

Bhāvvyātrā (Walking Pilgrimages): Insights for Self-development Through Service

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Rakshita Goel¹ and Rachana Bhangaokar¹

Abstract

Inspired by the life and work of Mahatma Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave, *Bhāvvyātrā* is a walking pilgrimage, a metaphor for ‘slowing down’ in a fast-paced world. The qualitative study was conducted with 11 adults, both men and women, who had undertaken *Bhāvvyātrā*. In-depth interviews were conducted to know their experiences of *Bhāvvyātrā* and its effects on self and interpersonal relationships. *Bhāvvyātrā* gave participants opportunities to reflect on pure intentions (*Bhāv*) behind their actions. Offering oneself in service in a variety of unfamiliar contexts enhanced feelings of trust and interdependence. Older, more experienced *Bhāvvyātris* reported better psychological well-being.

Keywords

Bhāvvyātrā, walking pilgrimage, self, service, India

Transformation is a complete rebirth. It is not a result of calculation. . . . To know the unknown, I must completely abandon the known. Therefore,

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¹ Department of Human Development and Family Studies, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara, Gujarat, India.

Corresponding author:

Rachana Bhangaokar, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara, Gujarat 390002, India.

E-mails: rachana.bhangaokar-hdfs@msubaroda.ac.in; rachana.bhangaokar@gmail.com

devotion, feeling, emotion, all of which lie in the field of thought, the known—are impediments to transformation (Krishnamurti, 1948).

Unlike western Psychology, self, consciousness and first person experiences are central to theory and methods in Indian Psychology (Rao & Paranjpe, 2016). Human beings constantly strive for new knowledge, often first in the outside world. Apart from knowing the external environment, human beings have the capacity to be aware of their own self and its workings. When answers from outside are not adequate or satisfactory, they turn inwards. With this begins a process of moving towards freedom from ignorance and the known. In the *Yogāśutrā*, Patānjali emphasises yogic practices that develop *vivēkakhyāti*, knowledge to discriminate between changing qualities of what is perceived and unchanging qualities of that which perceives. This process needs constant effort, and consistent practice enables discrimination between the permanent and impermanent (*nitya-anityavivēka*) aspects of the self and reality. The ultimate goal of yoga is developing this clarity and avoiding disturbing actions (Desikachar, 1999).

Amidst the hustle of a fast life, as adults, we often engage with ourselves and the external environment in a conditioned, automatic manner. Our ability to see reality ‘as is’ gets blurred as we move farther away from self-awareness creating distance between our inner and outer realities. Against the backdrop of adult development in India, this study unravels the myriad processes and challenges of self-discovery and inner transformation. After scaling peaks of worldly success, why did some individuals feel a lack of balance in their life? Why did they feel the need to explore the ‘who am I’ question further? How did undertaking a *Bhāvyātrā* enable them to meet these goals? This article examines the experiences of some individuals who undertook a walking pilgrimage—*Bhāvyātrā*, to become more aware of their own intentions (*Bhāv*) and their relationships with others in society.

“Bhāvyātrā is a journey on foot, of approaching people with pure intentions, in the light of knowing your own self (inner self). It is about asking questions to your own self rather than looking for answers from others” (MA, participant).

Walking pilgrimages have historically been a part of Indian culture. Even today, we see *padayātrā* (pilgrimages on foot) being organised by groups of people to various religious destinations like Ambaji, Shirdi, Pandharpur and other places. Interestingly, walking was a natural choice for the likes of Buddha, Shankaracharya, and in more recent history, for leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave. Their walks, even

when other means of transport were available, were critical in forming connections with local people they met along the way. Gandhi's famous Dandi march or Vinoba's *Bhoodān* movement were significant social movements carried out primarily on foot.

Adult Development: Global and Indian Perspectives

According to Erikson (1980), human development is a series of predetermined stages which regulates the 'unfolding' of the individual in a societal context. He explained psychosocial development through eight stages. The Eriksonian stages corresponding to life stages of participants of this study are (a) *intimacy vs. isolation*, when young adults seek out romantic love and companionship; (b) *generativity vs. stagnation*, when middle-aged adults nurture others and contribute to society; (c) *integrity vs. despair*, when older adults reflect on their lives, looking back with a sense of fulfilment or bitterness. Indian perspectives on adult development differ significantly from western conceptualisations. According to Kakar (1982), Hindu stages of life are expressed more in terms of an ideal state of 'what should be' rather than 'what is'. These life stages are described against the framework of *Dharma*, following which results in happiness and self-realisation.

