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Remembering
Mahatma Gandhi

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JOURNAL OF THE ASIATIC SOCIETY

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Remembering
MAHATMA GANDHI

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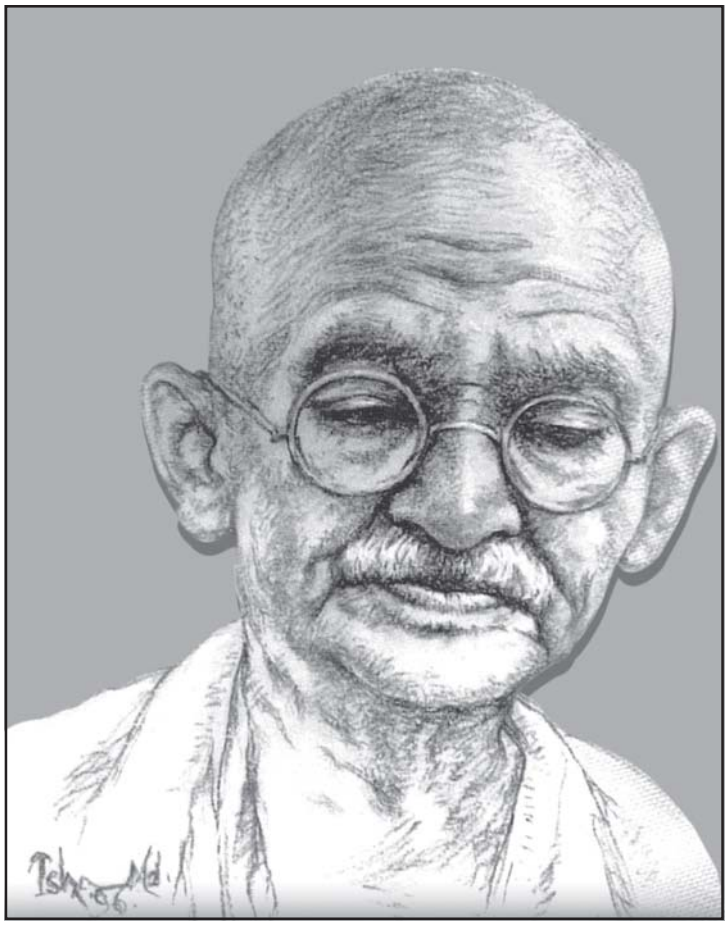

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

October 2, 1869 – January 30, 1948

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Editorial Note

The Asiatic Society had taken up an elaborate programme for the observance of 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. The Society was also requested by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, to do so as part of the year-long programme in a befitting manner. We had brought out, as per our commitment, a reprint authored by Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose entitled 'Studies in Gandhism'. Professor Bose was the Personal Secretary of Mahatma Gandhi during his tour to the riot affected Noakhali (now in Bangladesh), Calcutta (now Kolkata) and parts of Bihar during 1946 to 1947. Incidentally, Professor Bose was also the President of the Asiatic Society during 1972. The Society while releasing this book, mentioned above, in the 43rd Kolkata International Book Fair at Kolkata on 5th February, 2019 also organized a symposium on contributions on Mahatma Gandhi. This apart, another National Seminar was organized by the Society in Kolkata on 12th and 13th February, 2019 on the Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi where a number of very distinguished academicians and social thinkers from various parts of the country had taken part. A year-long monthly lecture series was organized beginning on 2nd October, 2018 where eminent scholars delivered lectures on various topics related to the life, activities and ideals of Mahatma Gandhi. Put together, we had engaged ourselves in an exclusive cultivation of Gandhi and Gandhism, both in its theoretical and pragmatic context. The construction of personality of Gandhi was looked at as an unique individual character, who was also blended in multiple connectivity, wisdom and experiment in a personal and collective practical life. The levels of his experiments can be reduced in three sub-sets, namely (1) Non violence, non cooperation, stayagraha - a socio-political syndrome, (2) Theory of trusteeship, theory of bread labor- an economic format, (3) Truth vis á vis God- an extra ordinary transcendence.

The personality of Mahatma carried in him an excellently embedded entity of an individual, a professional political leader as well as freedom fighter, a political philosopher and on top of everything a distant visionary. At the core of this whole structural embodiment an assumed goal of sustainable progress in the society, economy and polity kept Gandhi thoroughly engrossed throughout his life time.

Looking at Mahatma in retrospect as well as in prospect one stands simultaneously face to face with him in a psycho-cultural trait marked by a dichotomy of devotion and frustration. At the level of his emotive self, there was a conscious factor of identity neutralizer which symbolized through his external preparedness of self conscience; at the level of collective representation he was identified as an organized strategic mobilizer of the masses which got reflected apparently on simple, acceptable, understandable and easily communicable slogans.

Throughout our present academic journey, perhaps we have been able to realize a hard fact which revealed a number of binary category, such as advance-retreat, accommodation-rejection, defining and refining interfaces, placement-replacement and the like. We have traversed through the way of exploring an 'enigmatic domain' which can be arguably called 'Gandhism' in our normal and encapsulated cognitive perspective.

