

Prayer  
AND OTHER SKETCHES  
of  
**MAHATMA GANDHI**

by  
DHIREN GANDHI



*Introduction*  
**THE MOODS OF A MAHATMA**

by  
G. VENKATACHALAM



Indira Gandhi National  
Centre for the Arts



NALANDA PUBLICATION



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**D**HIREN GANDHI is a grand-nephew of Gandhiji. That by itself may not mean much. Dhiren is an artist as well. That, of course, is something. But young Gandhi is also a successful illustrator and interpreter of the Mahatma's mind and moods. And that definitely is an achievement. What is still more interesting is that he is the first painter to come out of the family of the Gandhis of Porebunder.

There is a general impression, even among some of his close associates, that Gandhiji's understanding of art is lop-sided if not negative. It is true he has a Tolstoyan view of art and expresses himself thus. But that is only his mental approach to the subject. Art has an emotional appeal, more real and convincing than the intellectual, and this Gandhiji could not escape in spite of his ascetic outlook and pragmatic view. Whatever he is, he is not a puritan. More a saint than a sage, he is essentially a man of feeling and not an intellect.

Here is a revealing anecdote regarding his æsthetic reaction to painting. During one of his visits to Mysore he was shown some lovely watercolour landscape studies by K. Venkatappa, one of India's foremost artists. When looking at a picture showing the first outburst of the monsoon and the mist-clad and rain-drenched hill at Ooty, he said that he felt the chill and cold blast of the rains as if he were actually caught in the monsoon on the Nilgiri hills. People about him saw his shivering sensation ; and if I remember right the late Mahadev Desai has recorded it somewhere.

Mahatma Gandhi is a much-sought-after man by the world's publicists and photographers ; and much as he dislikes to be publicised or photographed, he remains the most written about and caricatured man in the world. That is the penalty he has to pay for being what he is. The elusive beauty of his uncomely face has been photographed by every man with a camera and from all angles, but none of them has done justice to him.

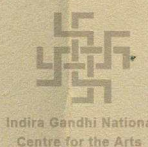
He on his part has always been unfair to artists. He has consistently refused to sit or pose for painters or sculptors, however eminent or famous they may be. Clare Sheridan, the well-known English sculptress and a close relative of Winston Churchill, was perhaps the only exception. She too had to wait and snatch such moments as he could spare to make his bust. She was proud of her masterpiece.

Other artists had to sneak in, steal their way into his room, and unobserved make quick sketches in pen, pencil or brush and make a hasty retreat before they were caught in their nefarious act. Only in exceptional cases, like those of Frieda Das and Elizabeth Brunner, did he nod an unwilling assent. Just as he accepts his daily visitors and talks to them as he spins or writes or walks, so he tolerates artists to do their best or worst as he works. Often worst is the result.

And the tragedy of it all is that even the best attempts by the most sympathetic artists result in a caricature of the man. Nandalal Bose's sketches alone do him justice ; the one master-artist who has succeeded in catching the inner beauty and strength of this strangely enigmatic and ugly person. His seemingly unattractive face has a dignity and charm which no camera has so far succeeded in recording and which only a few artists have been able to sense and recreate in their pictures. Most of them, however, have succeeded in making him look uglier than he is. His real portrait still remains to be done ; or will it ever be done at all ?

# The Moods of a MAHATMA

Six Pencil Sketches by  
DHIREN GANDHI



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And it is here that Dhiren Gandhi scores over others. His studies of Gandhiji (reproduced in this portfolio) have an intimacy and understanding lacking in most others. Some of Gandhiji's portraits have a remarkably lifelike appearance but do not reveal his soul. Often a camera will show a better lifelikeness than the laboured efforts of a portrait painter. But the function of art is not mere reproduction but recreation ; imagination is the first prerequisite for any creative work of art.

This imaginative quality characterises every one of the sketches reproduced here. It is obvious that the young artist, apart from being a close relative, is an ardent admirer and devotee of Gandhiji trying to imbibe something of his lofty idealism and ascetic temperament. We see this in his sincere attempt to present only those aspects of the Mahatma that have made an abiding impression on him. He has purposely omitted the humorous and the lighter side of his subject.