Adulthood in India is marked by a growing sense of equanimity, that is, neither a resignation from life nor a withdrawal from human effort and acceptance of the transitory nature of all relationships and emotional states (Kakar, 1998). Ramanujan (1989) argued that because of a high degree of 'we-self' regard, the Hindu self is essentially determined by how others look at you. In this context, Roland (1988, 1996) observed that the sense of selfhood in Indians often included family members, which means, 'we-ness' over 'I-ness'. Mines (1988) noted that as Indians advanced in age and life stages, instead of becoming more conservative, they increasingly found opportunities to pursue personal interests. Although the core of the Indian self is essentially metaphysical, the socially constructed Indian self is viewed differently at each life stage with reference to one's role in society and occupation (Bhawuk, 2011). In the *āśramadharmā* framework, the transition from *Grihasthā* (householder) to *Vānaprasthā* (forest dweller) *āśramā* represents entry into mature adulthood, wherein gradual disengagement from family responsibilities and worldly matters is encouraged. Gender is intricately

tied to critical features of selfhood in India like familial roles, changing authority structures and emotional experiences. Menon (2013, 2015) described women's psychological and moral dominance, coherence and centrality in Odia households which enables them to have more satisfying experiences during mature adulthood than men. Across life stages, anyone desirous of spiritual progress must first recognise the self through *karma* (action). Only then can one move to *ātmajnānā* (self-knowledge) at later stages. In order to move towards ultimate spiritual knowledge, refining intentions of action from *sakāma* (desirous of outcomes) to *nishkāma* (indifference towards outcomes) is mandatory (Bhawuk, 2011). All these elements contribute to the unique nature of selfhood in India.

Selfhood in India

The understanding of selfhood is attributed to the self-reflexive and conscious nature of human beings. The experience of emotions and motives make human selfhood interesting and different from that of other species or machines (Sedikides & Gregg, 2007). Similarly, self-consciousness or deliberately directing attention to inner mental states and emotional experiences for introspection is a cognitively sophisticated human ability (Janzen, 2008). Over the course of evolution, the multifaceted and flexible symbolic self was strengthened as human societies stabilised into large social groups (Sedikides & Skowronski, 1997). In a social context, self-enhancement or assertion about the goodness of self and self-protection or managing self-threats are two significant motives that define an emotional and reflexive self (Sedikides, 2012). Self-enhancement is central to human nature and is moderated by cultural factors. Evolved over centuries, each culture defines and demonstrates the ideals of selfhood that their members may aspire to emulate.

For most Indians, the ideal goal is to attain a kind of selfhood which seeks to realise itself through 'selfless' pursuits and divinity to attain 'salvation', *mukti* or *moksha*, an idea first discussed in the Upanishads. *Moksha*, in major Indian philosophical traditions is understood as release from the cycle of birth and death, or union of the personal self (*ātman*) with the absolute self (*paramātman*) or devotion that liberates. Across these perspectives, the idea of *māyā* as an illusion is significant. *Māyā*

creates ignorance (*ajnāna*) and duality that veils our true blissful nature - *sat chit ānandā* (Misra, 2013). The process of self-realisation is often rooted in four Upanishadic statements or *Mahavākya*—*prajñānam brahma* (mind/consciousness is God), *ahambrahmāsmi* (thou art that/ supreme being), *tat tvamasi* (I am Brahman/Godhead) and *ayamātma brahma* (this self is God) indicating oneness with universal consciousness (Tripathi & Ghildyal, 2013). The Vedāntic method of self-realisation called the ‘knowledge path’ (*jnānamārg*) involves knowing the self by being, that is, knowing what lies behind and beyond one’s thoughts, feelings, motivations and actions (Paranjpe & Rao, 2008). Irrespective of the life stage, other paths and practices for attaining *moksha* also emphasise self-regulation, transcending emotions and the cultivation of equanimity. It thus becomes important to understand the transient nature of human emotions.

Rasā and Bhāv: Emotions in the Indian Context

The aesthetic theories and the science of dramatics, especially the works of Bharatmuni (5th century) created a refined and intricate understanding of emotions and emotional experiences in the Indian context. According to this theory, the emotional universe or *bhāv* includes both positive and negative emotional states of the individual in totality, and *Bhāv* means an emotional state or mood (Paranjpe, 2009). *Bhāv* is that which brings about a condition or which gets established through what happens. In English, there is no standard, accurate and exact translation for the word *bhāv* or the meaning it conveys in Indian languages. The root *bhu* means ‘to be’ and *bhāv* means ‘that which brings about being’ (Pandit & Misra, 2013, p. 679). Eight or nine of these mental phenomena are permanent (*sthāyibhāv*) while 33 others are transitory. Psychologically, the experience of various *sthāyibhāv* is central to the human experience and dependent on the person-in-context (Arjunwadkar, 1984). Thus, *bhāv* refers to existence as well as the mental state conveying intentions. In dramatics, through the *sthāyibhāv*, the actor should be able to elicit the experience of particular ‘*rasā*’ in the audience (Srinivasan, 2019).