The special volume which is being presented here covers a wide range of subjects freely chosen by the individual scholars who have contributed to the whole discourse on short notice. Therefore, the scope of this special volume of the *Journal of the Asiatic Society* has been expanded to make this composite compilation a rewarding venture.

SATYABRATA CHAKRABARTI
General Secretary

Personality Cult or Charter of Hope? Gandhi : Study of an Icon

Suparna Gooptu

This essay was first delivered in the form of a lecture at the Asiatic Society, Kolkata on the occasion of the commencement of 150th year of Mahatma Gandhi's Birth anniversary. Lectures do not always have the rigour of a densely researched paper. The present essay does not accordingly, claim intellectual mastery on the subject, but may be seen as the author's broad reflections and views of the chosen theme.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi , the 'Father of our Nation' was an icon in his time, and continues to be so in the present. Studying icons is never easy, especially when they become symbols of national pride, religious tolerance, vanguards of social justice and equity, or an apostle of non-violence and peace. However, the vantage point of objective distance allows us to attempt a more critical appreciation of visionary figures like Gandhi, and enables us to read them in their context while assessing their contributions.

There have been many studies on Gandhi which show, how this iconisation has occurred in different stages of history. A whole range of books and articles are available to elucidate on the 'Making of the Mahatma'. So, the fact that the Mahatma was not born, but was made is now a fairly well-known fact. Many myths and legends are woven around his personality and life experience. This created multiple imageries of the 'Mahatma'. It also requires, re-iteration, that Gandhi, however influential he had been during his lifetime,

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The Paper was presented at the Asiatic Society, Kolkata on 12th October 2018 under the special lecture series *Remembering Mahatma Gandhi.*

could not have possibly influenced all sections of society, in a uniform manner. Not every individual or group had accepted his leadership unequivocally or shared his vision unquestionably. There have been in his time, and after, many critiques of the Gandhian way.

We also know from our understanding of Gandhi, that even those who accepted Gandhi's leadership and his vision of social and national reconstruction, were selective in their reception of Gandhi's message. There were variations in the nature of their acceptance. Hence, scholars have tried to understand the phenomenon of Gandhi at various levels - local, provincial, national, as well as his differential appeal to diverse social groups arising out of caste, class, ethnic, religious and gender identities. Recently, attempts have also been made to understand Gandhi as a person in private life, especially his role as a father, and a husband. Focus has also shifted to studies on Gandhi's family members to see points of rupture between his private self and his public calling.

Yet, despite such a wide range of scholarship - critical, eulogistic, empirical and documentary—- Gandhi continues to touch the finer sensibilities and deeper intellectual moorings of every thinking individual. The question thus arises, is there something intrinsically iconic about him, which defies our 'rational' 'scientific' 'materialist' understanding of the man, which made Albert Einstein remark:

> Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.

Is there something in his life and legacy which is potent enough to create a common platform, which can bring both the admirers and critiques of Gandhi together, even long after his death? Why is it, that we repeatedly engage ourselves, at schools, colleges, universities and other public institutions, with Gandhi's life, and messages that he left behind as written texts? It is with this question in mind, that I would like to engage with a larger issue. Why do we actually need icons in our lives, either individually or collectively, and do we need them even more, in crucial transitional periods of history? The first part of this essay, will try to unravel the process,

through which Gandhi has been iconised from time to time, especially after 1948, and the consequences it had in shaping our present day journey towards modernity. Consequently, this essay will reflect on the changing nature of the Gandhian legacy in Independent India.

The second part of the essay, will try to address a more substantive issue of Gandhism, by focusing on aspects of Gandhian intervention in the discourses of modernity and showing, how Gandhian philosophy has tried to infuse certain new elements into politics and political culture, which in many cases crossed the boundaries of the emerging 'political nation' and reached out to address issues of economy, culture, working of social institutions and life-style (food, clothing, human relationships). This will help us in our attempt, to juxtapose Gandhi in history with Gandhi as an icon in post-independent India, more specifically in recent times.

Gandhi, I would argue, whether he wanted it or not, became both a personality cult and a charter of hope, during his time and after. Even today his messages help us to think critically the changes that are shaping our present. The Gandhian way of thinking still holds immense possibilities to critically engage with the broader world and provide us with means and methods to encounter the challenges of our times, including those arising out of the process of iconisation of his life and message after his death. Hence, there has always been a need to re-visit him.

I

Gandhi was essentially a political man, although he himself claimed a number of times that he would prefer to remain a social reformer and a constructive worker, creating a nation bottom up. It was thus not a sheer wonder, that Gandhi, after 1947, wanted the Congress to reinvent itself as Lok Seva Sangh and stop functioning as a parliamentary political party. Of course, this did not happen, and the Congress party became the leading parliamentary political force in post-independent India. However, a resolute Gandhi chose to follow his own path. Gandhi and his followers were scheduled to hold the first meeting, to set up his new organization, at Sevagram

