

AN EXPERIMENT WITH UNTRUTH

Crucial entries found in the earlier edition are missing, names are misspelt and the index is confusing. The revised edition of Mahatma Gandhi's collected works is an insult to scholarship.

By Uday Mahurkar

In 1956 when the Union Government decided to publish the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, it set up an advisory board chaired by Morarji Desai. At one time or the other, the board has had such eminent members as Gandhi's secretary Pyarelal, his Yeravada Jail companion Kaka Kalelkar, poet Ramdhari Singh Dinkar and Gandhi's son, journalist Devdas Gandhi.

The project closed with the publication of the 100th volume in 1994, only for the Information and Broadcasting (I&B) Ministry to reopen it four years later to re-edit the volumes, ostensibly to bring in "uniformity, strict chronology and authenticity". Clearly, it is a job not well done because a group of Gandhians led by Chunibhai Vaidya has now demanded the immediate scrapping of the new edition and its replacement with the original.

There are as many inaccuracies as there are omissions. Crucial letters carry wrong names, some names are misspelt, and the indexing is confused—so much so that Gandhian research could be seriously affected. Take the will Gandhi signed on June 19, 1909, in Johannesburg, transferring his personal property, including the real estate connected with the Phoenix Farm and the printing press which published his weekly *Indian Opinion*, to a set of trustees—among them close friend and architect Hermann Kallenbach, Rustomji Jeevanji and

Omar Haji Amod of Durban and barrister Lewis Walter Ritch of Johannesburg. Gandhi specified in the will: "My heirs shall not have any rights to this property." This important document is missing in the revised English and Hindi editions as well as the CD capsuling the works, which was released in 2001.

The blunders came to light only two years after the new edition was published when Tridip Suhrud, an Ahmedabad-based scholar with a doctorate on Gandhian social thought, started referring to it. When he found that some of the letters were missing or were attributed to wrong people, Suhrud screened volumes 91 to 98. To his dismay, he found that as many as 100 entries were missing in



SHAIKESH RAVAL

LOST IN EDITING

■ The will signed by Gandhi in Johannesburg on June 19, 1909, transferring his property to a set of trustees is missing in the revised version and the CD on his works.

■ Thirty of the 250 important Gandhi-Kallenbach letters are absent in the CD.

■ Volume 98 of the original edition had 324 letters under the name of Bhave Vinoba. The new one has only 175 under two versions of the name.

■ There were 382 entries under the name of the Frontier Gandhi, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, in volume 98 of the original edition. The new edition has only 115 entries on him under four names.

these eight volumes alone. Says Suhrud: "I believe at least 500 entries are missing in the CD version while the number in the print version could be around 300."

While some of the entries might be avoidable, the real adverse consequence of the missing entries is for the scholars who have already published works on Gandhi using these entries. For example, Thomas Weber, an Australian considered to be an accomplished scholar on the historic Dandi March, is anxious about his latest work on Gandhi for which he has used the CD as source material. Says Weber, who teaches at the University of La Trobe, Australia: "After working hard on the subject and spending so much time, I realise that my research is incomplete. I will have to go back to the original version now."

Around 30 of the 250 crucial Gandhi-Kallenbach letters are missing in the CD version. Kallenbach's is an

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TRIDIP SUHRUD, GANDHIAN SCHOLAR



the entries on him are in four different names and even then they add up to only 115.

The letters of Adajania Sohrabji Shapurji, who took active part in Gandhi's Satyagraha movement in South Africa but died early, too have met the same fate in the new edition. There are 173 entries in his name in volume 95 of the original edition while in the new edition this figure has been reduced to 147.

Ask Vaidya, an eminent Gandhian who even today lives in the Sabarmati Ashram at Ahmedabad: "How can source material on such an important figure be tampered with by people about whose competence we have no knowledge?" Adds Amrut Modi, in-charge of the Sabarmati Ashram: "Corrective measures must be carried out speedily or else the new edition will get unofficial sanction once scholars use it as source material on a large scale."

Curiously enough, no one knows who edited the new edition. Nor is it known who in the NDA govern-



"We don't have any knowledge about the competence of the tamperers."

CHUNIBHAI VAIDYA,
EMINENT GANDHIAN



"The flaws must be corrected before scholars start using the new edition."

AMRUT MODI,
IN-CHARGE, SABARMATI ASHRAM

important chapter in Gandhi's tenure in South Africa because he not only gifted 1,100 acres of his land for Gandhi's Tolstoy Farm but was a partner in his experiments. While communicating with Kallenbach, Gandhi used to address him as "Lower House" while calling himself "Upper House". His letter to Kallenbach would invariably begin with "My dear Lower House". Instead of signing it he would write, "Upper House". But there is a series of complex mismatches in volume 74. For example, a letter written by Gandhi to Kallenbach on January 20, 1938, is attributed to Prabhudayal Vidyarthi.

Then in volume 98 of the original, there were 324 entries of letters under the name of Bhave Vinoba. But

in the new edition the number of entries under that name is only 131 while there are another 44 entries under the name of Vinoba Bhave. But even if the lists of entries under both the names of Vinoba Bhave are considered, the number of letters in the name of the great leader of the Bhoodan movement adds up to only 175. That means 149 entries which existed in the original are missing in the new edition.

There are similar blunders with regard to entries on the Frontier Gandhi, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, a great associate of Gandhi who stood like a rock behind him in the worst of times. There are 382 entries under his name in volume 98 of the original version. But in the new edition,

ernment in 1998 decided to edit the original edition and bring out a new version. The publisher's note—in this case the Publications Division of the I&B Ministry—in the revised edition says: "The objective of the series is to reproduce Gandhiji's actual words as far as possible; reports of his speeches, interviews, conversations which did not seem to be authentic have been avoided, as also reports of his statements in indirect form."

Suhrud says there should have been a public debate over whether the new edition should have been brought out and how before the government actually embarked on the project.

Perhaps even now it is not too late. ■