The word *rasā* is derived from the root *rasāh* meaning sap or juice, taste, flavour, relish. The experience of *rasā* is hidden, as a seed holds a tree, in the concept of *bhāv*. ‘The Indian perspective treats emotion in a narrative framework composed of causes, consequences and concomitants

of an illusive meta-emotion, a unique form of consciousness called *rasā*⁷ (Misra, 2014, p. 211). When the stimulus (*vibhāva*), the involuntary physical responses (*anubhava*) and the voluntary psychological states and actions (*vyābhicharibhāva*) come together, the *sthāyibhāv* are brought into consciousness to experience corresponding *rasā* (Menon, 2017). When we recognise these *bhāv* in ourselves (and others), by means of enlightened bliss in the transpersonal self, a feeling which is lasting, spiritual and spreads happiness all around, then, the very same *bhāv* are designated as *rasā*. In this way, the experience of *rasā* operates in a sequence of transformations in the person (Misra, 2014). Comparable to other acontextual ideas in Hindu thought namely, *sannyāsa*, *bhakti* and *moksha*, the experience of *rasā* is also acontextual yet fleeting. *Rasā* can be relished only vicariously, when one is non-attached to the actual emotional experience (Menon, 2017). In Yoga, the ability to experience each *rasā* deeply but return to the state of *śānta* thereafter, reflects advanced *sādhanā*, indicating consistent practice of non-attachment (Anantanarayanan, personal communication, November 20, 2020). Thus, complete presence, self-transformation and self-refinement are interwoven with the concept of *rasā* and *bhāv* (Menon, 2017; Paranjpe, 2009).

To be aware of one's deep intentions and feelings needs effort. Sometimes, adequate distance from the demands of a habitual life is necessary for such reflection. Spaces for enabling self-reflection, witnessing and self-transformation may have to be created in the busy, modern world. *Bhāvyātrā* was one such avenue, a journey or a pilgrimage on foot focussed on *bhāv*, basic emotions and pure intentions arising in the self. Although walking is, to date, the slowest form of travel, it is the quickest way to not just our most authentic selves, but also to 'defocussed attention', that is, being focussed and unfocussed at the same time. Besides health benefits, walking anywhere between 5 and 16 minutes significantly enhances creativity and reduces stress eating (Weiner, 2020). The inspiration for *Bhāvyātrā*, a 'slow' journey on foot comes from the life of Mahatma Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave. As a principle and a creative constraint, *Bhāvyātris* carried minimum luggage and did not carry any money with them, except a minimum amount for emergencies. In effect, they opened up to unpredictable experiences, ate what was offered and slept where place was available. As they walked, they offered themselves in service to whoever was in need, anyone they met along the way.

Walking: Gandhi and Vinoba's Method of Service and Connection

The life of Mahatma Gandhi can be seen as a transformation of Gandhi to Mahatma, from Mohandas to *Bapu*. His life was a constant effort to reform not just the society where discrimination and injustice prevails, but also his own self (Sharad & Misra, 2013). In this way, Gandhi, Vinoba and their followers contributed to the understanding of self-development and societal progress. It is well known that Gandhiji used walking as a means of commuting between villages and as a method to connect with local people who participated in the non-violence movement. From 1913 to 1948, Gandhiji walked 18 kilometres a day, covering more than 79,000 km on foot during his political campaigns (Bhargava & Kant, 2019). Vinoba was considered Gandhi's spiritual heir.

Vinoba knew the strength of *padayātrā* (march on foot) and walked over a period of 20 years throughout India. Over 14 years, Vinoba too walked approximately 70,000 kilometres for the *Bhoodān* movement (Logical Indian, 2015). He was a man who was able to move the hearts of landlords and touched them so deeply that they voluntarily donated four acres of land (Kumar, 2011). He saw land as a gift of God like air, water, sky and sunshine. On deciding to walk (instead of taking some form of faster transport) for the *Bhoodān* movement, Vinoba said,

“Walking has advantages that aeroplanes can't provide.... Going on foot brings one closer, both to the country and to the people, than any other form of travel, and that was why I did it.... In former days, men like Sankaracharya, Mahavir, Kabir, Chaitanya and Namdev had travelled about India on foot. They used no such speedy transport, because their aim was to correct people's mistaken ideas, and the best way to do that is to go on foot” (Sykes, 2011, pp. 132, 134).

In keeping with the Indian tradition of walking as a metaphor and a regular practice for connecting with people, this study anchors on to the thoughts and methods of modern historical figures like Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave, who continue to inspire people to adopt walking as a means of self-reflection and as a method to connect with others. The study examined the motives and sources of inspiration for undertaking a *Bhāvyātrā* and described experiences of participants to exemplify how they strengthened their abilities of trust building and self-development through inner transformations.

A previous study funded by The Indian Council of Philosophical Research (ICPR), titled, 'Is the Mahatma "Thriving"? The interface of youth civic engagement and Gandhian philosophy' (Bhangaokar, 2014), was conducted to understand the developmental aspects of youth civic engagement within the clear boundaries of Gandhian philosophy, principles and ideologies by one of the authors. In the process of conducting that study, we were introduced to a small group of volunteers associated with Gandhian institutions who took up walking pilgrimages (*Bhāvvyātrā*) as part of their civic engagement activities. The participants of the present study were thus contacted via the references given by the participants of the ICPR study.