(a small hamlet in Wardha), in February 1948. But, before the meeting could be held, Gandhi received three bullet shots on 30 January 1948. However, his followers still met, on 11 March 1948, and they charted their own path of constructive work for India and its socio-economic uplift. So, while the Gandhians were crafting their new India through such institutions at Wardha and Sevagram and organizations like Charkha Sangh, Gramodyoga Sangh, Talimi Sangh, Hindustani Prachar Sabha, Hindustan Mazdoor Sevan Sangh, Adivashi Seva Mandal, Kasturba Gandhi Memorial Trust, Harjan Sevak Sangh and Sarva Seva Sangh, the Congress Party along with other political parties were giving shape to a democratically elected India, based on a parliamentary system, with Five year planning as its firm economic foundation. In this India, within the framework of the Parliamentary system a distinct place was carved out for Gandhi. Nehruvian India created its own icon of Gandhi. The Gandhi National Memorial Trust or The Gandhi Smarak Nidhi was set up to preserve the legacy of the Mahatma. A corpus fund of Rupees Twelve Crores was raised through public contributions under the initiative of national leaders assssociated with the government and constructive workers working in the fields. The Smarak Nidhi decided to establish a Memorial Museum at the national level to collect, preserve and display materials connected with the memory of the Mahatma and in 1949, the first Gandhi Memorial Museum or Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalaya was inaugurated in New Delhi. Subsequently, four regional museums were set up. The work of compiling one hundred volumes of Gandhi's works was initiated by Jawaharlal Nehru in 1956 and the task was entrusted to a group of scholars committed to Gandhian values and principles, which was to be published by the Publications Division of the Government of India. So the living icon, who lived till 1948, was made a part of the emerging Indian state structure in its various institutionalized forms. The father of the nation, the apostle of peace and non-violence was honoured and revered, and the people of India of the classes and the masses bowed before his memorials and felt humble, at the feet of their leader. The living icon, who led the Indian freedom struggle, who converted

millions of Indians to brave *satygrahis* to fight the British, became the state-crafted institutional moral face of India after independence. This Bapu caught up in the steel frame of the independent Indian state, however, had a healthy and symbiotic relationship with the people who followed Bapu's path in the fields. The constructive workers of various Gandhian institutions worked in the fields of Wardha, Pochampalli, Sevagram, Paunar, villages of Bihar and U.P. They were together seeking to build the India of Bapu's dream in their own way. However, the drift between the two strands of Gandhian legacy, one within the state structure and the other unfolding itself in the hamlets of the Indian countryside, was slowly manifesting itself in the body polity of the emerging Indian Nation.

At a time when the challenges before the nascent Indian nation were too many, the soldiers of peaceful, non-violent constructive work trained in Bapu's thought and ideals were becoming fewer. Some were drifting towards other ideologies, and were trying to redefine, reapply and reinvent Bapu's principles within the emerging state-structure. The mission of Jayaprakash Narayan is a case in point. Nehru's death in 1964 ushered in a period of serious testing of Bapu's principles and thoughts. Economy was in a slump; there were droughts and food shortages; the revocation of the PL480 agreement with the United States exacerbated the food crises. India's war with China and then with Pakistan shattered the earlier Nehruvian faith in principles of Non-alignment and Panchsheel Programme, and the conviction to follow moral politics in international relations was being shaken. India was getting more and more integrated with the twists and turns of the changing dynamics of international politics in the 60s and the 70s. Indira Gandhi was leading a Congress Party whose support base was increasingly shrinking and an alternative leadership from within the party was posing a challenge not only to her, but whatever she stood for in terms of her politics. The right and the left within the Congress was getting sharply divided. On top of this there were challenges from the regions – Punjab, Kashmir and the North-Eastern states. Terror and violence was once again creeping into the body polity of the Indian nation in the making. The Bangladesh war,

brought glory to India, but it also brought with it the daunting task of rehabilitating the landless uprooted people from the neighbouring state. India provided food and shelter to the refugees from Bangladesh and surely in such acts, one could see the moral face of India, of which Gandhi was still the icon. But the war had its economic costs. In 1975, when India's democratic order was put to test, one of the Gandhians working in the fields Vinoba Bhave became silent, while the other leading Gandhian, Jayaprakash Narayan was at the helm of affairs. Far removed from this political hotbed, in the quaint countryside of Wardha, Sevagram and Sabarmati, the spinning wheel was taking its turns of the rotating cycles assuring peace and harmony. The printing press of the Navajivan Trust, the publishing house founded by Gandhi in 1929, and based in Ahmedabad, continued to outpour pages after pages of Gandhi's thoughts and philosophy. Gandhi continued to represent India's moral face.

In 1977 the Government of Indira Gandhi was toppled. The new Government of Janata Party was sworn in but, only to hand over power once again to Indira Gandhi. Unfortunately, India in 1984 had to witness the second political assassination of another of her leader, shattering India's image as a land of non-violence and peace. To India's identity, was now added once again two vices — deceit and untrustworthiness, that too coming from its own people. Christ's 13th follower, Gandhi's Godse, and Indira's body guard all proved only one truth, that Gandhi was swimming against the tide. But surely, Gandhi himself would not have accepted that he was swimming against the tide, and he would regard these incidents as 'interruptions in the even working of the force of love or of the soul.' He wrote in *Hind Swaraj*, 'Soul force or force of love being natural is not recorded in history' (p. 68). Such was his conviction, and Gandhi as an icon of such conviction was still trying to lay a claim on the Indian nation's psyche.

