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Draft: Paper for WISH Seminar

Chapter Four

The Diary as “The Mirror of the self”<sup>1</sup>

The primary focus of this chapter is to illustrate the impact that the daily writing practice of keeping a diary had on the development of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's philosophical and political practices. Although Gandhi had been a diarist for most of his adult life this chapter only examines a particular set of diaries related to his time in Natal and Transvaal. Gandhi began diary writing as an occasional activity but by the end of his life it had become integral to his daily writing practices. Once he had established his daily writing routine he also encouraged his political followers in South Africa to do the same.<sup>2</sup> Many years later, in India, Gandhi also required his *satyagrahis* to keep a daily diary which he read.

There are sixty four diary entry titles in the table of contents of the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*. It needs to be noted, however, that not all these entries are full diary entries. For example there are only twenty pages of the first diary that he wrote on his inbound trip to London are available. Whereas his second diary, written on his return to India for *The Vegetarian*, and his *Vital Foods* diary, which was also written for *The Vegetarian*, are complete. However both these diaries were only a few pages in length as the diaries only lasted the duration of the voyage and the dietary experiment respectively. Gandhi's diary of 1912 is the longest surviving diary from his time in South Africa, lasting almost a year from January to December of 1912. This diary, written towards the end of Gandhi's time in South Africa, was probably indicative of the daily diary-writing routine he developed during his time in South Africa. By the time Gandhi left South Africa his writing practices were firmly established and instrumental in the development of his political, social and spiritual activities. This was so much so that later on in India diary writing was an expected practice of his *Satyagrahis* and, by 1935, he was espousing the benefits of diary writing to the readers of his weekly

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1 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.*, Vol. 67 (25 April, 1935 - 22 September, 1935), 232.

2 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 012 (15 July 1911 - 8 March, 1913), 296.

newspaper the *Harijan*, which was read by a much wider public than that constituted by his *Satyagrahis*. In this publication he wrote:

Your diary must contain every particular about your health. It must also contain the particulars of work done every hour, if the work could be so divided. You might also make it a mirror of your own mind, recording your thoughts and dreams, good and bad.

*Harijan* 6-7-1935<sup>3</sup>

For Gandhi the daily writing discipline that the diary imposed on the diarist meant that the diarist not only developed a disciplined writing practice but also that the diary provided a mirror of “one's self. “Gandhi's interest in the idea of the diary as a mirror was far from unique and dates back to the first attempts at diary writing. The diary has, throughout history, been used as a reflective tool. By accounting for their daily activities diarists had hoped to develop a clearer image and deeper understanding into their selves.

This chapter will begin with a general historical overview of diary-writing in order to demonstrate the link between diary writing, the quest for self-knowledge and the turn towards practices orientated towards self-regulation. Thereafter the chapter will shift to an analysis of the diaries Gandhi kept, beginning with the first diary Gandhi wrote on his trip to England, as well as the diary he wrote for publication on his home bound trip from England to India. The South African diaries which I analyse here conform much more closely than his first two diaries to the idea of the diary as a tool to be used in a practice of on-going self-examination. After a close examination of the South African diaries there is a brief analysis of the importance of diaries later on in Gandhi's life. The practice of diary keeping that began as a tool to record a set of life changing events in Gandhi's life evolved and became a tool in Gandhi's dietary, spiritual and political practices. By publishing extracts of his diary Gandhi, opened up the content of his private diary to a public audience. *The Vegetarian*, a publication of the Vegetarian Society, which showed interest in Gandhi's diary, published two of his diaries including a travel journal and a food diary. With the publication of these diaries Gandhi understood that the internal musing of an individual was also useful to a wider audience. Additionally, Gandhi made strategic public use of his diaries, manipulating this ambiguously private form of writing, to shape and inform opinion on a range of matters, including political matters. We can deduce - given

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3 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.*, Vol. 67 (25 April, 1935 - 22 September, 1935), 232.

the ease with which Gandhi published extracts of his diaries- that he had either written his diaries with an audience in mind or that his private life and public image were much more united. However, his insistence on reading his satyagrahis' diaries later on in his life demonstrates that Gandhi also believed the diary to hold a true reflection of the writer's feelings.<sup>4</sup>

#### Diary-writing: a brief historical account

The earliest form of diary writing in Europe dates back to the mid-fifteenth century. Diaries were written in both England and France. The first recorded instance of diary writing in France were the anonymous diaries of *Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris* written in 1405 - possibly by more than one cleric. The first English examples date back to 1442.<sup>5</sup> These early European diaries were written a few hundred years after the first known diaries of the Arab world, which date back to 1068 CE. These diaries were from Baghdad and belong to the Arab scholar Ibn 'Aqil.<sup>6</sup> They provide evidence that as early as the 11<sup>th</sup> century Arab scholars were grappling with notions of individuality. This was probably due to the fact that the Arab world had already developed a deep appreciation for writing due to the strong reliance on intellectualism and scientific ingenuity that had been lacking in Europe during the Middle Ages and which Europe only began to experience during the Renaissance.

It's no coincidence that diary writing began in Europe during the fifteenth century as there was an increased sense of individualism during this time.<sup>7</sup> The rise of the bourgeois classes not only fostered intellectual and artistic advancement, it also replaced the communalism of the Middle Ages with notions of individuality.<sup>8</sup> “The self,” according to Perrot & Goldhammer, “gained new depth and complexity.”<sup>9</sup> This was reflected not just in literature but in most aspects of society from architecture to minor shifts in household furniture; including the increased sales and displays of

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4 Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi : VOL. 80 : 28 DECEMBER, 1940 - 17 AUGUST, 1941 page 253

5 Makdisi. *The Diary* , 173.

6 Makdisi. *The Diary*, 173.

7 Habermas. *The Structural Transformation*, 49.

8 Makdisi. *The Diary*, 173.

9 Michelle Perrot & Arthur Goldhammer. *A History of Private Life: From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War* (United States: Harvard, 1990), 455.

mirrors in homes and the increased commission of self-portraits.<sup>10</sup> A growing sense of individuality and privacy marked bourgeois political and social life of nineteenth century Europe.

The perception that during various epochs particular types of writing practices are favoured over others is not uncommon. The rise of the bourgeois class and the conjugal family in Europe during the eighteenth century resulted in a resurgence of the practice of keeping a diary.<sup>11</sup> According to Habermas, along with the letter, the diary became a key technology in the development of individual subjectivity as:

...the psychological interest increased in the dual relation to both one's self and the other: self-observation entered a union partly curious, partly sympathetic with the emotional stirrings of the other I. The diary became a letter addressed to the sender, and the first-person narrative became a conversation with one's self-addressed to another person. These were experiments with the subjectivity discovered in the close relationships of the conjugal family.<sup>12</sup>

The diary, as defined by William Matthews, should contain “details about daily thoughts, emotions and actions.”<sup>13</sup> The main function of the diary has not changed over the last millennium but the writers of diaries have certainly changed. The earliest recorded diaries were largely written by elite men of religion, both in the Arab world and Europe. Encouraged by rising Protestantism after the Reformation more clergy in Europe began to keep diaries as an account of their own private spiritual journey and their direct and personal relationship with God.<sup>14</sup>

The rise of the bourgeois classes in the eighteenth century meant that diary writing became widespread amongst the mercantile elites as well. The growing spirit of mercantilism free from strict feudal relations meant that there was a marked turn inward to the private, and an increased sense of individualism. The increased divisions between the public and private grew, affecting all areas of life including architectural style. As Habermas, points out, “Certain changes were taking place in the

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10 Perrot & Goldhammer. *A History of Private Life*, 460.

11 Habermas. *The Structural Transformation*, 48.

12 Habermas. *The Structural Transformation*, 49.

13 Matthews. *British Diaries*, x.

14 Barber. *The Anthropology*, 180.

structure of the houses newly built. The lofty, raftered hall... went out of fashion. ‘Dining rooms’ and ‘drawing rooms’ were now built of one storey height, as the various purposes of the old hall were divided up among a number of different chambers of ordinary size.”<sup>15</sup> This shift to architectural privacy mirrored the changes that were happening both within the family and in society at large.