Method

To be included in the study, the participants had to be adults (early, middle-aged and older adults) who had undertaken a *Bhāvvyātrā* at least once. Individuals who were familiar with Gandhian ideology, believed in the spirit of service or identified with the values propagated by Mahatma Gandhi or Vinoba Bhave were selected. Many of them were formally volunteering with Gandhian institutions associated with the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad. The sample for the study comprised of 11 men and women participants. The age of the participants ranged from 26 to 58 years. All of them had well-established careers, were highly educated, belonged to middle and upper middle classes, and lived in cities of Mumbai, New Delhi, Ahmedabad, Vadodara and Pune. Older adult participants had taken up more number of *Bhāvvyātrās*. Most of the older participants were social entrepreneurs and had chosen to work in the social development sector. Many participants also had unconventional careers like those in the music industry or film making. Some participants had experience in teaching yoga, vipassana and other meditative-contemplative therapies. The younger participants were self-employed or into research.

The interview protocol included 23 questions covering different aspects of the *Bhāvvyātrā* experience. It was content validated by an expert in the area of Human Development and Family Studies and by another *Bhāvvyātri*, not included in the study. The participants were contacted on phone and appointments were scheduled at a mutually convenient time. After explaining the rationale of the study, written informed consent was taken. Interviews were tape recorded with permission, transcribed verbatim and later, translated to English.

Common themes across interviews were listed to create codes and inter-coder reliability was established in consultation with research assistants from the ICPR project team. Frequency tables, case profiles and flow diagrams depicting experiences were created.

Results and Interpretations

Sources of Inspiration

Table 1 shows what inspired the participants to take up a *Bhāvvyātrā*. It was observed that most of the participants (7 out of 11) were directly inspired by the works of Gandhi and Vinoba. They had read their autobiographies,

Table 1. Sources of Inspiration.

Themes	Verbatim	Frequency
Gandhi and Vinoba	<p>‘Gandhiji is recognised as a great person and in him I found a saint and I see someone who has really spent all his life seeking that higher world, without any deviations, so I seek inspiration and wisdom from him... but, my quest is not to become a Gandhian’</p> <p>‘Some things if you read and it clicks and it might motivate, for example: when I read <i>Bhoodān</i> movement, that was the time when I got much more motivated’</p>	7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature • Gandhi ashram 		
Others	<p>‘In 2012, the desire to connect came in the mind so, Satish Kumar’s name flashed in my mind. I met Nipun Mehta who had conducted a walk in 2008, he also inspired me’.</p> <p>‘I would read life of Mahāvīr or Buddha or any of the saints who have left a mark and one common trait in all of them was that they walked, they walked a lot and in walking it’s a meditation...you get out of the <i>māyā</i> of the mind’</p>	4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Satish Kumar (a writer and a pilgrim) • Spiritual figures 		

Source: The authors.

books written about them and had visited the Sabarmati Gandhi ashram and Gandhi museum. Other than Gandhi and Vinoba, important spiritual figures like Mahavira, Buddha, Shankaracharya and people like Satish Kumar (a writer and a Jain monk) also inspired the participants. Some experienced *Bhāvvyātris* had inspired younger participants.

Shifting Motives for Undertaking the *Bhāvvyātrā*

The participants mentioned a variety of motives for undertaking a *Bhāvvyātrā*. It was observed that some motives that they had in the beginning changed as they took up more number of *yātrās* over time. These are described in Table 2.

Table 2. Motives for Undertaking *Bhāvvyātrā*.

Themes	Verbatim	Frequency
Initial motives Discovering self	'The whole world belongs to you, yet you are also just a pilgrim. for whatever time you are here, you have to let go of that so I think it helps you connect with yourself and that's why I do this' 'The intention was not to look for answers, but to start asking tougher questions to myself'	4
Not happy with the current life	'I have constantly found a way of being even happier or being even more content or peaceful...so I take up <i>Bhāvvyātrās</i>	4
Serving and connecting with others	'If we go to people, we will connect with them, know their attitudes, practices and connect that with our life.'	3
Novel experience	'One of our friends was to make films on people who have walked with Vinobaji and I heard so many stories from him about Vinobaji and then he just said that I am planning to walk so if you want to join, you can. This is how I began and would like to continue'	2

(Table 2 Continued)

(Table 2 Continued)

Themes	Verbatim	Frequency
Spreading peace	'For me <i>Bhāvvyātrā</i> is more about world peace, a walk with people, your inner desire to connect with them and share yourself while connecting'	1
Shift in motives Service and self • From discovering self to serving • From serving to connecting and stillness of mind	'For me walking is a means to purify and through this purification get deeper clarity into life' 'I realised when someone else is walking, that time I feel called like how can I go and support' 'Two or three years ago, it was about moving into the mindset of service, of contribution... Today I would say it's more about being authentic to who I am'	9
Idea of serving changed to 'walking as meditation'	'the reason I wanted to call it a pilgrimage was, it was really about how was I serving through this process not about how I was performing but, can I serve through music and can I grow as a human being through this journey?' 'Too much doing is also something that I have to be careful and I think I should stay committed to my own practices of awareness and stillness'	3

Source: The authors.