II

However, India after 1984, saw the unfolding of a process of nation-building which challenged almost every aspect of Gandhi's vision.

Rising militarization, communal frenzy, caste violence, economic crisis reaching a lowest ebb, were all a counter thesis to Gandhi's thesis. But still Gandhi lived on in such an India, in Bapu Kutir in Sevagram, Wardha, in Gandhian organizations, in Sarvodaya schools, in Sabarmati, in Navajivan Trust, and other Gandhi ashrams in their quaint ways. Famous Bengali Novelist Annada Shankar Ray had once written that the task of constructive workers in times of trouble is to keep the pot boiling. Committed Gandhians and their organizations were doing just this. They were embalming the soul of India, 1990s was a turbulent period for India and the world. An image of the New India, that was to come, could be heard in the voice of Amitabh Bachhan in one of the short video telecast on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of India's independence entitled, India poised: Our Time is Now, presented by Times of India:

> India is now turning a page in history. We have two Indias in this country. One India is eager to spring forth, the other India wants to live up to all the adjectives that the world has shorn above us. One India says give me a chance and I will prove myself. The other India says prove yourself first and then you may be given a chance. One India lives in the optimism of our hearts, the other India lurks in the skepticism of our minds. One India wants, the other India hopes. One India leads the other India follows. These conversions are on the rise. With each passing day, more and more from the other India are coming over to this side very quietly. The world is not looking, that a pulsating dynamic new India is emerging. An India whose faith in success is far greater, than its fear of failure. An India that no longer boycotts foreign made goods, but buys up the company that makes them instead. History, they say is a bad motorist, it rarely ever signals its intentions, when it's taking a turn. This is that rarely ever moment. History is turning a page. For over half a century our nation has sprung, stumbled, run, fallen, rolled over, lurched on. But now in the 60th year of our freedom the ride has brought us to the world's great precipice, and

one India with a tiny little voice at the back of the head is looking down at the bottom of the ravine hesitating, the other India is looking at the sky and says its time to fly.

Not only did this new vision of India set the tone of what was to come, it was followed by a reinvention and new iconisation of Gandhi. A new Bapu was born. Gandhi started appearing in corporate and inflight magazines. Shopping malls held special events selling products made by prisoners of Tihar and other reformatories. A more robust smiling Gandhi replaced the image of the historic Gandhi. To ensure this, technology was at the country's disposal. Social media and the digital world took a large step to create this new iconic Gandhi. Gandhi was now readily available in tweets, Instagram and Facebook posts, Whatsapp messages, etc. A light fragile easily accessible fun loving Gandhi was making his presence felt, where viewers were reminded of that Gandhi whom Sarojini Naidu called Micky Mouse. Depoliticisation of Gandhi had set in.

Another trend had started in creating a new icon of Gandhi for the emerging global India. This trend started in 1982 with Richard Attenborough's famous Oscar winning film *Gandhi,* followed by *The Making of the Mahatma* by Shyam Benegal in 1996. This new phase of celluloid exposure of Gandhi which continued 2005 onwards with such films like *Maine Gandhi Ko Nahin Mara* (2005), *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* (2006), *Gandhi My Father* (2007), *Gandhi To Hitler* (2011) and Kamal Hasan's controversial film *Hey Ram* were all targeted not only to a new kind of national and global viewership, but it sought to reach out to a multiplex oriented market culture where improvisation of Gandhi and Gandhian message became inevitable. The historic and the new iconic was parting their ways.

A far more disquieting trend appeared with the publication of the news in 2008-9 that there has been a proposal to christen Gandhi to sainthood. This did not materialize, but very recently there has been a move to set up a temple of Gandhi at Vijayawada. In all probability, he will now be added to the pantheon of Indian gods. So, although, Gandhi could be saved from attaining sainthood, he

could not be from securing Godhood per se! He is now set to become a new god of the new India.

A digital version of this new god is now available in the revamped and remodeled museums in the capital as a part of the *Eternal Gandhi* Programme, where with the pressing of a button, one will be able to talk to the Mahatma, hear his voice and heart beat. Surely many more attractions are awaiting visitors in the future. A series of such digital interactive museums are coming up in different parts of India as well as in UK and USA. In keeping with this trend, Mahatma Gandhi Mobile Digital Museum Store marks a recent initiative of *Eternal Gandhi*. The store has over 100 souvenirs, ranging from apparel, books, bags, desktop accessories, figurines, personal accessories etc. The proclaimed goal of this store is to reinstate Gandhi's ideals of 'Peace', 'Truth', and 'Ahimsa' among the general populace and the student community. Where flesh and blood Bapu failed, the digital world hopes to succeed.

Delhi's present political regime, too, associates itself proudly with the new reinvented imaging of Gandhi: A smart robust 'swachha' 'sanitized' Gandhi is fast becoming the icon of present-day India. The new India is in need for such a Gandhi and the celebration of Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary will perhaps take it to a climatic height, the musical foundation of which has already been laid. To kick start the celebration on a global level, a new rendition of Gandhi's favourite song *Vaishnava janato* performed by singers from different parts of the world was telecast widely. Indian Missions around the world are also planning to highlight Gandhi's relevance through LED projections on iconic buildings in different countries. The underlying hope is, perhaps, to make India a part of the global culture and Bapu its brand ambassador. An icon of the new Swachha India.