A growing spirit of political independence and notions of individuality continued to increase in Europe over the next decades, even spreading across class at times. The increase in literacy, which grew in popularity, became important to not only the elite and bourgeois classes but also to the new industrial classes. By the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century literacy had grown and spread both formally and informally. For example within England various cottage industry communities learnt to read and write: “Some weavers had fruit, vegetables, and flowers from their gardens. ‘My work was at the loom side, and when not winding my father taught me reading, writing and arithmetic.’”<sup>16</sup> It was probably through an informal system of a reading group, or one of the various social programmes instituted by people such as Robert Owen, that workers in more inhumane factory settings also learnt to read and write.<sup>17</sup> At this time reading and writing amongst the working class was no longer confined to just reading or transcribing the bible but many also partook in activities such as diary writing. This is evident in diaries written by men like John Kitto who left behind an account of his life which moved from a wretched workhouse to a job as a Church printer.<sup>18</sup> A review of *An Annotated Bibliography of British Diaries*, containing a large bibliography of British diaries written in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century reveals that in Britain, diary writing, was a thriving activity across class and gender.<sup>19</sup>

At the same time the British colonial project in India, that had officially begun after the Battle of Plassey in 1757,<sup>20</sup> was, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in full swing. British Colonial domination of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was not just satisfied with economic plunder and sought to expand its control over the

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15 Habermas. *The Structural Transformation*, 44.

16 Edward. P. Thompson. *The Making of the English Working Class*. (Penguin Books Ltd, Middlesex, England: 1970), 321.

17 Thompson. *The Making*.,710.

18 Matthews. *British Diaries*., 200.

19 See: Matthews. *British Diaries*.

social and cultural fabric of South Asia. This project was supported by men such as Thomas Macaulay, the Law Member of the Governor-General Council of India, who proposed:

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of population.<sup>21</sup>

This project of *colonialism's culture*<sup>22</sup> was not just the domain of Whig parliamentarians such as Macaulay, but, also, British army officers and English educated Indian teachers and missionaries, some of whom Gandhi encountered as teenager in Rajkot.<sup>23</sup> As Barber points out writing was very important to this project and to the project of colonialism in general. The colonisers “used writing as means of domination, both politically and culturally. But the colonised also seized upon literacy as a new weapon, resource and opportunity.” More importantly writing allowed for the expression of new aspirations, new ways of being subjected and of becoming a subject.<sup>24</sup>

Although the assumption by social engineers like Macaulay was that the coloniser would be the active party in this process of creating *colonialism's cultures*, with the colonised being the passive recipient this was not always the case.<sup>25</sup> In fact, it was often the English educated Indians that shifted the site of the colonial encounter from the periphery to the metropole. Burton has concluded that: “Britain itself has historically been an imperial terrain - a site productive not just of imperial policy or attitudes directed outward, but of colonial encounters within.”<sup>26</sup>

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20 Sugata Bose & Ayesha Jalal. *History of Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 41.

21 Joel H. Spring. *Education and the Rise of the Global Economy* (Mahwah, NJ: Taylor & Francis, 2009), 12.

22 Barber. *The Anthropology*, 181.

23 Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1940), 49.

24 Barber. *The Anthropology*, 181.

25 See: Edward Said. *Culture and Imperialism* (Vintage, London: 1994)

26 Antoinette Burton. *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 1.

It was as a young man with pretensions of becoming one of these English educated gentlemen that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi left for Britain. From early on in his life Gandhi’s father, Karamchand Gandhi, was aware of the role imperial culture would play both on the sub-continent and in the metropole.<sup>27</sup> For this reason Karamchand Gandhi sent his sons, including Mohandas, to English medium schools where the syllabus was probably influenced by the ideas of Thomas Macaulay whose claims about Indians’ lack of bravery were roundly condemned by a much older Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj*.<sup>28</sup> It is no surprise then, given the dominant pedagogy of Gandhi’s youth, that the young Gandhi developed an ardent “infatuation with British culture.”<sup>29</sup> A large part of this infatuation was tied to the notion of success as the English language was linked to better job opportunities - in the form of intermediate roles between the Empire and its subjects. It also came to signify, through the cultural assimilation of these British educated Indians, civilization and advanced culture.

Gandhi, like many other of his contemporaries, hoped that an immersion into this system would provide the answer to the various difficulties in his life. England therefore offered the hope of success to the young Gandhi who had not had much success at the Samaldas College in Bhavnagar where he had no hope of passing his courses<sup>30</sup>. The trip to England would complete his education and provide a balm to many of the difficulties he experienced in his life.<sup>31</sup> In fact, it was in the overcoming of these obstacles that the young Gandhi believed “made England dearer to me than she would have been.”<sup>32</sup>

It was not only education that Gandhi was after but also cultural assimilation. This included dress, mannerisms, notions about diet and most importantly the adoption of various modes of writing. Considering all of these influences over Gandhi it is unsurprising that he also began to keep a diary

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27 Hay. “The Making of a Late-Victorian Hindu: M.K. Gandhi in London, 188-1891” in *Victorian Studies* Vol. 33 No.1 (Autumn, 1989), 307.

28 Fischer. *The Essential Gandhi*. 35.

29 Hay. “The Making of a Late-Victorian”, 319.

30 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896), 3.

31 Hay. “The Making of a Late-Victorian”, 317

32 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896), 9.

at the outset of his first trip to England. It is here that we begin to witness Gandhi’s desire for self-reflection and introspection.

Gandhi’s association with groups such as the Vegetarian Society and the Theosophical Society began during his stay in London. It was through these networks that his further desire for self-knowledge was piqued. From his various writings it is evident that Gandhi was not alone in his quest for a better quality of life brought about by spirituality, dietary practices, intellectuality, discipline and alternative utopian experiments in communal living. The ideas espoused by the enlightenment experienced unparalleled growth in Britain in the late eighteenth century and continued to flourish during the nineteenth century. The promotion of the quest for enlightenment and independence was not a marginal occupation of these small voluntary societies but occupied a large part of the political, social and cultural life in Britain.

Writing was important to the eighteenth century Enlightenment project whether it was letters or diaries.<sup>33</sup> As a result everyday writing activities that were previously used mainly as tools to either convey messages (the letter) or account of daily activities (the diary) became central to the project of self-discovery.

Gandhi not only used the diary as a personal tool for self-reflection but also, from the outset, published these thoughts. In the quest for enlightenment the exposing of private and intimate life outward to a public was considered to be important not only for your personal reflection but also for the education of others by the emerging bourgeoisie. Despite the strong division between the private and public sphere by the end of the eighteenth century, the notion of privacy was in itself a popular interest and people often had the expectation that their private activity and ruminations had a place within the public sphere.<sup>34</sup> Habermas points out that “the innermost core of the private was always already oriented to an audience.”<sup>35</sup>

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33 Habermas. *The Structural Transformation*, 48.

34 Habermas. *The Structural Transformation*, 48.

35 Habermas. *The Structural Transformation*, 49.



By outlining the changes that occur in the different diaries Gandhi wrote throughout his life we can gain a few conclusions about his daily activities. There is a stark difference in terms of style, content and emotive quality between the diaries he wrote on his inward bound trip to England and then later on his outward journey. His first South African diary reads like a list of his daily professional activities, clearly demonstrating Gandhi's rise to public prominence. It also, more significantly, illustrates how writing became fundamental to Gandhi's daily activities. Although there is evidence of a dietary diary in Gandhi's early years in South Africa it was only written with the purpose of noting down his diet and its effects on his body. This diary ceased the day the diet ended. However once we get to Gandhi's later life we can read, through his diaries, a closer union between his spiritual and political philosophy as well as notions of physical and mental discipline. A close reading of Gandhi's diaries will firstly provide insight into Gandhi's daily activity. Secondly, they allow for the tracking of the growth of Gandhi's political popularity. Additionally the diary itself became a reflection of Gandhi's search to unify the various aspects of his life. Finally, the self-imposed daily practice of writing in a diary was a means for Gandhi to strive to self-regulate, compartmentalise and control the activities of his day.

### Gandhi's London Diary

The remnants of Gandhi's first recorded diary that survive to the present day were from when he decided to leave India for England. Gandhi began writing this diary, in English, at the age of nineteen. According to the editors of the *CWVG*, the diary originally contained one hundred and twenty pages, however presently there are only twenty known pages. The story behind the missing pages of the diary was explained in the *Collected Works* as follows:

When his nephew and co-worker, Chhaganlal Gandhi, was proceeding for the first time to London in 1909, Gandhiji gave him his “London Diary” The diary filled about 120 pages. Chhaganlal Gandhi gave it to Mahadev Desai in 1920. But, before doing so, he copied out in a notebook about 20 pages of the original. The remaining 100 pages were not continuous writing, but merely a chronicle of incidents during his stay in London from 1888 to 1891. The original being untraceable, Chhaganlal's copy is reproduced here with minimum editing.<sup>36</sup>

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36 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001 (1884 – 30 November, 1896), 2.