He knows his great and noble grand-uncle well. He has sat on his lap as a child and watched his changing moods ; as a young boy he played with him and about him, and was even taught by him. So it is easy for him to draw truthfully every lineament of his face and form ; and this in itself would not have been any great achievement. But Dhiren's ambition is to present not so much the man as his life's mission and message ; and in the two portfolios he has so far given he has wonderfully succeeded.

In the six wood-cuts published last year he gave us a glimpse into the soul of a *tyagi*, the martyr that is Gandhi. It is a moving record of the mortification of the flesh for a great cause and its ultimate triumph. He revealed to us the ascetic Gandhi, the man of prayer and fasts. The dark silhouette studies of an agonised soul, surrounded by sorrow-stricken followers inside a guarded prison camp, are soul-stirring in their appeal. Their emotional content is profound as they are truthful records of an historic moment in Gandhi's life.

In these sensitive pencil studies, Dhiren introduces us to another Gandhi, Gandhi the thinker, the man of meditation. Gandhiji's capacity for concentrated work and one-pointed attention is well known. In spite of his single-track mind, which is both his weak and strong point, he is a man of deep introspection. His "Inner Voice" is his imperious intuition at fever-heat ; which is the result of concentrated thinking and deep contemplation. In such moods are born his great ideas and big decisions.

It is these serious moods that the artist has attempted to portray in these pencil studies. And he has been remarkably successful. In these delicate sketches he has caught for us something of the dynamic energy of Gandhiji in moments of calm contemplation or compassionate feeling. Each one of these sketches suggests the strong dominating personality behind this man of prayer. For a man of action Gandhiji is strangely unreal and unpractical, and yet his actions are rooted in profound and logical thinking. His paradox, like life itself, mystifies one.

Seeing these pencil portraits calmly and leisurely, you think to yourself : So must he have sat and thought when he decided on that soul-shaking Dandi March ; so must he have sat and resolved when he made those Himalayan decisions and pitted his soul force against the might of a great empire. In these portraits the artist has revealed not only the mind and mood



of a great personality but his own sensitive feeling, sincerity, impersonality, emotion and imagination. These are distinct assets to an artist ; and Dhiren Gandhi has them in an abundant measure.

Even as mere portraits these are as good as any so far drawn by any master artist. For one of his age and experience they are highly creditable achievements. His pencil work is soft and delicate ; his lines are strong and sure. Modelling is superb especially where he treats those weak expressive lips. Dhiren has certainly proved a worthy pupil of a great master, the incomparable Nandalal Bose.

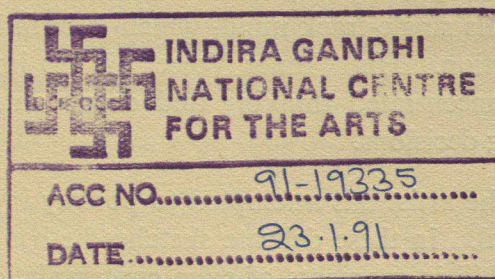
These sketches are more in the nature of a dedication than attempts at portraiture. They are sincere outpourings of the heart of a sensitive artist at the feet of a saint who is also a nation's redeemer. The artist is a devoted lover of Bapu and thinks he can best serve him by placing at his disposal whatever talents he has for any good cause to which he may be directed. He has no other ambition in life. A poor, limited vision for an artist, some may say, but that is his own choice. Each to his *dharma*.

Shy, modest and unostentatious, Dhiren is a very promising young artist. As a child he showed a natural aptitude for playing with colours, so much so that his mother prided herself in the fact that her children must have inherited her artistic tastes. Dhiren has an elder brother, Navin, and a sister, who are both talented artists. They lived their childhood days with Gandhiji and Kasturba in their *ashrams*. Observing their natural gifts Gandhiji had them first sent to Ahmedabad to be trained by R. M. Raval and later to Santiniketan under Nandalal Bose. Now they have settled down in a quiet corner of a Bombay suburb, dreaming, working and training younger ones. Seeing their silent sincere work one cannot help wishing them more strength to their elbows and more lustre to their rainbow-coloured dreams.