Copyright on Bapu's writings has been lifted, but who holds the copyright on Bapu's spectacles, his body sketch or sketch of his bald head? Perhaps no one. Bapu is for everyone. In keeping with this cultural orientation, the Government of India has Bapu as their

inspiration.for its various political and social programmes, *Jan Dhan, Gobardhan, Swaccha Se Jura Jan andolan, Jan Oshodhi*, all leading to *Sabke Saath Sabka Vikash*. But this panoramic vision of India of the present regime, which they believe only Bapu can hold together, seeks to be as inclusive as possible. Thus, it also celebrates surgical strike, observes *Parakram Diwas*, proclaims India as the land of the Hindus, conducts NRC, while projecting Bapu as the new icon of today's India.

But let us now make an attempt to find Bapu in all this. Did Bapu truly stand for all that he is attributed to? Let us revisit Bapu in our own humble way.

III

Let us first take up Gandhi's position on politics and the political movement with which he associated himself. Recently, we are hearing a statement that given a choice Gandhi would have preferred *Swachhata to Swadhinata*. It is true that till 1919 there was a dilemma in the minds of many Indian political leaders regarding the priority to be given to social reform vis-a-vis political independence. But after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, the issue was more or less firmly settled in favour of political independence, although Gandhi always had a parallel concern for social issues. But if one looks at Gandhi's role in history, there will not be any doubt that the central element of Gandhiji's political movement was resisting British imperialism based on severe racial and economic discriminations. Gandhi's struggle was against the British Raj in all its manifestations. Gandhi was steadfast, not only to drive the British out of India, but his challenge was against the entire framework of imperialism, political, economic and cultural. This is evident from his struggles dating back to his South African days. His fight was also against caste, class and gender inequality and oppression, and certainly, he combined these with issues of sanitation, but only as a part of the broader political struggle against racial discrimination, and segregation based on caste, class or gender.

A question may next be posed: Would Gandhi have liked to become an icon of the new digital India? We remember that Gandhi in 1909 in *Hind Swaraj* came up with a strong critique of the industrial capitalist system, which was the foundation of modern civilization. He argued that the system, apart from creating conflicts at various levels, took the economic process outside any moral consideration, which made such economic activities develop its own momentum, and get divorced from all moral concerns. Moreover, he felt that the economic logic of this capitalist system acquired legitimacy in the name of modern progress and this helped the spread of aggressive imperialism. He reminded us:

> The economics that disregard moral and sentimental considerations are like wax works that being life like still lack the life of the living flesh. At every crucial moment these new fangled economic laws have broken down in practice. And nations or individuals, who accept them as guiding maxims must perish.

Gandhi also wrote in *Hind Swaraj,* that since Indians had accepted the basic tenets of industrial civilization with its attendant evils, they themselves were the cause of their own enslavement. He wrote, 'the English have not taken India, we have given it to them'. Regarding ill effects of mechanization too, Gandhi's position was very clear. He wrote:

> What I object to is the craze for what they call labour saving machinery. Men go on 'saving labour', till thousands are without work and thrown on the streets to die of starvation. (*Hind Swaraj*, p. 8).

Criticizing machine based modern civilization, Gandhi wrote:

> Men will not need the use of their hands and their feet. They will press a button, and they will have their clothing by their side. They will press another button, and they will have their newspaper. A third, and a motor car will be in waiting for them. They will have a variety of delicately dished up food. Everything will be done by machinery. (*Hind Swaraj*, p. 31).

Thus a question lurks in our mind, would Gandhi have liked to see the mobile empowered Indians having a *moothoi bondi jiban*? (a life stuck in the clutches of ones fist?)

As an alternative, Gandhi proposed the possibility of evolving an economic philosophy based on agriculture and small scale industries. This vision of Gandhi was intrinsically linked to his attempt to weaken the economic foundation of British rule in India and challenge the industrial capitalist system, that it represented. His attack on the production system set up at Manchester was clear and firm. He wrote,

'It is difficult to measure the harm that Manchester has done to us. It is due to Manchester that Indian handicraft has all but disappeared.' (*Hind Swaraj* p. 81). He further added,

> It may be considered a heresy, but I am bound to say that it were better for us to send money to Manchester, and to use flimsy Manchester cloth, than to multiply mills in India.

He could visualize the unemployment, poverty, hunger and squalor that were to accompany such an irreversible development. But we are now eager to set up silicon valleys in different parts of India.

Gandhi visualized a self-sufficient India, and *Khadi* was envisioned by him as the fabric of freedom, not only from British rule, but all that it represented in its economic and cultural form i.e., the material civilization and its attendant evils. On the necessity of promoting the cause of *Khadi* Gandhi wrote :

> 'Khadi provides dignified labour to the millions, who are otherwise idle for nearly four months in a year. Even apart from the remuneration the work brings, it has its own reward. For, if millions live in compulsory idleness they must die spiritually, mentally and physically. The spinning wheel automatically raises the status of millions of poor women.