The first entry of the diary was dated 12 November 1888 and begins almost like a novel with these sentences, “What led to the intention of proceeding to London? The scene opens about the end of April.”<sup>37</sup> These words are the opening of an eight page recollection about the decisions and difficulties Gandhi faced in his move to England. There was no attempt to write this part of the diary in a conventional day to day manner. The content of these early entries provide the various, often conflicting, reasons for Gandhi’s trip to England. For Gandhi's family, education was the only reason for Mohandas’s trip to England. He wrote that “a secret design in my mind of coming here [was] to satisfy my curiosity of knowing what London was”<sup>38</sup>. For his family Gandhi’s success in his studies would mean the alleviation of their difficult financial circumstances. A lawyer trained in London would have not only been able to practice law but might also enter into a similar bureaucratic post to the one held by his father. Therefore Gandhi’s family spared no effort in securing this move to England.

On our return my brother said: “We would go to see Mavji Joshi“, and so we went. Mavji Joshi asked me as usual how I did. Then put some questions about my study in Bhavnagar. I plainly told him that I had hardly any chance of passing my examination first year. I also added that I found the course very difficult. Hearing this, he advised my brother to send me as soon as possible to London for being called to the Bar. He said the expense will be only Rs. 5,000. “Let him take some *urad dal*. There he will cook some food for himself and thereby there will be no objection about religion. Don’t reveal the matter to anybody. Try to get some scholarship. Apply to Junagadh and Porbandar States. See my son Kevalram, and if you fail in getting the pecuniary help and if you have no money, sell your furniture. But anyhow send Mohandas to London. I think that is the only means to keep the reputation of your deceased father.” All of our family members have great faith in what Mavji Joshi says. And my brother who is naturally very credulous made a promise to Mavji Joshi to send me to London. Now was the time for my exertions.<sup>39</sup>

The early recollections of this diary also reveal the many difficulties Gandhi faced in turning his planned trip to England into a reality. These included lack of finances, warnings about the perceived negative influences he would encounter in England, concerns about breaking caste and Gandhi’s own fears about his lack of confidence. Gandhi’s lack of confidence was brought to the fore when

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37 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001 (1884 – 30 November, 1896), 2.

38 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001 (1884 – 30 November, 1896), 2.

39 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001 (1884 – 30 November, 1896), 3.

he was expected to give a speech to his classmates in Rajkot.<sup>40</sup> Despite the many financial, familial and social difficulties that he had faced he eventually set out for England. He left Rajkot for Bombay on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August 1888<sup>41</sup> and travelled on from Bombay on the 4<sup>th</sup> of September 1888.<sup>42</sup>

The second entry in this diary is dated 4<sup>th</sup> September 1888. This entry was also written as a recollection of events and begins with his departure for England. A departure made all the more sweet, Gandhi believed, due to the difficulties he overcame to achieve his dream.

I must write that had it been some other man in the same position which I was in, I dare say he would not have been able to see England. The difficulties which I had to withstand have made England dearer to me than she would have been.<sup>43</sup>

Gandhi’s first diary entry began at the start of his voyage. It was also written as a recollection but rather than focusing on big events on board the ship Gandhi covered many of the minor details he found interesting. From this entry we gain a fairly detailed account of the days spent on board the steamship and, at the age of nineteen, his discussion of both his diet and toiletry needs were already present. This early preoccupation with the requirements of the body would later develop into central tenet of his adult philosophical and political ideology. Gandhi’s determination to the keep up his vegetarian diet meant that for the first two days of his voyage he only ate:

... sweetmeats and fruits which I had on board with me. Then Mr. Mazmudar made an agreement with some boys on board to cook us food. I would never have been able to make such an agreement. There was one Abdul Majid who was a first-class passenger while we were saloon passengers. We enjoyed our dinner cooked by the boy... I always got up at 8 a.m. in the morning, washed my teeth, then went to the W.C. and took my bath. The arrangement of the English water closets astonished a native passenger. We do not get there water and are obliged to use pieces of paper.<sup>44</sup>

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40 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001 (1884 – 30 November, 1896), 1.

41 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001 (1884 – 30 November, 1896), 8.

42 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001 (1884 – 30 November, 1896), 9.

43 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896), 9

44 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001 (1884 – 30 November, 1896), 9.

Once Gandhi’s eating arrangements were sorted out he involved himself with the novelty of sea travel. The rest of the diary provided accounts of the various places in which the ship dropped anchor. It was mainly written in the first person and provides a visceral account of Gandhi’s experience. The following entries relating to Gandhi’s experiences in Aden provide an excellent example of the first person account Gandhi gave in this diary.

I could not see any well or any place of fresh water there. I am afraid that perhaps the tanks are the only place for fresh water. The heat of the sun was excessive. I was quite wet with perspiration. This was because we were not far from the Red Sea.<sup>45</sup>

It is at this point that the surviving text of this diary ends. In these few surviving pages of this first diary kept by Gandhi we encounter a nervous and insecure young man, who was nevertheless determined, despite, many difficulties to go to England. For the young Gandhi, England did not only represent a means of education that would uplift his and his family’s economic and social standing but, more importantly, would also complete Gandhi’s desired transformation into an English gentleman. His preoccupation with his dietary and daily toilette and grooming practices demonstrates that Gandhi, at this stage of diary writing, took seriously the view that the diary should be an account of one’s daily practices. The detailed record of life on board the ship provides insight into the awe and fascination that the young Gandhi had experienced as a novice sea traveller. This reads very differently from the next diary that Gandhi wrote on his return trip to India. The young novice traveller fascinated even by the stars reflected on the water<sup>46</sup> changed into a young cosmopolitan gentleman possessed with the critical eye of a seasoned traveller and very much aware of his audiences back in England.

From the various other documented accounts it seems that Gandhi reached Plymouth on the 25th of October 1888 at 11:00pm. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of October 1888 at 4:00 pm Gandhi reached the Victoria Hotel along with Mr. Mazmudar and Mr. Abdul Majid where he took up his first residence in London.<sup>47</sup> It was at the Victoria Hotel that Gandhi confessed his amazement at the use of lifts. This was the last entry in this diary, which ends abruptly. From this point on the *Collected Works of*

45 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896), 11.

46 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896), 10.

*Mahatma Gandhi* can only provide evidence of Gandhi’s time in London through letters, both public and personal in nature, as well as various interviews he granted the Vegetarian Society. Through these accounts we can piece together some aspects of his time in London. For instance the development of his daily practice of reading newspapers began in London. This was also the time in which he became convinced of the benefits a vegetarian diet through his encounters with the Vegetarian Society. This was the same society that later provided the first international public for his writing, which at first took the form of mini essays and, later, the travel diary that he was commissioned to write on his journey back to India in 1891.

Even though there is no diary available during his actual time in London we are led to understand from the diary Gandhi was commissioned to write for his homeward trip for the Vegetarian Society that he was disappointed to leave England. It is unclear why he was commissioned to write this travel diary. However given the general interest in India in Esoteric circles in England at the time, it is likely that the audiences of the Vegetarian Society would have had an interest in the thoughts and experiences of an Indian man.

I could not make myself believe that I was going to India until I stepped into the steamship *Oceana*, of the P& O Company. So much attached was I to London and its environments for who would not be? London with its teaching institutions, public galleries, museums, theatres, vast commerce, public parks and vegetarian restaurants, is a fit place for a student and a traveller, a trader and a “addist”.<sup>48</sup>

This commissioned diary written by Gandhi for the Vegetarian Society began on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June and ended 12<sup>th</sup> July 1891. This diary started with Gandhi already on board the ship heading back to India. Unlike Gandhi’s earlier diary which did not recognise another reader this diary overtly recognised an audience. It is interesting that here the Editor was the audience whereas later on, after 1903, when Gandhi was the editor of *Indian Opinion*, he was the author, and the audience the readers.

But it would not do to have all play and no quarrel, so some of the passengers thought fit to get drunk (beg your pardon, Mr. Editor, they got drunk almost every evening, but this particular evening they got drunk and disorderly).<sup>49</sup>

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47 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896), 15.