As evident in Table 2, discovering the self and finding contentment in life featured prominently in their responses. Some participants were looking for contentment in their lives, and *Bhāvvyātrā* became a means to be satisfied with what they already had. Two early adult participants had undertaken this *yātrā* just to have an experience of it. It was their first *yātrā*. Service and spreading peace were the other motives that participants had initially.

A shift in motives was mentioned by participants who had been on more than two *yātrās*. Their motive changed from self-discovery to service and a need for connecting with others. An interface of finding oneself in the service of others was experienced by participants who had undertaken more *Bhāvvyātrās*. Walking had become like meditation and led to inner peace and stillness of the mind.

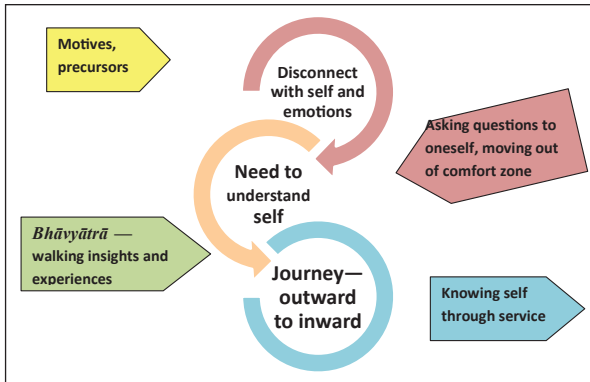


Figure 1. Precursors to *Bhāvvyātrā*.

Source: The authors.

Figure 1 represents that the participants wanted to connect with their inner self and then wanted to deeply explore the meaning of their relationship with others. In this process, the intention of service to others (*sévā bhāv*) turned out to be one of the simplest and yet the most profound life-changing method through which their spiritual understanding emerged.

Experiences in Trust Building

Trust was an important factor that propelled the idea of a walking pilgrimage. As evident from Table 3, after taking up the *Bhāvvyātrā*, eight participants started believing and trusting more in universal energies that guided their life. Initially, participants were sceptical about not carrying money with them during the *Bhāvvyātrā*. But during the journey when they had deep experiences of being hosted selflessly by absolute strangers, their trust in people grew. With more experience of the *Bhāvvyātrās*, seven out of 11 participants did not feel the need for carrying money for security even once. No pre-planning was done; just a walk with an idea of surrendering to the universe remained. This led to a stronger belief in divinity and a space beyond the conscious mind. Other than trusting universal energies, participants' ($N = 3$) trust in their own self increased such that they could take up any challenge that came along the way. Such experiences were transformative for them.

Table 3. Experiences in Trust/Faith Building.

Themes	Verbatim	Frequency
Universal energies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beyond conscious mind • Not doubting God 	'The idea is just ... let the conscious mind really rest you're not planning any thing, there's a greater force planning, how can I consciously surrender to that completely and say I am at your service take care if you want otherwise make me suffer'	8
Trust in people	'I was hosted, fed by people and was offered a very nice stay so then where is the question of money coming in and I think it's more building trust and when people start trusting you all these things really don't matter'	4
Trusting in self	'I am the youngest in the family <i>toh hamesha koi na koi hota tha</i> but, when I went alone to the vipassana centre, there were three roads leading to the centre and I had to pick one. I was waiting to ask someone but, <i>koi āyā nai</i> . Then I just started walking and somehow <i>andarse</i> it said no, this is not the way and then I looked at the second way it said no, and then when I took the third road I reached the centre...I learnt to hear myself, be aware of fears'	3

Source: The authors.

With these experiments in trust, participants learned to trust not only their heart and instincts, but also other people whom they met. Importantly, they reported that when they walked, a sense of acceptance towards whatever experiences came their way, without much resistance or stress, increased their ability to submit. Based on their experiences, the *Bhāvvyātris* realised that trusting was psychologically less costly than suspecting others all the time.

The last core theme that emerged was self-development and experiences of inner transformation.

Self-development and Inner Transformation

As evident in Table 4, three distinct themes emerged when participants explained their inner transformations that occurred after taking up *Bhāvvyātrās*.

Table 4. Self-development and Inner Transformation.

