

# Speech at Montessori Training College Mohandas K. Gandhi

London , [ October 28, 1931 ]

*(Note: Dr. Maria Montessori met Mahatma Gandhi in the beginning of October, 1931 in London. And on October 28, 1931 Gandhi spoke at the Montessori Training College, London where Dr. Montessori was also in attendance. The following is the text of Gandhi's Speech, which was published in the weekly newspaper, Young India , on November 19, 1931. For further information and/or discussions on this topic, please contact Shall Sinha at [shall@ssinha.com](mailto:shall@ssinha.com) )*

Madame, you have overwhelmed me with your words. It is perfectly true, I must admit it in all humility, which however indifferently it may be, I endeavor to represent love in every fiber of my being. I am impatient to realize the presence of my Maker, Who to me embodies Truth, and in the early part of my career I discovered that if I was to realize Truth I must obey, even at the cost of my life, the law of love. And having been blessed with children, I discovered that the law of Love could be best understood and learned through little children.

Were it not for us, their ignorant poor parents, our children would be perfectly innocent. I believe implicitly that the child is not born mischievous in the bad sense of the term. If parents would behave themselves whilst the child is growing, before it is born and after, it is a well-known fact that the child would instinctively obey the law of Truth and the law of Love.

And when I understood this lesson in the early part of my life, I began a gradual but distinct change in life. I do not propose to describe to you the several phases through which this stormy life of mine has passed, but I can only, in truth and in perfect humility, bear witness to the fact that to the extent that I have represented Love in my life, in thought, word and deed I have realized the "peace that passeth understanding". I have baffled many of my friends when they have noticed in me peace that they have envied, and they have asked me for the cause of that priceless possession. I have not been able to explain the cause by saying that, if my friends found that peace in me, it was due to my attempt to obey this, the greatest law of our being.

It was in 1915 when I reached India , that I first became acquainted with your activities. It was in a place called Amreli that I found that there was a little school being conducted after the Montessori system. Your name had preceded that first acquaintance. I found no difficulty in finding out at once that this school was not carrying out the spirit of your teaching; the letter was there, but whilst there was an honest - more or less honest - effort being made, I saw too that there was a great deal of tinsel about it. I came in touch, then, with more such schools, and the more I came in touch, the more I began to understand that the foundation was good and splendid, if the children could be taught through the laws of nature - nature, consistent with human dignity, not nature that governs the beast. I felt instinctively from the way in which the children were being taught that, whilst they were being indifferently taught, the original teaching was conceived in obedience to this fundamental law. Since then, I have had the pleasure of coming across several of your pupils, one of whom had even made a pilgrimage to Italy and had received your personal blessings. I was looking forward to meeting the children here and you all and it was a great pleasure to me to see these children.

I had taken care to learn something about these little children. I had a foretaste of what I saw here, in Birmingham , where there is a school between which and this there is a difference. But I also saw that there also human nature was struggling to express itself. I see the same thing here and it was a matter of inexpressible joy to me that from their childhood the children were brought to understand the virtue of silence, and how, in response to the whisper from their teacher, the children came forward one after another in that pin-drop silence. It gave great joy to see all those beautiful rhythmic movements and, as I was watching those movements of the children, my whole heart went out to the millions of the children of the semi-starved villages of India, and I asked myself as my heart went out to those children, "Is it possible for me to give them those lessons and the training that are being given under your system, to those children"?

We are conducting an experiment amongst the poorest of the children in India . I do not know how far the experiment will go. We have the problem of giving real vital education to these children of India 's hovels, and we have no material means. We have to fall back upon the voluntary assistance of teachers, but when I look for teachers, they are very few, especially, teachers of the type wanted, in order to draw the best from the children through understanding, through studying their individuality and then putting the child on its own resources, as it were, on its own honor. And believe me from my experience of hundreds, I was going to say thousands, of children I know that they have perhaps a finer sense of honor than you and I have.

The greatest lessons in life if we would but stoop and humble ourselves, we would learn not from grown-up learned men, but from the so-called ignorant children. Jesus never uttered a loftier or a grander truth than when he said that wisdom cometh out of the mouths of babes. I believe it; I have noticed it in my own experience that, if we would approach babes in humility and in innocence, we would learn wisdom from them.

I must not take up your time. I have simply given you what is, at the present moment, agitating me, namely, the delicate problem, considered in human terms, of drawing out the best from these millions of children of whom I have told you. But I have learned this one lesson - that what is impossible with man is child's play with God and, if we have faith in that Divinity which presides over the destiny of the meanest of His creation, I have no doubt that all things are possible and in that final hope I live and pass my time and endeavor to obey His will. Therefore, I repeat that even as you, out of your love for children, are endeavoring to teach those children, through your numerous institutions, the best that can be brought out of them, even so I hope that it will be possible not only for the children of the wealthy and the well-to-do, but for the children of paupers to receive training of this nature. You have very truly remarked that if we are to reach real peace in this world and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with children and if they will grow up in their natural innocence, we won't have the struggle, we won't have to pass fruitless idle resolutions, but we shall go from love to love and peace to peace, until at last all the corners of the world are covered with that peace and love for which, consciously or unconsciously, the whole world is hungering.

*Young India , 19-11-1931*

## **Interview With Maria Montessori**

LONDON ,

[*On or before October 9, 1931* ]

Gandhiji greeting her, said, “We are members of the same family”.

“I bring you the greetings of children,” said Madame Montessori.

**GANDHIJI:** If you have children I have children too. Friends in India ask me to imitate you. I say to them, no, I should not imitate you but should assimilate you and the fundamental truth underlying your method.

**MADAME MONTESSORI:** As I am asking my own children to assimilate the heart of Gandhiji. I know that feeling for me over there in your part of the world is deeper than here.

**GANDHIJI:** Yes, you have the largest number of adherents in India outside Europe .