48 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896), 50.

Even aside from these editorialisations it is apparent that this diary was written for public consumption. Unlike his first London diary, Gandhi did not write in the first person about his own personal feelings and the discomfort of the travel but rather reports on events and experiences that would be useful to a traveller. This includes sections on prices and various other difficulties a traveller may encounter. He wrote these accounts like a travelogue. Gandhi reported favourably about the new places he saw either from on board the ship or through disembarkation.

When you land at Brindisi, a man would come and ask you, in case you are a black man: “Sir, there is a beautiful girl of 14, follow me, Sir, and I will take you there, the charge is not high, Sir.” You are at once puzzled. But be calm and answer boldly that you don’t want her and tell the man to go away and thereby you will be safe. If you are in any difficulty at once refer to a policeman just near you, or at once enter a large building which you will surely see. But before you enter it, read the name on the building and make sure that it is open to all. Thus you will be safe. This you will be able to make out at once. Tell the porter there that you are in a difficulty, and he will at once show you what you should do. If you are bold enough, ask the porter to take you to the Chief Officer and you will refer the matter to him. By a large building I mean that it must be belonging to Thomas Cook or Henry King or some such other agents. They will take care of you. Don’t be miserly at that time. Pay the porter something. But this means is [only] to be resorted to when you think yourself to be in any danger.<sup>50</sup>

Gandhi’s writing style here was markedly different to the diary dealing with his journey to England. The first London diary was written far more as a diary in the sense of carrying much more detail of everyday activity in simple language. Gandhi’s commissioned diary of his return journey was short and only provided highlights of important moments in the journey and was written much more in the style of a travel journal. Additionally, there was no comment about any emotion Gandhi may have been feeling. His first diary captured the sense of vulnerability and excitement Gandhi felt on undertaking this momentous journey. However his diary written for *The Vegetarian* is devoid of this emotional content. Gandhi provided a view of a detached observer offering travel advice to a novice traveller. Besides the reference to “black man” at the beginning of the quote there is nothing else to signify that Gandhi was not an English gentleman. The degree to which, at this point in his life, he is a stickler for rules enforced by appeals to duly constituted authority very clear.

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49 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896), 53.

50 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896), 13.

The following excerpts from the diary also provide us with an insight into Gandhi’s preoccupation with food, which is striking even at this early stage of his life, and his prejudices, which were typical of most Victorian gentlemen of the day:

It may be well here to contrast the Oceana to the Assam into which the Bombay-bound passengers had to tranship at Aden. There were English waiters on the Oceana, always neat, clean and obliging. On the other hand, there were Portuguese waiters on board the Assam who murdered the Queen’s English, and who were always the reverse of clean, and also sulky and slow. There was, moreover, a difference of quality in the food supplied in the two steamers...

Gandhi continues with reference to the Assam:

...how did the vegetarians manage in this ship? This would be an apt question. Well, there were only two vegetarians, including myself both of us were prepared, in case we did not get anything better, to manage with boiled potatoes, cabbage and butter. But we had no reason to go to that extreme. The obliging steward gave us some vegetable curry, rice, stewed and fresh fruit from the first saloon and last, but not least brown bread; so we had all we wanted. Undoubtedly, they are very liberal in giving good and sufficient food to the passengers. Only, they go too far; so at least it seems to me.

It would not be amiss to describe what the second-saloon menus contained, and how many meals the passengers had.

To begin with, the first thing in the morning, an average passenger would have a cup or two of tea and few biscuits. At 8:30 a.m. the breakfast bell would bring down the passengers to the dining-room. They were punctual to the minute, at their meals, at any rate. The breakfast menu generally contained oatmeal porridge, some fish, chop, curry, jam, bread, and butter, tea or coffee, etc., everything ad libitum. I have often seen passengers take porridge, fish and curry, bread and butter, and wash down with two cups of tea.<sup>51</sup>

Gandhi’s detailed description of the menu and the eating habits of various passengers continued for the next two meals of the day. He also presented accounts of his discussions with various passengers about food and his attempt to convert fellow passengers to vegetarianism.

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51 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896), 50.

The abundant description of food and the ship’s menu could well be due to his awareness of his specific audience and the public nature of this “diary”. Even though this travelogue was published as a diary of an Indian man travelling back to India Gandhi was aware that it was to be made public before he began writing it. Therefore the writing up of this “diary” was, from the very beginning, composed with a particular audience in mind. It is important to note here the change in Gandhi’s role within his own life story. It is this document that illustrates the shift in Gandhi from an impressionable young male, colonial subject to a man with expert knowledge who had a stake in shaping notions of *Indianness* to a British audience. Gandhi was not alone in this. Burton writes that:

Indian culture and society was the relentless object of colonial scrutiny, there were some admittedly privileged colonial subjects at work producing ethnographies of “native” British culture that Britons had to confront and contend with.<sup>52</sup>

These excerpts from Gandhi’s diary were published in *The Vegetarian* on the 16 April 1892. The entries in *CWVG* on Gandhi’s time in India for this period are scant to say the least consisting of only one letter written by Gandhi. However from Gandhi’s other writings<sup>53</sup> it is evident that his time in India was not productive and he soon made arrangements to take up a post in South Africa.

Gandhi left Bombay on the 19 April 1893 on board the *S. S. Safari*. Unlike his two previous journeys by sea there is no surviving evidence of diary entries or letters from this sea voyage. He arrived in Durban on the 23 May 1893 aboard the *S.S. Admiral*, which he boarded at Zanzibar. He arrived in Natal to take up a position for a year with Dada Abudullah and Co. taking up a case between Dada Abdullah and Co, versus T.H.K. Mohamed and Co. and Moosa Amod and Co. His main job was to instruct counsel, order the English correspondence and translate Gujarati documents.<sup>54</sup>

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52 Burton. *At the Heart of the Empire*, 11.

53 Gandhi. *The Story of My Experiments*

54 Meer (Ed) *The South African Gandhi*, 107



The First Southern African Diary<sup>55</sup>

It was once Gandhi was firmly established in Transvaal, and more than a year after his arrival in the colony, that we encounter another diary entry within the records of *CWVG* which began on Friday June 22 1894.<sup>56</sup> There could be preceding entries to this diary but they are not available in *CWVG*. A footnote in *CWVG* explains that the “text, in Gandhiji’s hand is damaged in many places.”<sup>57</sup> This suggests that there may have been other texts but they were too damaged to include.

The entries in the diary for 1894 were very short and dealt mainly with administrative matters while briefly noting any important events of each day. Although most of the entries were short it was clear that from this moment on Gandhi took the writing of a diary very seriously. And unlike his earlier attempts at diary writing the function of this diary was to record daily events as they occurred. This section of the diary does not read like a personal diary of one’s own musings but more as a list of work completed to remind Gandhi himself of the each day’s events. The style of writing lacks the descriptive and emotive language of his earlier diary and often names and places are written in short hand. The notational nature of the diary entries makes it very difficult to read this diary on its own as it does not provide enough information for one to gain a clear picture of Gandhi’s daily activities. However the diary is still useful in providing some idea of the key activities dominating Gandhi’s life, as well as the key figures he interacted with during this period.

The main events noted by Gandhi in these pages related to his work activities. He noted down the many people he met in terms of the legal profession as well as the responses he received to the various petitions he drafted. It also becomes clear that even though Gandhi had just arrived, he was speedily roped into dealing with the political and legal issues affecting the merchant class Indians in both Transvaal and Natal.

Abdoolla, Rustomji, two coolies and myself went to Maritzburg. Saw there Labistour who congratulated me on the petition but could not help in any way

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55 The diaries that Gandhi wrote during his stay in South Africa which started on the 22 June 1894 and ended on the 19 September 1894 will be referred to in this thesis as the first South African diary. Please note that this only includes diaries contained in the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* as this archive is the focus of this thesis.

56 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896),122.