G. VENKATACHALAM.



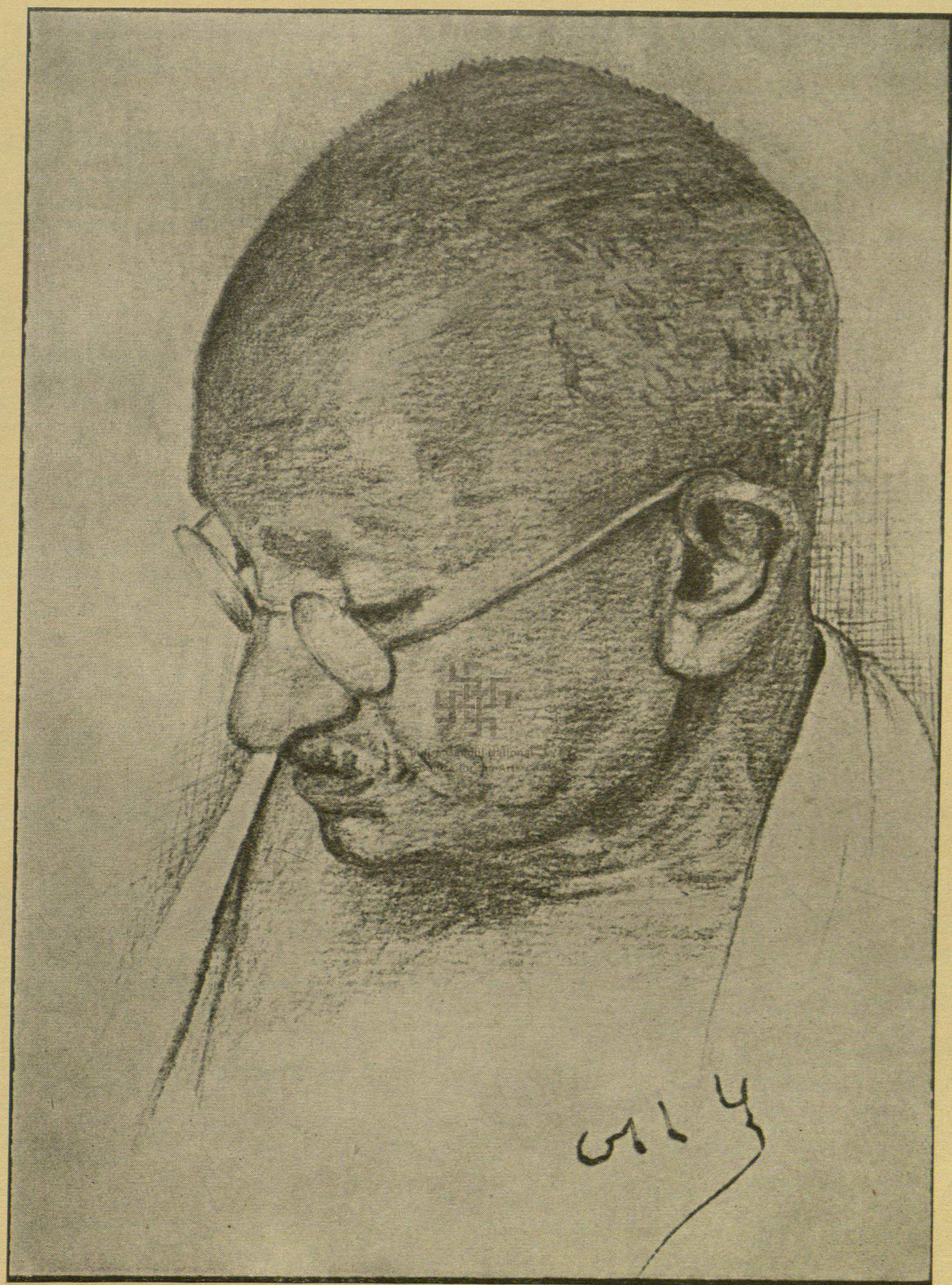
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