager for results without putting in the effort and time in something. It further captures a pitiful situation where we have to make a movie to tell who Bapu was.

One of the most unique aspects of the movie is the fact that it brings to life the memory of Gandhi but interestingly removes the aura of "god likeness" around him. We know Gandhi as one with the common man yet unlike the common man. However, in this movie, without the halo, we have a Bapu here who is accessible to all, even to a simple gangster. The local citizens of Mumbai turn into a radio station and learn to apply Gandhigiri to their day to day life. It's not an easy task and Munna, the most unexpected teacher of Gandhism coaxes and convinces them to have patience and believe that a concept like Gandhism has value even today. A close look into the recent Anna Hazare trend and this movie won't be too farfetched.

While the movie comes with its flaws of being too preachy at times and having some unnecessary illogical melodrama, it does justify its humor and innocence through wonderful lead actors. As a gangster whose face looks ravaged by time yet whose eyes come alive whenever he sees Bapu, Sanjay Dutt has played the part of a hallucinating Bapu-loving goon to perfection and what remains after the movie is a refreshed memory of the father of our nation. For this and more, the movie is among the most likeable Indian movie ever made. It is fresh and yet contains a message that is almost as ancient. In his words, "remember me from your heart and I will appear in front of you." ●

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– *Editor*