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Gandhi's Legacy of Peace as perceived by Stanley Albert Wolpert

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Abstract: Mahatma Gandhi is considered an apostle of global peace and non-violence by people traversing continents, religions and communities. This great leader served as an inspiration towards ending injustice and colonialism through elements of suffering and self-sacrifice. He held a strong conviction in the inviolable connection between ends and means comparable with one between a seed and a tree. India's attainment of freedom symbolized victory of soul force over armed force under Gandhi's leadership. His influence on activists of peace and non-violence even in present times, makes him most modern and has had a considerable impact on the lives of Americans from all walks of life. Stanley Albert Wolpert (born 1927), an American historian, is one. He occupies a pre-eminent position among those contributing towards American historiography on Modern India. His notable works include studies of the subcontinent and those related to it as also, the landmarks of the Indian freedom struggle. His association with India dates back to February 1948 when he first touched the Indian soil as a marine engineer and saw Gandhi's ashes being immersed in the Arabian Sea off the coast of Bombay. Knowledge of Gandhi and his tremendous following aroused Wolpert's interest in this great personality and India. The magnitude of the impact was so much that thenceforth, he became a student of Indian history, setting aside his career of marine engineering. Over the years, he developed a strong bond with India and started teaching Indian history in the University of California, Los Angeles. Subsequently, he wrote on various personalities of the subcontinent such as B. G. Tilak, G.K.Gokhale, J.L. Nehru, M.A. Jinnah, Z.A. Bhutto besides others. However, it was

Mahatma Gandhi who impressed him the most. Consequently, he produced the biography of Gandhi entitled 'Gandhi's Passion- the Life and Legacy of Mahatma Gandhi' (OUP. 2001).

In this work, Wolpert speaks of the rich global legacy of Gandhi who showed to the world that civilizations can exist and prosper only when there is global peace. This is Gandhi's greatest contribution and legacy to mankind, held in high estimation by Wolpert. According to him, it inspired personalities worldwide. However, Wolpert is skeptical about Gandhi's Indian legacy. He feels that despite his worldwide appeal, it is ironical that Gandhi failed to convince his own countrymen even in his lifetime and after it. That he was 'walking alone' with his ideals even before Independence is illustrative of the fact that his principles did not find appreciation of many of the Indians. Barely a few months after India attained Independence, Gandhi had to sacrifice his life for those very ideals. Even later, India remained non-compliant with his ideals, resorting to armament and nuclear testing. Wolpert was shocked and anguished when India exploded three underground nuclear bombs in 1998. At that point of time, hardly any Indian protested: on the contrary, the popular response was euphoric. This compelled the historian to wonder whether Gandhi had really influenced his countrymen or not. Such a paradox between Gandhi's global and Indian legacy finds expression in Wolpert's biography on Gandhi. But then, it is also imperative to assess India's position in the world, to consider that India cannot survive as a political entity divorcing itself from such elements in present times. Moreover, to make Gandhi's dreams come true, a concerted effort is required, not only of Indians but of people all over the world. Truly, global peace can be a reality only amidst mutual respect and collaborative effort towards peaceful co-existence.

Keywords: global peace, American historiography, disarmament, nuclear testing, legacy.

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