Themes	Verbatim	Frequency
Self-awareness Simplification of thoughts	<i>'Jahān sharing ātā hai, sense of sacrifice ātā hai, jahan vishwas aata hai, jahan pyaar aata hai, jahan seva aati hai, wo bhaav hai. Wo tatva hai, us tatva ko pakadne keliye apne jeevan ko is kaam main joda'</i> (where there is sharing, sacrifice, trust, love, service...that is bhāv. That is the essence, I joined my life with this work to capture that essence).	3
Being more aware • Knowing what you already know • Learning that you are unaware	<i>'When the mind calms down and things that I wasn't aware of ...they surface and then you start seeing yourself okay I am ... that ... and I don't want to be that and I think at times its very hard to accept what you see but it is real so that acceptance is a challenge'</i>	2
Positive self Increased acceptance • of context and relationships • Changing nature of life (nothing is permanent) • honouring the present	<i>'For me it has never been very fixed that I have to walk these many kilometres, agar dil kehtā hai ki this is not right then, stop. Accept it and honour it. So, the yātrā should complete in your every step, so each step is a yātrā in itself'</i>	10
Non-judgemental	<i>'I was very judgmental...the moment somebody would walk in I would start thinking, whether I would like have a communication or not. But, on the yātrā I had decided that I want to accept whatever universe is giving and that has changed my judgmental behaviour'</i>	4

(Table 4 continued)

(Table 4 continued)

Themes	Verbatim	Frequency
Increased gratitude	'It creates a great reverence for life and with reverence comes a lot of gratitude and then you feel, <i>kis bāt keliye rorahe ho</i> , what are you crying for'	4
Melted ego <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surrendering yourself in the present situation • From 'me' to 'we' 	So, for me that was an important balance internally to make sure that I understood the reality that it was just all a blessing that I am receiving. If the ego grows just 1% then you are in trouble, instead it should be lessening by 10%, 20%, and that I think was a process and a challenge'	3
<i>Echoes to self</i> Peaceful mind	'I cannot define this, there is no end to it. I meet people who have contributed to the society; it just deepens the idea of peace in my mind'	6
Practice detachment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not holding on to a person or a situation • Getting away from materialistic forces 	'I learnt to be vulnerable, to love without holding back and to love to let go. Everybody is afraid of love because they fear losing but, in a <i>yātrā</i> , everyday you are loving and everyday you are leaving. It's a very interesting experience and that makes you realise that to hold onto something is not to love'	4
Cultivating pure intentions	'We generally run away from our problems but, the world is round so even if you keep running you are going to come back and land in the same ditch. When you walk., you are very conscious like 'hey this is the situation I need to get out of' and I am going to take small steps, so it was like very internal, what really matters is the intention. So, over the years, a lot of work have been about purifying my own intention, my own inner self'	2

(Table 4 continued)

(Table 4 continued)

Themes	Verbatim	Frequency
Better relations	'Earlier it used to have a strange relationship with my parents. Over time I guess they are opening up to that idea that such experiences are defining my being and character'	3

Source: The authors.

Self-awareness explained how the thoughts of *Bhāvyātris* were simplified and how this led to an understanding of being more aware of both the known and the unknown aspects of their self. Three participants experienced thought simplification and two became more aware. It was seen that in their day-to-day lives, these changes made a difference. These participants reported that in their lives, ideas which were not true (or illusionary) started dissolving and a road was built for looking inside their own mind before seeing the world with a certain bias or a fixed perspective. One of the modifications that *Bhāvyātris* noticed in themselves was their focus on an evolving, positive self. Similarly, 'increased acceptance' of self and others became prominent. This acceptance was also towards changing life situations and accepting their own life as a process. They also reported becoming less judgemental and more aware of why they should show gratitude in their thoughts and actions. Another important experience that emerged was of 'seeing your ego melting down'. The ego that stops you from asking for help or food or a place to stay had to be discarded while undertaking the *yātrā*. By surrendering themselves to the present situation, they could see the world from a 'we' perspective rather than the limited 'me' perspective. Layers of moving up on the *rasānubhava* scale were evident here when the arousal of empathy and education of one's own emotions or *sādhāranikaran* (generalisation) led to a feeling of *sahridayatā* or being attuned with emotions of others. Such expansion of the self to include others is an intense *bhāv* experience that leads to loss of individuality (Misra, 2014).

Lastly, participants experienced cultivating an inner voice, experiencing internal peace, loving without holding back, cultivating pure intentions and having better relations with others. One of the participants, experienced peace when he met new people as he walked with the principle of *jai jagat* (well-being of all) and for him, the whole

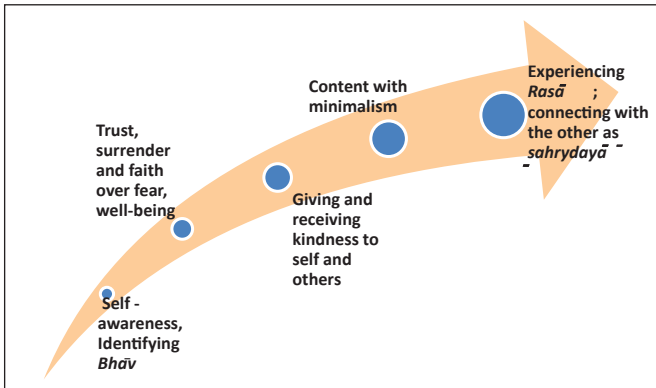


Figure 2. Self-transformation and the *Bhāvyātrā* Experience.