Gandhi also wrote:

> 'Khadi has a tonic effect but, like nourishing food, it may not please one's taste; its savior lies in its tonic effect. Increased production of Khadi will correspondingly increase the vitality of the country and in any case, will not bring about indigestion.'(CWMG volume 30, 1926)

Gandhi was fully aware of the value and worth of human labour, the social consequences of alienation, the political implication of surplus accumulation and the consequent political imperialism. He also wanted to address the issue of class distinction when he persuaded the rich and the affluent to be on the spinning wheel at least for an hour in a day, hoping that it would connect them with the 'other' India. Under the present system, we do have *Khadi* but in a changed form and content. It is no longer a fabric of freedom and a livery of hope, but a global Indian brand. The shift in the underlying discourse is clear.

Gandhi's famous saying *My Life is My Message* is a statement on his vision of an alternative life-style. Today's India which is witnessing a flowering of the consumer society based on the pursuit of material happiness and individual well-being is certainly not a part of the Gandhian vision. Gandhi wanted to uphold an alternative lifestyle, in language, dress, and human relationships — the hallmark of all which was simplicity. This was reflected in the life style of Gandhi and Gandhians, in the pattern of community living in his ashrams, which aimed to be syncretic, egalitarian, moral, communitarian, self-reliant based on truth and non-violence. Through this alternative lifestyle Gandhi hoped to weaken the cultural bases and moral superiority of the capitalist consumerist society. As part of his experiment with truth, he conducted his experiments in *Brahmacharya*, in a much controversial phase of his life, and many of his closest associates could not accept it. But for him, it was a final test of his philosophy of life. A life based on self control, balance, moral strength and the will to establish mastery

over the five human senses- the life of a true *Satyagrahi*. Fundamental to his idea of alternative lifestyle were the concepts of trust, faith, duty and justice. Today, we are celebrating the discourse of rights that attempts to guarantee legal entitlements, but in the process the climate of trust among individuals, communities and nations is being systematically eroded. The passing of the new adultery law claiming to ensure equality of men and women has raised high hopes. Nobody knows, who is going to be benefitted by it, and how justice will be safeguarded. But Gandhi certainly wanted to work for a society where such problems would not have required a law or legal sanction. Gandhi would surely have preferred trust being restored, than trying to secure competing rights for the contending parties.

How would Gandhi have reacted if he had seen the working of today's parliamentary politics? Gandhi's views on parliamentary democracy were deeply insightful. He highlighted the contradiction that often surfaced between party politics, the parliamentary structure and the ability of individuals to act independently, morally and conscientiously, sometimes rising above party and personal interests. He also highlighted the negative role of newspapers which could mould public opinion adversely often to the detriment of public good. (*Hind Swaraj* p. 30). It is thus not a mere coincidence that Gandhi ran four newspapers — *Indian Opinion*, *Young India*, *Harijan* and *Navajivan* — as part of his broader struggle, and none of them relied on advertisements. He was well aware of the dangers of news and views being controlled by vested group interests and becoming subject to the money power of the few.

Gandhi has now, become very much the logo of the establishment. The outline of his round spectacles are all over the place. We are made to believe that we are seeing the world through Gandhian lens, as if, India is being modeled in accordance with Gandhi's visions. We are often misled to become a party to those changes. More alarming is the fact, that the younger generation will know Gandhi in this present form and will not know Gandhi of his own times. They will know when you are afraid you have to utter the

name of Ram and you will be spared. They will know, that Gandhi wanted us to sweep and clean in immaculately dressed attire as part of school projects. The poor will know that Gandhi wanted everyone to open bank accounts, irrespective of whether they have money or not. The *kisan* will know that Gandhi wanted them to understand the worth of cow dung, irrespective of whether the *kisans* die of hunger or commit suicide, being unable to come out of the debt trap. Champaran will be memorialized only to be the link between the historic Gandhi, India's neo-capitalist transformation and our modern 'Gandhi driven' 'Gandhi dictated' state structure where dissenters run the risk of being behind the bars.

Perhaps the time has come when we will have to remind ourselves that Gandhi became an icon in his time and even after his death, as a symbol of passive resistance. How did Gandhi see dissent as an effective political weapon? Gandhi developed his idea of passive resistance to rectify wrong and secure justice. A situation when the ruled would cease to cooperate with the rulers, when the latter displeased the former. Central to Gandhi's concept of a civil resister was the self- disciplined morally strong individual who would come together to create a new political space (*Swaraj*) and Gandhi felt that each individual would have to be inspired by the idea of *Swaraj* individually. He asserted, 'Swaraj has to be experienced by each one, for himself.' For the resisters, *satyagraha* would be the method, that is a commitment to non-violent moral power, by the exercise of which the illegitimacy of the regime that they are hoping to change would be exposed, and the upholders of the regime would also see the wrong and would be brought to the side of right thinking. To Gandhi, the issue of moral transformation of the individual and the collective was very important. To him politics, social transformation and morality were integrally related. Therefore, he wanted a *satyagrahi* to distinguish between the immediate exploiter and the structure of exploitation and stressed on the need to change the structure of exploitation. In his words *Rog Ko mitana hai rogi ko nahin*. Do we see any of these today? And if yes, with what consequences? Perhaps

we all need to take lessons from his life experiences and revisit him to clarify our own thoughts.