57 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896), 12

although the [prayer] was very just. Saw Escombe & Hitchins who also admitted the justice but could not help. Attended the 3rd reading which was postponed. Wrote a long letter to Dr. Stroud; also to Barn De Matalha, [Jennings] & to Tayob. About 100 Indians met. Spoke to them for 45[minutes]. Exhorted them to talk less & work more, to have [unanimity] & to subscribe.<sup>58</sup> The speech seemed to have made a favourable impression. Paul came and said he was going to work seriously.<sup>59</sup>

The above excerpts read very much like an inventory list. The practice of keeping a list of the day’s labour is similar to a bookkeeper who keeps an account of finances. This practice of accounting for his day would have allowed Gandhi to live with far more awareness of how he spent his day, similar to an accountant who can tally every cent spent. Secondly, it becomes apparent from the above excerpt that Gandhi became a celebrity within two days of arriving in Durban. According to Meer, Gandhi’s popularity might have had something to do with his name being mentioned in the newspapers on the 26<sup>th</sup> May 1893. This was due to Gandhi causing a commotion in court when he refused to remove his turban.<sup>60</sup>

He also seems to have overcome the fear of public speaking that so plagued him a year earlier making it impossible for him to practice law in India. Although the diary provides a clear account of Gandhi’s political and legal work there is very little discussion about his personal transformation. This diary therefore does not provide the researcher with much to work with when trying to understand the shift in Gandhi’s persona. He managed to transform himself from a *vakeel* who, by his own account, when cross examining felt that his “heart sank into my boots. My head was reeling and I felt as though the whole court was doing likewise. I could not think of no question to ask,”<sup>61</sup> to a serious lawyer and then an important, cunning and sophisticated political player in Southern Africa and later world politics.

The first diary written in Transvaal was mainly a record of daily appointments and work. There were no real personal reflections in this diary. However what becomes apparent is Gandhi’s importance in South Africa from this early period onwards. It clear that Gandhi’s engagement with texts becomes

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58 By subscribe here I think Gandhi is referring to a more general lifestyle subscription.

59 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896), 123.

60 Meer (Ed) *The South African Gandhi*, 109.

61 Meer (Ed) *The South African Gandhi*, 81.

fundamental to his daily activities whether it was; writing petitions, letters, and telegrams, translating, or copying. What is also clear from these diary entries is that as a letter-writer Gandhi interacted with many colonial officials, both low ranking officers, as well prominent public figures.

JULY 4, WEDNESDAY

Received a letter from Bird also [regarding] deputation that waited upon Premier.

Received a letter from Tayob

Wrote to Bird, [also] to Tayob. Telegraphed to Campbell who [replied that the] petition was presented [but ruled] out of order. Telegraphed again . . . [Ordered] post all the lette[rs to the] members. Translated for Abdoolla

JULY 5, THURSDAY

Received a letter from Campbell as to how petition was ruled out of order. Also a letter from Tatham. Drafted another long petition to Council

Sent it with a letter to Campbell

Drafted a letter in reply to Tatham, and sent it.

JULY 6, FRIDAY

Received a letter from Bird saying petition to Home Government may be printed and their original signatures need not be applied to the other two copies. [Wrote to Miabhai] a long letter and also to Brother

Received a letter from Ramsay & the book . . .<sup>62</sup>

It is evident that Gandhi, through his various public writings, had established himself as an important person in Natal and Transvaal by 1894. This was especially so amongst both the merchant Indians and the various government officials. Despite his popularity he was still uncertain about whether he was going to stay in Natal or return to India. His family assumed that he would be coming to South Africa to attend to just one case and then return back to India. On Saturday July 28<sup>th</sup> Gandhi's brother sent him a postcard requesting that he return home.<sup>63</sup>

Regardless of the pressure to return home to India, Gandhi decided to stay in South Africa.

Although his first year in South Africa was taken up with the legal dispute he was initially retained to mediate, he very quickly became involved in local issues facing Indian businessmen in South Africa.

Even though there is no existing diary of this period in Gandhi's life we can once again deduce something about his life from the letters he wrote to his contacts in the Vegetarian Society.

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62 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896), 125.

63 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896),128

Gandhi wrote many letters to the Vegetarian Society describing his attempts to convert various individuals including his landlady to vegetarianism:

“I am so glad to say I have been able to induce my landlady, who is an English woman, to become a vegetarian, and bring up her children on a vegetarian diet, but I am afraid she will slide down. Proper vegetables cannot be had here.”<sup>64</sup>

Although the diary so far was filled with administrative duties it does become clear over time that Gandhi was growing in stature amongst certain sectors of Indians in the colony. This was apparent when Gandhi was asked to speak to a group of young boys about self-control and discipline. Gandhi was increasingly becoming an expert in practising regimes of self-control in his diet and disciplined in his daily practices of writing.

Sunday, June 7<sup>th</sup>

A letter from Jayshanker and one from Ruffe. The educated youths (Indian) about . . . assembled. I spoke to them for \_ hours on political activity, drunkenness and self-respect. They seemed to have been favourably impressed.<sup>65</sup>

The diary goes on to describe minor details of Gandhi’s daily work activity including the writing of letters to newspapers and payment of money to various people. This entry makes it apparent that Gandhi was becoming more aware of how he was spending his time and his increasing drive to use his time with maximum efficiency. In addition, to providing an account of Gandhi’s daily administrative activities the diary presents evidence of continued engagement with the Vegetarian Society. He not only tried to convert people to vegetarianism in his personal encounters but also began to request the publication of Vegetarian Society articles in local newspapers. He also continued to develop his interest in the Theosophical Society.

Additionally the diary provides an account of people Gandhi personally met. These entries are not detailed but are rather noted in the form of appointments. However by reading this entry in conjunction with Gandhi’s letters and other document provides insight into the development of Gandhi’s personal philosophical interests during this period. Although his main intellectual

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64 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896), 64.

65 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896), 125

interlocutors were still mainly drawn from the network of friends he established while in England, he developed a new group of companions he could engage with on a more philosophical level in Transvaal. Of this new group his main conversational partner was Dr. Stroud, who was the receiver of many books that Gandhi had begun importing, on a small scale, from England.<sup>66</sup>

There are many entries in his diary about long distance discussions with Dr. Stroud about Vegetarianism. Even though Gandhi does not mention any discussions about the Theosophical society with Dr. Stroud from the letter below makes it clear that they also discussed Theosophy. The letter to Mrs. Lewis is dated 4<sup>th</sup> August 1874. Gandhi writes:

After I wrote to you last, I had occasion to come into contact with a doctor in Pretoria. He seemed to be the only gentlemen in addition to another who took interest in Theosophical subjects. I gave him *The Perfect Way* to read. He liked it so much that he wished me to get another copy for him. I made him a present of my copy.<sup>67</sup>

Gandhi does not mention any discussions with Dr. Stroud in his diaries about the Theosophical society. He does however, mention to Mrs. Lewis in the above letter that he had discussed Theosophy with a doctor in Pretoria. Dr Stroud worked in the medical unit of the military in Pretoria.<sup>68</sup> He began his discussions with Dr. Stroud almost a month earlier on 1 July 1894. Given the overlap of the letter and Gandhi’s diary entries about his discussions with Dr. Stroud we can safely assume that he was having his discussions about the Theosophical society with Dr. Stroud. This demonstrates how the diary can be used as tool to collaborate information about Gandhi’s life that is obtained from other sources.

Another valuable contribution that emerges from this section of Gandhi’s diary was the diverse range of people that Gandhi was in contact with on a daily basis. Not only was he in contact with various people in South Africa ranging from many of the various Indian businessmen who retained his services to unlikely friendships with men such as Dr. Stroud. Internationally, Gandhi kept his

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66 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896), 132.

67 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896),176.

68 Comdt. D.O. Stratford. Military Medical Services during the Old Transvaal Republic in *Military History Journal* Vol. 1 No. 1 (December 1967) accessed 10 April 2010, <http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol011ds.html>

links with his old friends such as Annie Besant from both the Theosophical and Vegetarian societies, and was also in contact with people in Zanzibar and, increasingly, in India.

Gandhi's close friends and acquaintances were made up of a variety of people not defined by narrow understandings of race, religion or geographic boundaries. Gandhi also managed to access books and literature through a global network of people interested in similar ideas about (physical / self / bodily) discipline, spirituality, diet, political action and philosophy. Gandhi was the source of various international periodicals such as the Vegetarian Society and various books, especially about the Theosophical Society and Esoteric Christianity, for many people in South Africa including Dr. Stroud.