Source: The authors.

idea of undertaking a *Bhāvyātrā* was to spread peace by forming one-to-one connections. In terms of the changes experienced by the participants, maximum responses obtained were about experiencing a peaceful mind and detachment from materialistic things, situations or people. Participants reported better relations with family members, after they returned from the *Bhāvyātrā*. Figure 2 represents the gradual self-transformation experienced by the participants.

Discussion

During a *Bhāvyātrā*, what really mattered was the journey and not the destination. Through that journey, the participants got time to introspect and reflect on their ‘being’ by hearing their inner voices. Some took a step towards knowing their real self, and for some, the meaning of ‘I’ broadened to include many others. When they walked, they carried only what was essential because it was convenient. However, when they started applying this principle to other aspects of their life, they could make important lifestyle changes. After the *Bhāvyātrā*, they could de-clutter and start living a simple life with just what was essential or minimal. They could experience and further cultivate a sense of contentment and well-being in their everyday life.

Walking as a Metaphor for Slowing Down

Being a conscious decision taken by adults, some amount of readiness and commitment was a prerequisite for the *Bhāvvyātrā*. The participants of the study expressed that when they walked, they could observe small, mundane things like someone sitting on the footpath and selling belts, ants moving on the ground, the sunrise and the sunset. They could observe nature very closely and feel one with it. They could deeply connect with people they already knew as well as with complete strangers. Importantly, they felt stillness in their being, which became the source of lasting motivation to be meaningfully engaged in life, even after the *Bhāvvyātrā*. Looking back, many of them said that they were living life with a fast-forward button without knowing when to stop, step back and see the big picture of where life was heading. A *Bhāvvyātrā* gave them the opportunity to press the pause button and experience a kind of *thehrāv* (pause, stillness) in life, which created optimising conditions to look inward and introspect. Heightened self-awareness was a natural outcome of this process.

Intentions of Walking

One may walk everyday with an intention of reaching a place or with a religious purpose in mind or simply to save money. This routine walking cannot be called a walking pilgrimage. But, if the same is done with an intention of becoming aware of your innate *bhāv*, using it as a practice to become more aware of your thoughts and purifying these thoughts, then gradually, every walk, every action can become a *Bhāvvyātrā*. Similarly, forming connections with others through pure intentions, without prejudices or judgements or expectations, leads to well-being. When you offer your presence with the intention of service to others, everyday actions can open doors to an inward journey. According to Rao (2011), Gandhi's spirituality was very practical, not philosophical. Drawing from Gandhian ideas, in practice, the *Bhāvvyātrā* is a very simple process and can be taken up anywhere. However, the most significant aspect of this exercise is being aware of your intentions as well as cultivating right intentions. The process of purifying your intentions is a constant, ongoing one with a limitless horizon.

Gandhi as an Idea

Bhāvyātrā turned out to be one of those unique experiments through which Gandhian values could be made relevant today. Participants of the study believed in Gandhi and the efficacy of his ideologies. But that was not the only reason they undertook a *Bhāvyātrā*. Gandhi to them was an inspiring idea to engage with. All the participants were clear about Gandhi's style, but they were also very conscious about moulding that style to suit their lives. Therefore, the underlying principle of making him significant was not to look for a tool kit but following the essence and the spirit of his values. As one of the participants NM said,

“I think we sometimes mix the *tantrā* (the mechanism, the obvious action, what Gandhi did) and *tatvā* (the essence, the values that Gandhi endorsed) so, the values and the manifestations. Sometimes, we just end up looking at the tools that he suggested but, actually it is about the value. To make them relevant, it is up to us how we manifest them and we have to figure this out in many-to-many context. Then, we can see some exciting and hopeful possibilities for mankind”.

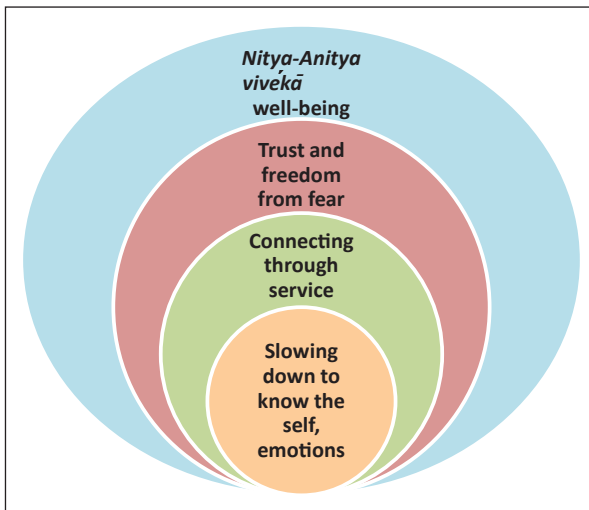


Figure 3. Implications for Self-development.

