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S.N. Subbha Rao is a lawyer who never practiced law. Except for one time when he had to go into court to work out the details of a mass surrender of 185 cutthroat dacoits (bandits) in 1972 at the Gandhi Seva Ashram in Chandal Valley, Madhya Pradesh, India. Altogether, this man of Gandhian peace has finessed the surrender of 654 bandits, often setting them up with federal land and a cow to get started in normal life. He says, "While most dacoits carry knives or guns, they also carry a copy of the Ramayana in their back pockets."

S.N. Subbha Rao has never actually met Mahatma Gandhi. "I saw him from a distance. I was so young then and he was mostly in North India. I was in the South," he relates. But the force of Gandhi's ideas and example working at a distance transformed the young Subbha Rao into a lifelong disciple and champion of the man that stymied the British Empire and lived and died by a creed of religious tolerance.

Now, at 57, Subbha Rao is one of a handful of Gandhian workers with an ashram, Gandhi Seva Ashram, and a mission of his own: The National Youth Project dedicated to upraising the societal consciousness of India's youth. His method is non-sectarian and cross-lingual youth camps, that are staged all over India, usually in a hot spot where communal tension is brewing. "One purpose for all these camps is young people should cease to fight in the name of religion," he explained. This past summer he brought his expertise in youth training to the U.S. when, after touring some 9 camps held across the American landscape, he was interviewed by Hinduism Today.

"My camps in India include some work project in the community," he was telling. With camps such as his largest ever in Gujarat last year, 3517 attended from 21 Indian states, those projects can be quite significant: paving entire roads and quick relief aid for disaster victims. Subbha Rao estimates that if a tiny fraction of the

money now being spent for the Clean Ganges project went towards youth camps, 25,000 youths could be effectively mobilized towards that project. In the U. S., he wanted to get community work started at the camps he visited, but most were unenthusiastic. "Only the Flint, Michigan camp at the Bharatiya Hindu Temple responded," he said with a hopeful sigh that next year more will put their hands to the plow. "The girls at Flint planted a flower garden and the boys built a circumambulation path around the temple. It was a great fun for them."

At the American camps Subbha Rao introduced interactive dialogue, getting the kids to ask questions and discuss issues. The role of Hindu temples in preserving Indian culture in America and enriching American culture was the number one subject in most camps. Group singing of religious and human-value songs from the Gandhi movement and Ramakrishna Mission took place in the evenings. "Subjectively, I have been profoundly influenced by Swami Vivekananda."

"I told them that our love for Indian culture should be such that it enhances our love for humanity as a whole. As Gandhi said, 'I want the windows of my house to be wide open so that all cultures can blow freely into my home, but at the same time I don't want to be blown off my feet.'"

1985 is the International Youth Year and Subbha Rao wants to hold as many camps in India as he can this year. Usually, the camps are underwritten by public institutions. This is organized by his lean staff. He himself - "I'm a vagabond" - is a mobile office generating hundreds of letters on a portable typewriter he keeps hammering away at even in the midst of India's crowded trains. He has plans for camps forming in the Punjab and Gujarat, and potential camps in Orissa and Kanyakumari at the tip of South India.