**Friendship**

Close friendships, Ghandi says, are dangerous, because 'friends react on one another' and through loyalty to a friend one can be led into wrong doing. This is unquestionably true. Moreover, if one is to love God, or to love humanity as a whole, one cannot give one's preference to any individual person. This again is true, and it marks the point at which the humanistic and the religious attitudes cease to be reconcilable. To an ordinary human being, love means nothing if it does not mean loving some people more than others.

George Orwell - 'Reflections on Ghandi'

We gather on the new astro turfed pitch for a Friday after school kick about. We, the staff, are to play the builders of the new school at six a side football. I look around at who our side are as we line up to kick off and realise that we are made up of the unambitious and the undriven, the foot soldiers of British education. Above us the lights are still on in the rooms of those who are not so unambitious, a welcome signal to those that in authority that to them other people's children are as important as their own and anyway there will always be a partner, parent, child minder or Nanny to cook their flesh and blood’s tea and take care of them in their absence.

The ball is kicked off and at once a running commentary of banter begins. Mistakes are made and we laugh at them, but not in a cruel way, it is that most delightful side of male banter, quick witted but teasing, it is the genuine language of friendship and we all speak it fluently. But it is not all about mistakes as there is a constant flow of praise and encouragement too and what a contrast that makes to how we are meant to be now with praise only reserved, by our betters, for those that are judged 'outstanding' and not to be dished out to those who have done something that is merely 'good'.

The ball is taken down the wing and I push up into the box to anticipate the cross. It comes in and it has been well struck and I swivel into position and catch the ball on the volley and it flies off my boot, past the goal keeper and into the top right hand corner of the net. It feels good to score even though we and our opponents are just ordinary men having a friday night kick around.

We come back to the centre circle and the Builders kick off, the ball goes long to my best friend who controls it perfectly and with a lovely languid stride steps way from his opponent and begins effortlessly to bring the ball out of our half. I watch him in genuine admiration and for a moment think of that feminist lie that men only make jokes and talk about sport to avoid talking about feelings. He has stood by me through some of my darkest times, he does not need words to prove his love to me, he proves it every day through his actions. For me to tell him how I feel would be an act of sheer vanity on my part because I know that it would cause him excruciating embarrassment, and what friend wishes to do that? But I know that when I look into his eyes that I could trust him with my life and I hope, when he looks in my eyes, that he feels the same.

He looks up and strikes the ball from just inside their half and without deviating an inch it arcs into the back of the net and a ghost of a smile breaks his lips.

The game is over and we all shake hands and agree to play again the following week and then file back into the school, it is quite late now and even the ambitious are starting to leave but no doubt there will be more for them to do when they arrive home and I look at my friends and I look at the others and wonder who is most properly alive, them or us?

The essence of being human is that one does not seek perfection, that one is sometimes willing to commit sins for the sake of loyalty, that one does not push asceticism to the point where it makes friendly intercourse impossible, and that one is prepared in the end to be defeated and broken up by life, which is the inevitable price of fastening one's love upon other human individuals.

George Orwell