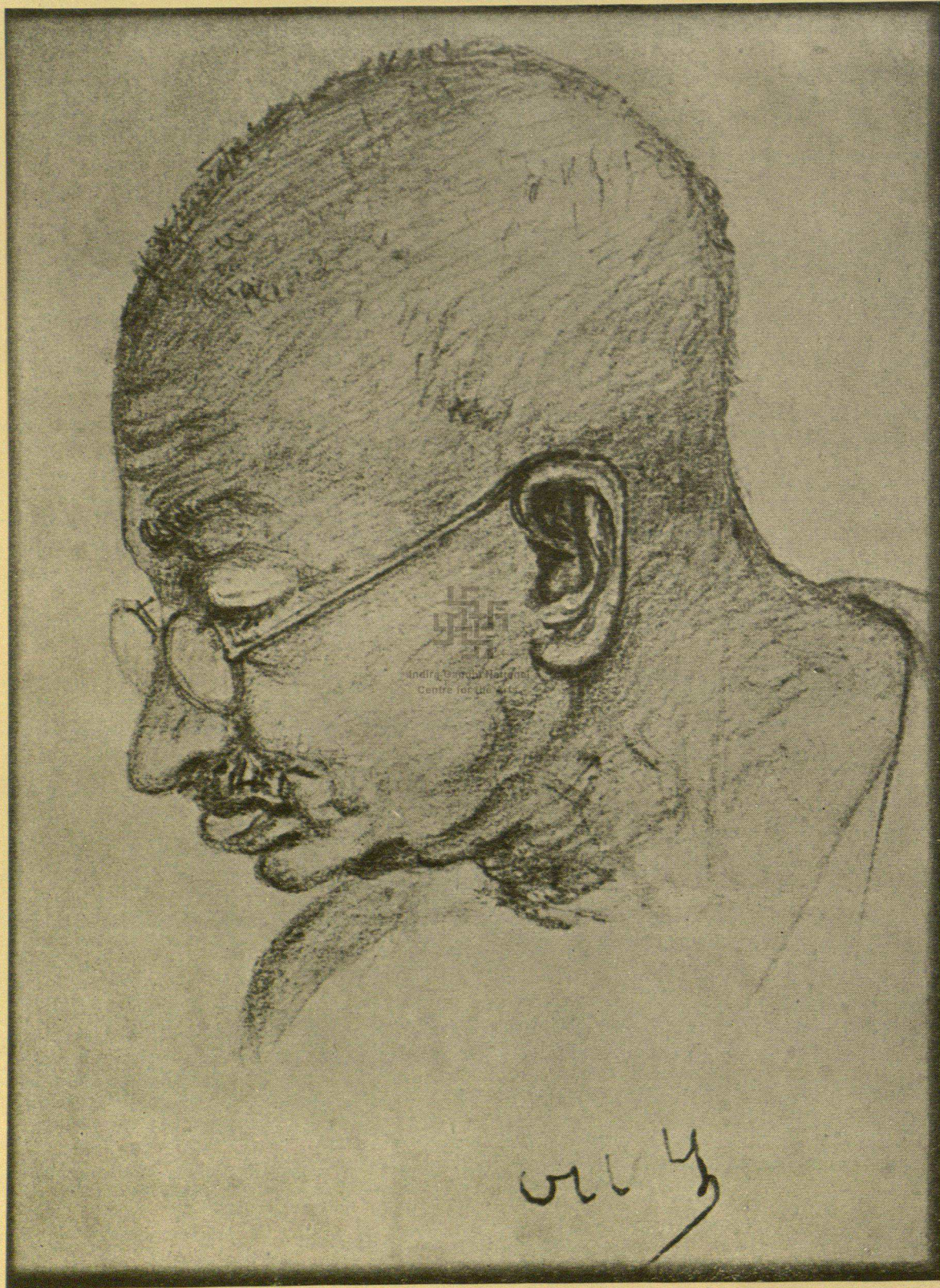
Dedicated, with deep love and respect,  
to my Guru NANDALAL BOSE.