Gandhi very quickly then, established himself in South Africa as both a prominent person amongst the merchant Indian class as well an important source of ideological information for many in South Africa. His diaries show that he was not treated as a backwater *vakeel* who was too shy to speak. He was certainly noticed, if not taken seriously from his very first day in court in South Africa and even managed an appearance in *Natal Mercury* on the 26<sup>th</sup> of May 1893. In addition, he was instrumental in fostering the fledgling political movement started by the merchant Indians.<sup>69</sup> Considering Gandhi's importance in Southern Africa it is no surprise then that he chose to remain in South Africa. He also had the independence to begin to carve out his own name independent of that weight of familial assistance and obligation which he experienced as a young man in India.<sup>70</sup>

This early diary was very different to Gandhi's later diaries. This diary does not have any additional comments on the events taking place in Gandhi's life. There are no musings about the significance of daily meetings and activities. Although this diary lacked the editorials of the later diaries it does provide an insight into the daily activities of Gandhi's life. It is also a useful collaborative source. During this period Gandhi also kept a second diary. This diary was solely concerned with Gandhi's experiments with food and dietary practices and once the experiment ceased Gandhi stopped the diary. At this stage in his life Gandhi kept two separate diaries, one for his work and one for his personal experiences. However later on in his life he combined his dietary practices, philosophical

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69 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896), 56.

70 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896), 55

musings, political work and administrative activities into one diary as he began to achieve a synthesis of his various interests into one overarching vision. It seems from both these early diaries that Gandhi was also experimenting with how best to record his life and activities. Therefore it was not only these early experiments with food and philosophy that lay the foundation for him becoming the *Mahatma*, his early experiments with writing and recording also lay the ground work for the types of texts that he would produce for the rest of his life.

#### An Experiment in Vital Food

This diary, which began was written in March 1934, was only a few pages long and was written with the intention of accounting for Gandhi's daily eating patterns and its effects. The diary becomes an account of what Gandhi ate - a list that he could measure his success or failures against, as well as keeping a record of his observations of the effects of the diet. This was the first time that the diary overtly became a tool or an aid to Gandhi's exercises in self-control and reflection. This was the beginning of the practice of using a diary as a tool for self-reflection and control, a practice he would continue and espouse for the rest of his life - writing many years later in the *Harijan* in 1935:

This mirror of the self is helpful for a purification one's self. One's bowels must move regularly, in order to keep one in a fit condition. That is physical purification. Just as this physical purification is necessary for the health of the body, even so spiritual purification is necessary for the health of the soul. In fact the necessity for physical cleanliness is in inverse proportion to the necessity for spiritual cleanliness. That is to say, spiritual cleanliness means automatic physical cleanliness. Have we not heard that a yogi's body emits a fragrant smell? The 'fragrant' smell means here the absence of bad smell.

*Harijan* 6-7-1935<sup>71</sup>

Gandhi was interested in the ideas espoused by the Vegetarian Society from around 1849. Vital Foods was a dietary concept supported and written about by Dr. A.F. Hills, president of the Vegetarian Federal Union in 1893. His article on vital foods was first presented in 1889 at the quarterly Vegetarian Society meeting and was later published in 1893 in the Vegetarian Society publication. The basic premise of Hill's argument was that raw foods were alive with the energy and

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71 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 67 (25 April, 1935 - 22 September, 1935), 232.

health of the sun and that therefore humans must rather eat raw foods instead of cooked dead food like meats which have no energy to pass on.<sup>72</sup>

After reading the article by Dr. A.F. Hills in the Vegetarian Society publication in 1893 Gandhi was inspired by the idea of making a public experiment of eating only raw food.<sup>73</sup> Influenced by the article Gandhi took up the experiment with earnest and kept a diary of his experiment. This *Vital Food* diary of Gandhi's was published the following year on the 23 of March 1894 by the Vegetarian Society.<sup>74</sup>

The *Vital Foods* diary begins with a recollection of having previously conducted a trial in Vital Foods in Bombay for a week. It was also presented as a complete account of the experiment with a prelude to the diary. Unlike his first diary in South Africa that arbitrarily began on the 22 June 1894 and ended abruptly on 19 September 1894, the *Vital Foods* diary started at the beginning of his undertaking with a clear introduction and ended with concluding observations on the experiment. Another point to note is that although this diary was written in 1893 and published in March 1894 by the Vegetarian Society it appears in the *CWVG* after the first diary which was written years earlier. It is not clear why this is the case as there is no explanation offered in the notes. The diaries in the collection are not ordered by chronology, theme or narrative.

His experiment began on 22 August 1893. This diary was very detailed and provided an account of both Gandhi's food as well as the physical and mental effects of the diet. One thing which becomes apparent is that the experiment did not initially agree with Gandhi.

August 23<sup>rd</sup>: Feeling hungry, had some peas last evening. Owing to that I did not sleep well, and woke up with a bad taste in the mouth in the morning. Had the same breakfast and dinner as yesterday. Though the day was very dull and it rained a little, I had no headache or cold. Had tea with Baker did not agree at all. Felt pain the stomach.

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72 Julia Twigg. *The Vegetarian Movement in England, 1847-1981: A Study in the Structure of its Ideology*, Accessed 11 April 2010, <http://www.ivu.org/history/thesis/life.html>.

73 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896), 64

74 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896), 139.



August 24<sup>th</sup>: In the morning woke up uneasy, with a heavy stomach. Had the same breakfast, except that the one spoonful of peas was reduced to half. The usual dinner. Did not feel well. Had feeling of indigestion the whole day.<sup>75</sup>

The next few entries in this diary continue in the same vein with detailed descriptions of both food intake as well as its physical and mental effects. Eventually on the evening of 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1893 Gandhi calls off the experiment as he was feeling too ill. He thereafter recorded his observations of the experiment in the same diary. To Gandhi the experiment was a failure. He does not question or blame the philosophy or practice of vital foods for his own illness during the experiment but rather the lack of availability of good food in South Africa to sustain the experiment. He however did note that the Vital Food proponents were over optimistic in their regard for this lifestyle when advocating that it would lead to immortality:

Vital food may have its grand possibilities in store; but it will surely not make our perishable bodies immortal. That any considerable majority of human being would ever do way with cooking does not seem feasible. The vital food will not, cannot, as such minister to the wants of the soul.<sup>76</sup>

The reason for him undertaking this experiment in the first place was a matter of trying to live simply. It was not driven by any desire of attaining immortality or spiritual purification. He hoped that if the experiment was successful he would cut out the difficulty of cooking and trying to eat properly while living in less than ideal circumstances. His reservation at having his landlady cook for him hints at Gandhi harbouring reservations of having strangers cook food for him. This was probably due to him retaining residual prejudice about who prepared his food that was encouraged by the caste practices that he was schooled in from childhood. It could have also been due to him wanting to have complete control and knowledge over what he put into his body as he could not always be sure of what other cooks put into their meals.

I would dispense with cooking that I could carry about my own food wherever I went, that I should not have to put up with any uncleanness<sup>77</sup> of the landlady or

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75 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896), 136

76 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896), 139.

77 By uncleanness Gandhi is not referring to hygiene but rather to caste norms around food.

those who supplied me with food, that, in travelling in such countries as South Africa.<sup>78</sup>

There are no surviving diaries for the years between 1894 and 1912.<sup>79</sup> Even though there is no evidence between the two diaries to suggest that Gandhi kept a diary it is unlikely that Gandhi did not keep a diary, even if intermittently. Rather, we can assume that the diaries that he did write between 1893 and 1912 have not survived to the present. Given Gandhi's earlier and later reliance on the diary as a tool of reflection of the changes he experienced it is improbable that Gandhi did not keep an account of the momentous changes that he had experienced in the first ten years of the twentieth century. It could also be that the almost daily practice of writing for the *Indian Opinion* from 1903 onwards, which in itself also had something of the form of the diary, temporarily replaced the daily practice of diary writing.

However by 1912 Gandhi was able to or ready to publish another set of diaries. In these diaries the Gandhi we encounter was very different to the young lawyer in 1894. By this stage Gandhi had been living in South Africa for just less than twenty years. He had by now firmly established his reputation as a serious anti-colonial political thinker both globally and in South Africa. In addition he had already developed his ideology of *Satyagraha* and in 1909 wrote *Hind Swaraj* on his return journey from London.<sup>80</sup> The *Indian Opinion*, which began in 1903, was still in publication<sup>81</sup>. He had also undertaken a passive resistance campaign in 1908 against the carrying of passes. Gandhi had also already been back to India twice and made links with many of the more conservative members of the Indian Congress. By 1912 he was still living at the Tolstoy Farm in Johannesburg which he had opened in 1910. It was to be a *Satyagrahi* farm run on the same principles of the Phoenix Settlement which Gandhi opened in 1904.