Gandhi always emphasized on the need to take the side of the oppressed and urged that a *satyagrahi's* sympathy should always lie with the weak and the disabled. In organizing struggles, he believed one should not always stick to the binaries or binary categories like men vs. women, Hindus vs. Muslims, rich vs. poor, capital vs. labour. Rather, his attention was always on the needy, the persecuted and the helpless and his way to identify the last man or the *antim jan* was reflected in his famous Talisman:

> I will give you a talisman whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him ... will it lead to Swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? (August 1947).

Gandhi was thus perhaps aware of the hegemonic aspirations of certain groups and communities that may arise from a collective desire to rectify the immediate or imminent wrong, embedded in a structure at a particular point of time. Should we not revisit his Talisman, to redefine our goals in confronting the challenges of present day India?

Gandhi has been an inspirer of peace movements and peace activists worldwide. Millions draw inspiration from his life and message. This was primarily because one of the crucial elements in Gandhi's political method was the idea of bridge building. This was manifested not only in his attempt to end the political conflict between British imperialism and Indian nationalism, but also in promoting the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity, women's empowerment, empowerment of lower caste groups, resolving the conflict between labour and capital and striking a balance between tradition and modernity. Once again, we feel confused, bewildered, anxious and helpless, when we fail to see the application of such an

approach in resolving long-standing conflicts and restoring peace locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

Religion and politics has been one of the most contentious issues in modern India's political life. Let us hear the voice of Gandhi on this: I quote from *Hind Swaraj*

> 'In India there had always been a coexistence of different religions- Hindus, Mohamedans, Parsis, Christians who have together made India their country. …….. The Hindus, the Muslims the Parsees and the Christians who have made India their country are fellow countrymen, and they will have to live in unity, if only for their own interest. In no part of the world are one nationality and one religion synonymous terms, nor has it ever been so in India.'

Although Gandhi had said so repeatedly and categorically, questions are still raised about Gandhi's own religious self. The doubts were so intense that he could not escape the bullets of Godse which left the nation awe-struck. So what was religion to Gandhi? He was clear in his statement when he remarked that, it was his commitment to truth which had drawn him both to the arena of politics and to religion. He wrote in *An Autobiography* or *The Story of My Experiments with Truth-*

> 'My devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics... Those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics, do not know what religion means.'

In 1924 he wrote –

> 'For me there is no politics without religion - not the religion of the superstitions and the blind, religion that hates and fights, but the universal religion of toleration.'

On 28 March 1930 he reiterated:

> 'We shall continue to be atheists and not believers so long as we do not achieve unity with all sections of the country.'

Does this vision tally with our present day situation where we are seeing the unfolding of a competing and contending religiosity in its most exclusionist form?

So questions arise: What is it, to which Gandhi is lending legitimacy in his present form of iconisation? Who are the beneficiaries of this new personality cult? For which section of the society is he holding a charter of hope? I think the answer will be self evident to an informed reader. Who are the people craving for legitimacy in Gandhi? Has Gandhi been turned on his head? Has the historic Gandhi failed the iconic Gandhi of today? I leave it to the readers to ponder over these questions and revisit Gandhi, his life and thought again and again. However my fear is most acute for the younger generation which is getting exposed to Gandhi of the new India which does not always represent the historic Gandhi.

One may of course argue, that every political ideology can be interpreted and re-interpreted and may be applied in changed circumstances. It also goes without saying, that India today is indeed turning a page in history. It is emerging as a leading soft power in the global arena. For this, it certainly requires its icon/icons, its 'brand ambassadors' and it is quite evident that the present regime is trying to rely heavily on the 'father of the nation'. But, perhaps, the demands of this new India, on its 'father' may turn out to be too exacting. Will Gandhi be able to 'father' this 'new India' for long? True, he in his own time, wanted to 'gently shake the world', and indeed, he could do so. He brought the 'Leviathan' of the British imperial state down to its feet, with his loin cloth clad frail body but strong mind. But the same arms which were instrumental in unshackling the chains of a 'Leviathan', can prove to be too soft and inappropriate in reshackling the chains of the newly emerging Indian State. His loin cloth may appear too pale and inadequate to clad the sparkling, gorgeous new India of the twenty-first century. The new India, which 'looks at the sky and says its time to fly' may soon have to look for and create her own icon/icons, to legitimize the change we are witnessing.

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I would end my reflections with a saying of Gandhi, and the conversation that I had with a young girl. Gandhi had written to the *ashram* children from prison cell shortly after his arrest in May 1922:

> Ordinary birds cannot fly without wings; with wings of course all can fly. But if, you, without wings, will learn how to fly, then all your troubles will indeed be at an end. And, I will teach you. See, I have no wings, yet I come flying to you every day in thought. Look, here is little Vimala, here is Hari and here also Dharmakumar. And, you also can come to my thought. Send me a letter signed by all, and those who do not know how to sign may make a cross.