—DHIREN

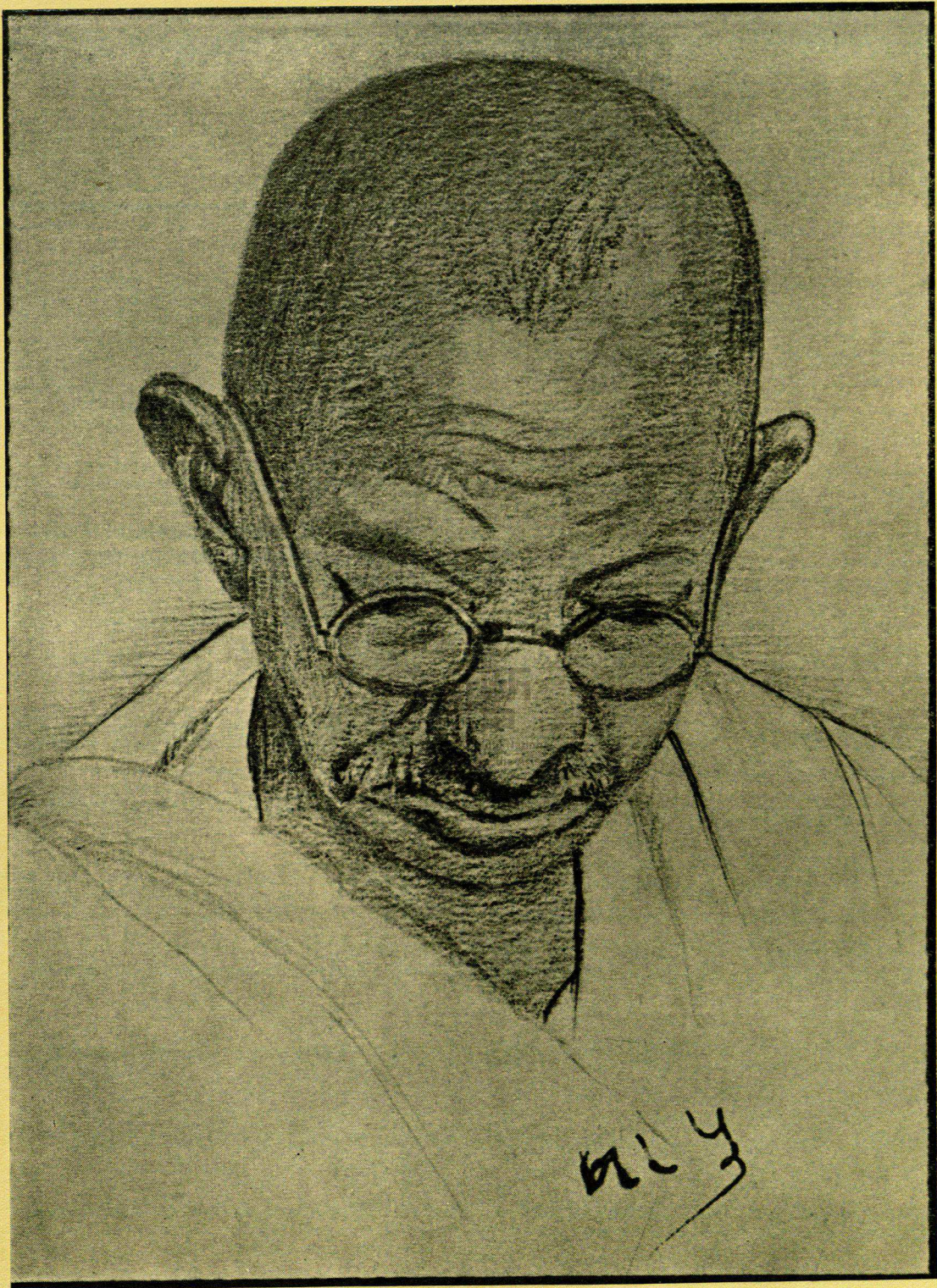




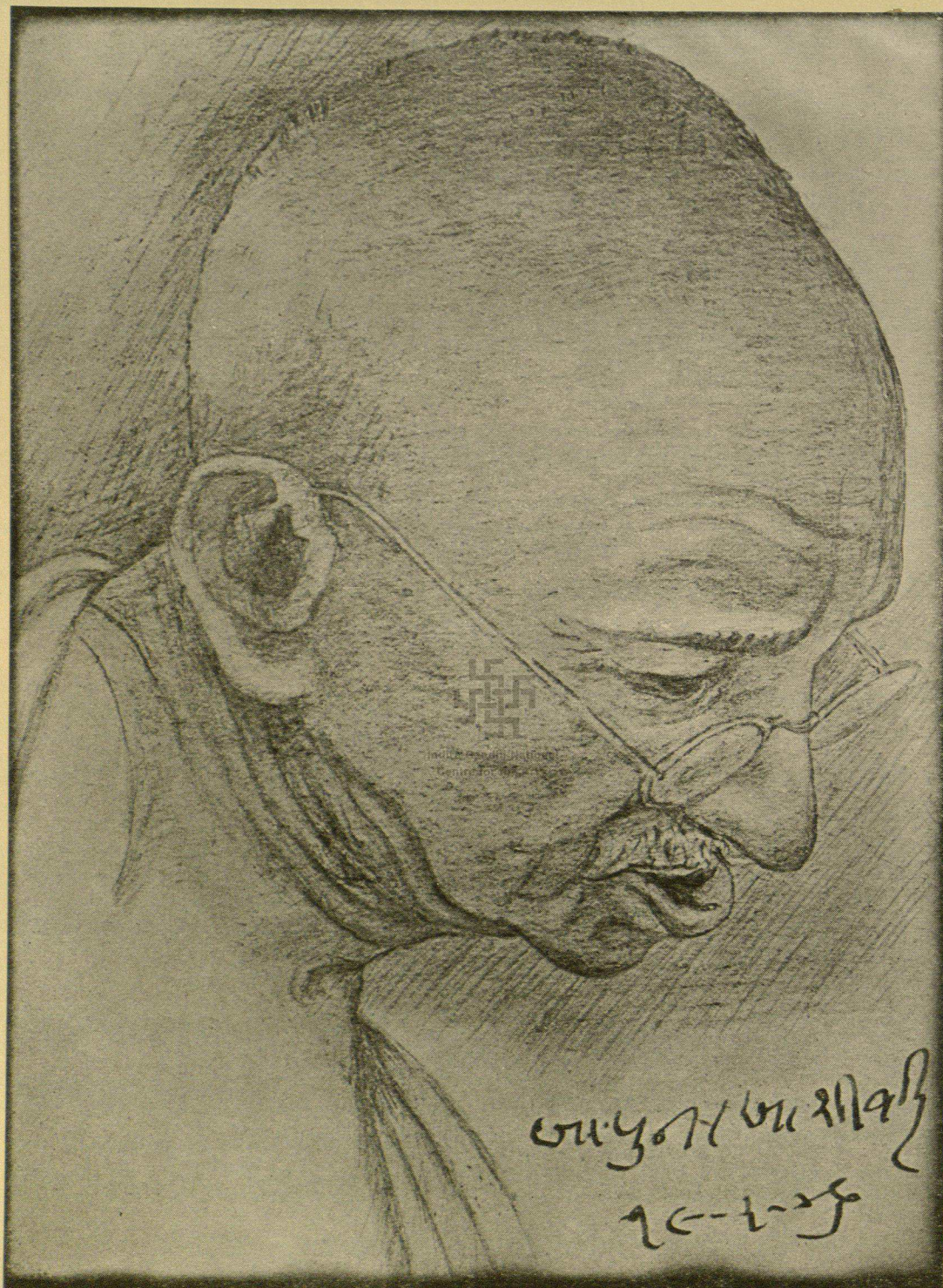
















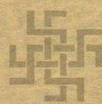




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