This later memoir is the diary of a man secure with his place in the world. This was a diary of someone who has already developed a clear pattern of collecting, recording and storing material

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78 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896), 139.

79 This does not mean that Gandhi did not write any other diaries. This diary however is included in the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*.

80 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 010 (5 August, 1909– 9 April, 1910), 245.

81 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 003 (1 August, 1903 -21 May, 1904), 78.

pertinent to his life. This diary, like Gandhi’s early travel diary, which was written for the Vegetarian Society, as well as his *Vital Foods* diary, were all written for publication. It was written during his time at the Tolstoy farm and his political and personal life in Transvaal including his correspondence with Jan Smuts.<sup>82</sup>

These brief memoranda were made by Gandhiji from day to day on a copy of “Indian Opinion Pocket book Diary for 1912” published by the International Printing Press, Phoenix, and advertised for the first time in Indian Opinion, 6-1-1912. It measures 4 by 3.(Crowns ex to - Decimo size) Written in Gandhiji’s hand, it contains most part, names of persons he wrote to each day and visited him at Tolstoy Farm and references to his visits to Johannesburg and Phoenix.<sup>83</sup>

Even though this diary was published, it did not follow the same pattern as his earlier published diaries.<sup>84</sup> The diary begins on 15 January 1912. It begins with six entries in the forms of one line notes and an account ledger as illustrated below:

JANUARY 17, WEDNESDAY  
Went to town—Met the Committee on Crematorium near the  
graveyard—  
Wire 0. 1. 0  
Freight Salt 0. 1. 0  
Paper 0. 0. 3  

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Bal[ance] £ 2. 13. 10<sup>85</sup>

It was only on Sunday 21 January 1912 that Gandhi began to write more detailed entries. He added to ledger style entries names of visitors and reasons for their visits as well as his trips to Johannesburg. One of the key aspects which emerged about Gandhi’s life on Tolstoy farm was that he had managed to accumulate a close cohort of people who made repeated appearances in the diary. Amongst the close circle of people living with Gandhi at Tolstoy were Hermann Kallenbach, Sonia Schlesin, Henry Polak, Mr. and Mrs. Roche, Coopoo Mudaliar, Thambi Naidoo, and Cachalia, to name a few. These were the people he most often interacted with on a daily basis. It was during

<sup>82</sup> *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 012 (15 July, 1911 – 8 March, 1913), 301.

<sup>83</sup> *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 012 (15 July, 1911 – 8 March, 1913), 296.

<sup>84</sup> *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 012 (15 July, 1911 – 8 March, 1913), 301.

<sup>85</sup> *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 012 (15 July, 1911 – 8 March, 1913), 296.

this time at Tolstoy farm that he also kept in contact with various people in England, India, Pretoria and Durban. His correspondence during this period also included regular letters to Jan Smuts.<sup>86</sup>

The communication between Gandhi and Smuts began in 1907 during the consideration of the Immigration Restriction Law.<sup>87</sup> The diary does not provide details about the correspondence but the entries can be cross referenced with the petitions, telegrams and letters in the rest of *CW/MG*. In addition, it is clear that Gandhi and the Natal and Transvaal Indian Congress were concerned about the Immigration Bill which dealt with the regulation of Indian immigration.<sup>88</sup>

Although Gandhi continued to account for his political activities and administrative obligations in this diary he also began to briefly note his dietary schedule. His meetings and his various appointments illustrate the prominence that Gandhi had achieved both locally and, to an extent, internationally. His international prominence was not just limited to England but also in the greater region of Southern Africa. Gandhi’s popularity in the region was evident from the amount of travelling Gandhi undertook during his last years in South Africa. In 1912 itself he travelled regularly between Transvaal and Durban as well as making trips to Bloemfontein and even to Mozambique on the 17<sup>th</sup> of November 1912.<sup>89</sup> In addition to his regular travels’ Gandhi’s political popularity extended far beyond the Indian merchant classes in South Africa. He seems to have built upon his earlier networks of international activists and pacifists’ receiving regular visits from Olive Schreiner as well as meeting with the local Chinese community. Most influential amongst the people in Gandhi’s life during this period was Mr. Gopal Krishna Gokhale - a founding member of the Indian National Congress.<sup>90</sup>

Although this 1912 diary was mainly a collection of appointments and tasks Gandhi began to introduce and include his dietary habits, physical discipline and spiritual experiences into his diary writing. His earlier diaries either deal with administrative and political matters or his dietary and

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86 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 012 (15 July, 1911 – 8 March, 1913), 307.

87 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 006 (5 November, 1906- 12 June, 1907), 317.

88 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 006 (5 November, 1906- 12 June, 1907), 320.

89 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 012 (15 July, 1911 – 8 March, 1913), 351.

90 Bal Ram Nanda. Gokhale: *The Indian Moderates and the British Raj* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998)

philosophical musings. These two aspects of Gandhi’s life are kept separate in his initial foray into diary writing. However as Gandhi the person became more certain about his political, spiritual and lifestyle choices he began to integrate all these aspects and developed his notions of *Satyagraha*. The 1912 diary is written evidence of how Gandhi was becoming far more comfortable with integrating all the different aspects of his life and was willing to make public his more esoteric and unusually spiritual, disciplinary and political practices.

In fact, by the time we get to the diaries towards the end of his life there is no apparent distinction between his spirituality, politics, philosophy and notions of physical and mental discipline. His bowel movements, and his experiments with *Brahmacharya*, are given the same attention as his political action and marches. The constant and disciplined notation of bowel movements and sexual desire was not only an expectation Gandhi placed on himself, it was also expected from his *satyagrahis*. Gandhi encouraged his *satyagrahis* to keep diaries so that they could become aware of and control many of their daily activities. It was also a way for Gandhi to control his *satyagrahis* daily activities as he often read the diaries of his *satyagrahis*. Leading by example Gandhi also sought to account for and control all aspects of his daily life, which was probably far more necessary given the outward disarray and conflict in India during this period of partition.

After the morning prayer, tried to study the outline of Bengali numeral one and to improve the outline of the second numeral. Next struggles unsuccessfully for about ten minutes to understand the distinction between nio and nao (future imperative and present indicative respectively of the Bengali verb ‘take’). In the meantime Mary brought orange juice. Put the same question to her. She too failed to give a satisfactory explanation. That accounted for another ten minutes. Sent for Nirmalbabu. Put the pose to him in turn. He fared a little better but in the end he, too, gave up perplexed. In between he handed Sardar Gill’s file. That started a conversation about Gill. This went on till 6:35. Wrote a letter to A. Then lay down to rest for about ten minutes; got up at 7:25, inspected the trench latrine and set out on the day’s march.<sup>91</sup>

Here, as is often the case, it quickly becomes apparent that Gandhi's commitment to a rigid discipline incorporated a concern for orderly grammar, filing, keeping up with correspondence and a concern for equally orderly toilet practice. The march Gandhi referred to here was the march he undertook in protest at both the partition of India and the violence that ensued. The above excerpt

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91 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896), 39

is an excellent example of the integration of the various aspects of Gandhi’s life that has come to be at the centre of the dominant representation of Gandhi. It is as if this image of Gandhi as the Mahatma was gifted as a symbol fully formed to represent anti-colonial and all oppressed peoples’ struggles. The developments of Gandhi’s political and philosophical principles are very rarely interrogated in terms of his experiences in both England and South Africa. A close reading of his various texts, including his early South African diaries, illustrate the experimentation and evolution of both Gandhi’s politics and daily practices.

Although Gandhi’s South African diaries differed from the later Indian diaries in terms of content and style, one of the central points of commonality between all the diaries contained in the *CWMG* was that they were all published during Gandhi’s lifetime. In fact Gandhi himself published most of the excerpts from his diaries, whether it was an account of an entire year or just a day. Additionally, an examination of the different diary provides us with essential evidence in attempting to understand Gandhi’s evolution into the Mahatma.