Source: The authors.

As depicted in Figure 3, when an individual walked, connections were formed first with self. Then the essence of connectedness stretched to others through service. In this trusting process, participants experienced freedom from inner and outer fears. The other was thus a mirror onto the self and this helped in making a stronger connection again with one's own self. Thus, Gandhi's 'ego-minimising' idea of losing yourself in the service of others becomes a medium to know oneself better.

Indian philosophical literature purports the *jnānamārg* (knowledge path) of knowing oneself as the path of self-realisation leading to salvation or *mukti*, the ultimate goal of life (Paranjpe & Rao, 2008). With increased self-awareness, participants could analyse their life and discover what they could offer to others through a lens of service. For example, one of the participants worked as a successful stock analyst. When he felt emptiness in his life in spite of all material comforts, he volunteered at the Sabarmati Ashram and later undertook a *Bhāvvyātrā*. This helped him to reflect on his career and now, the idea of service is central to his work as a financial advisor. He uses his knowledge to serve many not-for-profit organisations in India and abroad, and undertakes *Bhāvvyātrās* intermittently. For a beginner, the *bhāv* may be just to know oneself, witness the surroundings and enjoy the walk as a novel experience—which translates into quiet time with oneself—a luxury in our busy lives! But for JP, a participant who has undertaken many *Bhāvvyātrās* and inspired others, his entire life is now a *Bhāvvyātrā*. All his actions are a reflection of his spirit of service and surrender. He has experienced the constant awareness and purification of his intentions many times and this attitude has now become a part of his being. Similarly NM defines the goal of his life in two lines; “my life is an attempt to bring smiles in the world and silence in my heart. I want to live simply, love purely and give fearlessly. That’s me” (Agrawal, 2014). He undertook a six-month long *Bhāvvyātrā* with his wife, soon after his wedding. For him, it was a walk to experience humanity. For another participant MA, the entire journey was not essentially walking, but about practicing the essence of forming connections with strangers along the way, as well as ‘the unknown’. For him, to be aware that there is a lot that is unknown about him and the world was very humbling. *Bhāvvyātrā* for him was thus, an exercise of becoming aware that one is very unaware of many things, including parts of oneself.

The simple act of walking is much more than just moving on two feet. Walking is transformed into an opportunity to connect with yourself and be aware of your surroundings, what the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat

Hahn calls ‘walking meditation’. You can do it alone, or with like-minded others, or in silence, or by sharing your thoughts with others without fear or judgement. In order to have deeper clarity and clearer direction in life, one may reach out for some guiding lights. In the present study, Mahatma Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave influenced the thoughts of *Bhāvvyātrās*.

Conclusion

In the present context, our lives have become complicated and happiness is often equated with chasing desires and gathering possessions. This leads to immeasurable stress, leaving little or no time for self-reflection, eventually leading to depletion of well-being. Spirituality and simplicity are thus required to change lives that are too busy, too stressed and too fragmented. *Bhāvvyātrā* comes across as a viable option to integrate self-awareness, spirituality and simplicity in our lives to enhance well-being.

According to Pollock (1998), Bhoja in *Śringāraprakāśā* identified 49 *bhāv* which make passion (*śringārā*), the ‘cause of intensification’ (pp. 154) of various capacities of the self, manifest in the mind. *Bhāv* are subject to being felt (*bhāvanā*) but cannot become *rasā* unless the mind is purified (*sāttvika*) and the self is totally aware of experiencing emotions. Can anyone undertake a *Bhāvvyātrā*? Yes, anyone willing to self-reflect, to purify the mind and walk may undertake a *Bhāvvyātrā*. This is because more than the outcome, connecting with pure *bhāv* (intention) is important for self-purification and the subsequent experience of *rasā* for a fuller life. *Bhāvvyātrā* can be considered a simple yet rare approach to explore the path of self-development. It is a path, a pilgrimage, a *yātrā* in which a *yātri* walks with faith in the universe, with minimum or no money in hand and few essentials on the back. They eat food that is offered and sleep at places available to them. Their motives may vary but the intention (*bhāv*) to witness, love, accept and know thyself remains the same. *Bhāvvyātrā* is a small but unique initiative with a huge potential to bring positive shifts in life like a peaceful mind, simplification of thoughts, understanding self in relation to others through service, stillness and most importantly, a deeper clarity into life. Overtime, this leads to inner transformations and optimises the process of self-development in adults. In the process, one has to be ready for a range of experiences—good, bad or ugly—as well as its

consequences. If one is ready to throw oneself into adventure and 'willing to let go' of comforts, even if for a short time, the *Bhāvvyātrā* becomes a worthwhile experience. The *yātrā* needs to be undertaken with faith or unwavering belief (*śraddha*) in the universe that something will work out and you will be taken care of. This *śraddha* lies at the root of all trust that engulfs our self and our society.

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