The only diary that was written without the intention of publication was the first diary in the *Collected Works*. This diary tends to differ from the later diaries in terms of not only the content but also the style. This early diary seems to be written more honestly and is characterised by his preoccupation with his fears and minor problems about acquiring food and making friends. Although the second diary written for the Vegetarian Society discusses food and recreation it is evident that it is being written for an audience. Gandhi’s earlier diary often rambles on about his own fears and preoccupation and was written very clumsily. It not only illustrated the novelty of Gandhi’s experiences but also that Gandhi was a novice diarist. Gandhi as a diarist was writing out of a desire to capture the experience for his own purposes of recollection and not to engage a wider audience. The diary commissioned by the Vegetarian Society was written for an audience - an audience interested in travel and probably travelling to India.

Gandhi wrote this diary as if he was a seasoned traveller even though it was only his second voyage. The return diary which was written for publication differs in terms of content to his diary in South Africa. The diaries were written with the same confidence and the intention of the diaries was to illustrate a point or narrate an experience to the audience even if the experience was just a lesson on how to keep a diary.

Another important way in which Gandhi used his diary was as an illustrative or explanatory tool. His 1912 diary in South Africa was published to illustrate how to keep a diary. In India he continued to publish his diaries, but this time it was used as a means to explain or to provide an account of his perspective. This is evident in the excerpt of his diary he published in 1920 on his thoughts on the lifestyle of a *swarajist*.<sup>92</sup>

Gandhi’s use of the diary as a public tool to demonstrate inward thinking and self-reflection did not end in South Africa. On his return and establishment of himself as a formidable figure in Indian politics Gandhi began calling once again for the diary as a tool of reflection. This time however he also used the diary as tool not only to reflect upon his daily activities but also of his satyagrahis.

Writing in the *Harjjan* in 1940 Gandhi asked that all:

...prospective satyagrahi is expected to keep a log-book (or diary) in which he will daily enter the work done during the course of the day and the log-book shall be submitted to me through the P.C.C. concerned at stated intervals, say, fortnightly or monthly. After going through the diaries I shall grant permission for satyagraha to deserving persons. Others will have to follow the said course till they get permission: *Harjjan* dated 18th of August 1940.<sup>93</sup>

He would read the diary and then provide comment on writing style, content, as well as advice about the predicaments facing the diarist. It was also used as a means for Gandhi to learn about what was happening in his disciple’s life as illustrated below in the remarks he wrote in the diary of a young boy Sailendra Nath Chatterjee in 1941:

I have never undertaken to read diaries word for word. I gave most attention to yours. To be read, you must be brief. You are prolific. You have written almost an essay. I have read all the marked parts. I can give no guarantee as to the pay. You will get what you are worth. Anything more will be charity. Today you are a burden and you will be still greater when you are studying. But if you begin to earn, you reduce the burden and will presently save. This means hard and honest labour. I hope you will do this. You are not attending to your diet. You must control it or let

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92 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896), 351.

93 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 80 (28 December, 1940 - 17 August, 1941), 253.

Dr. Das control it. I am quite sure, I was right in stopping message you are becoming too soft.<sup>94</sup>

What is interesting about the above excerpt is the assumption that the diary as a textual style is the site of truthful introspection even when it was intended for public consumption. Gandhi seems to be satisfied that the style of the writing rather than its content guaranteed its truthfulness. By this I mean that the text, regardless of its content, was rendered truthful because it was written in the form of a diary. This conclusion is also supported by him taking the confession in Sailendra’s diary to represent his most honest reflections. He did not consider that Sailendra may have only included certain aspects of his life in this diary and, furthermore, that he may only have written things down with the intention of satisfying the expectation of Gandhi, the reader.

### Conclusion

The diaries that Gandhi wrote over his lifetime changed in terms of content and style. As a young man his diaries were mainly his reflections about the world rather than an inward reflection of the self. The early style of his two London diaries therefore seemed to indicate a clear intention of writing to be read. In fact, as noted above, the second diary to appear in the *CWMG* was written for an audience from the outset as it was commissioned by the Vegetarian Society. From the evidence in the *CWMG* it seems that these early diaries were kept intermittently by Gandhi either when he remembered or when he was commissioned to write one. There is also no evidence of a diary being kept while he was back in India for the short stay in 1892. He only began to keep a diary again once he was in South Africa. From this evidence one can deduce that at this point and time in Gandhi’s life he kept a diary as a record of a momentous occasions and new experiences rather than an everyday account of his life.

However once Gandhi had established himself in South Africa we find that he began to keep a diary again. These diaries consist of short daily notes and points. Although these entries lack the reflexive aspect of conventional diaries it does provide more of a framework for Gandhi’s life in South Africa.

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94 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001(1884 – 30 November, 1896), 16



It is only during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that we begin to see excerpts that are far more fitting of a conventional diary format and content that is about introspection and the desire for self-understanding. Gandhi’s latter diaries therefore, contain not only his daily appointment book, but also the various philosophical, political and spiritual issues. These diaries in a sense are more in keeping with the traditional notion of a diary, which according to Barber enables a particular form of self-reflection that allows you to “reflect upon, erase and correct what you have written and thus monitor and refashion your sense of self.”<sup>95</sup>

Even though these later diaries are closer to conventional notions of a diary Gandhi was always willing to publish his diary. In fact, he sent excerpts of his diary to be published by the *Indian Opinion* in 1912.<sup>96</sup> Later still, in India, he uses the diary as a means to explain his highly controversial experiments with *Brahamcharya*.<sup>97</sup> Here, once again, Gandhi seemed to be sufficiently convinced that the form of text influences the validity of the claims in the content of the text.

This close reading of the diary reveals various facets of Gandhi's reliance on writing and its contribution in turning an insecure young lawyer on the global periphery into the Mahatma, a world historical figure. Gandhi’s original project of diary writing was not necessarily one of self-reflection. These writings provide us with a view of a young Gandhi out in the world and his role within these new experiences. But, from the beginning, he had a public audience in mind. His diaries also according to him should be used to educate younger people leaving India to go to London. On his return to India he was sufficiently confident to secure a publication of his diary informing the readership of the Vegetarian Society about the impressions of an Indian abroad. In this way Gandhi himself becomes one of the colonised informing and shaping the colonisers.<sup>98</sup>

Once in South Africa Gandhi’s diaries initially resemble appointment books. They do provide the researcher with a detailed map of Gandhi’s time but there is not much in terms of outward or

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95 Barber. *The Anthropology*, 180

96 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 001 (1884 – 30 November, 1896), 1913.

97 Vinay Lal. *Of Cricket, Guinness and Gandhi: Essay on Indian History and Culture* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2003).

98 Burton. *At the Heart of the Empire*, 3.

inward gazing. By 1912, Gandhi was once again publishing excerpts of his diary. This time it was not only the content of the diary that was important but he also wished to teach his followers in South Africa the importance of keeping a diary. Through the publication of the 1912 diary Gandhi was promoting the diary itself as a text. Gandhi by this time believed that keeping an account of your daily activity encouraged one to live consciously. However, Gandhi's experiments with diary writing do not stop here. Once in India Gandhi often takes to publishing excerpts from his diary. In this instance the diary was important both for content and textual format. In fact, by now the diary came to stand for honest reflection to Gandhi, and therefore the content was only rendered important because of the format in which it appears.

Gandhi consciously or unconsciously sought to optimised the perceived nature of the diary as a site of truthful contemplation. This was especially evident when he used his diary extracts to influence public political discourse. For Gandhi, the diary came to be used as a public confessional tool which demonstrated that the Mahatma, like all mortals, grappled with inner demons and contradictory beliefs around political, philosophical and spiritual questions. Gandhi's public display of his inner ramblings from his diary, which has always been popularly perceived to be the site of truthful introspection, meant that he became viewed as political figure who did not divide his world into the public and private. This implied that he was an open book with no secrets or hidden agendas and therefore all that he said or wrote must be viewed as the truth.

The evolution of the various uses of the diary in Gandhi's life is important for the purposes of a researcher in many regards. Firstly, it demonstrates the various changes and relationships Gandhi had with diary writing and if, we take this further, it may enable us to point to different experiences Gandhi himself may have been going through. For example, in his first decade in South Africa, Gandhi may have been very politically active, and in terms of work very busy and not much given to self-reflection and introspection. Secondly, the diary becomes a means for him not only to reflect upon his own behaviour but later on in his life it becomes a means of engaging and controlling the lives of his political and philosophical followers. An investigation into the diaries also demonstrates how, at different times, the diary could be used for different ends and just because content appears in a particular format does not mean that it follows the rules of that format.