I narrated this saying to a young girl with an earnest hope that yes, now I have something which will surely appeal to her - with the hesitant expectation that it would at least for a while make her see the other side of life, which Gandhi wanted us to see the possibility of soaring high with hope even when one may not have the resource to do so, or take the mind away from the aspirations of material acquisitions. The reply was, "I would rather like to fly by an aeroplane". But then I told her, that Gandhi was saying even if you do not get a chance of flying with wings/aeroplane you can have the pleasure of flying, you can get connected with hope, in thought, in idea, in mind. She answered, "that is philosophy, aeroplane is science".

I recoiled back to my thoughts. But that conversation made clear to me Gandhi's place is the context of 'modern' living. The conversation with the young girl, that I mentioned, convinced me that Gandhi wanted to keep alive (like many others) a silver lining of hope, an alternative vision which constantly ran the risk of getting dismissed as anti-science and anti-technology in civilization's march ahead. Therefore, while envisaging the alternative system, Gandhi created his own iconic symbols for his struggle —- *charkha*, *khadi*, salt, *ashram* life. All had great symbolic significance. Gandhi himself perhaps knew the symbolic significance of these. In the task of

economic and political reconstruction of India these were incidental (may not be essential) but centering round these were certain long lasting values, the importance of which needs to be reassessed. And, he could only do it, by projecting in his persona those strands which civilization in order to retain its human face needed to hold on to. The enormity of this problem is perhaps more now than it was during Gandhi's time. Whether he wanted it or not Gandhi became both a personality cult and a charter of hope, both in his time and even today, although for different purposes.

Gandhi, I believe, still holds a space between the *reason* which tells us that he is like us, an ordinary mortal with usual pains and agonies, fears of failure, saddled with skepticism, and the *unreason*, which make us feel that he is different in his capabilities to create, to empathize, to share, to awaken, and to make us respect his ideals. He also perhaps holds a space between the modern individual's instincts of *social extraction* which makes him/her crave for daily necessities and that of *social accountability* which goads him/her to commit himself/herself to work towards creating a better society to raise a voice against injustice and to resist the process that legitimizes the authority and influence of the strong over the weak. Since Gandhi holds such a space he offers us a 'charter of hope' in the form of his personality from whom we can draw inspiration. The question whether he wanted it or not is of little relevance.

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Is Gandhi more Relevant in the Twenty-first Century? The Question of Caste in Contemporary India

Arun Bandopadhyay

The thought and activities of Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) have been viewed and analysed in many ways both in his life time and after, leading to different kinds of appreciation, criticism and sometimes even hostility. Gandhi came into historical prominence in India mainly in the first half of the twentieth century, but his immediate relevance continued in the rest of the century along with people who lived, worked and even contended him in various ways in his lifetime. The relevance of Gandhian thought and activities in the twentieth century was, therefore, more historical than, strictly speaking, 'ideological'. There is an argument that some aspects of Gandhian thought such as non-violence, decentralization of power, ecological awareness, and individual fulfillment in a civilizational context are of lasting significance, and, therefore, more relevant in the twenty-first century.

Generally speaking, caste questions are not treated as one of such foundational aspects of Gandhian thought. The present paper tries to question it by focusing on the strands that Gandhi had taken against caste both in his writings and deeds. It does not ignore the changes that occurred in Gandhian thought on this question over time nor does it minimize the impact of the contestation that Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (1891-1956) developed against him on the crucial question of the erstwhile depressed or dalit castes. It even takes into account a recent evaluation that Gandhi used a 'strategy' on the caste question in his

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lifetime, his so-called defence of qualified 'varnasram' at one time and his life-long opposition to 'untouchability' on the other. But the paper also pays a special attention to two spectacular similarities between Gandhi and Ambedkar in their thoughts on caste in the Indian historical context. The first is that both emphasized the role of non-violence and the significance of 'individual' in their respective ideological deliberations against caste. The second, and more fundamental, similarity was the importance that they have given on the 'socio-economic' and 'cultural' aspects of the caste questions in particular.

Whatever may be the criticism of Gandhian thought on the role of caste in Indian society, there is no denying the fact that Gandhi's crusade against untouchability was an established fact of both his personal and public life. Indeed, like Ambedkar, he also identified it as the crucial problem of the Indian caste question, though they differed in the method of its eradication. The apparent objective was the same, Ambedkar's 'annihilation' and Gandhi's 'abolition' of caste in the final sense of the term.

This paper has six short sections. In the first section, I have given an idea of the purpose of revisiting the cardinal views of Gandhi on caste, and the problems associated with such an exercise. I have also tried to clarify the methods followed in this exercise. The second section makes a brief discussion on the cardinal views of Gandhi on this age-old question of caste. The third section tries to identify the similarities and differences of the views of Gandhi and Ambedkar on the subject. The fourth section attempts to make a critical appreciation of Gandhi's views on caste in the long historical context of India. The fifth section specifically dwells on the importance of untouchability question within the purview of Gandhian thought on caste. The final section touches on the contemporary relevance of Gandhian thought on caste in India, both in terms of historical framework of the post-colonial era and in terms of the new analytical framework of social and cultural history emerging at that time.

I

As anticipated at the very beginning of this paper, understanding Gandhian views of caste may lead us to an exercise of facing two Gandhis on our way of interpretation. If one of them is historical Gandhi incorporating a trajectory along with the origin and development of his views and experiences on the subject over time, the other is the ideological Gandhi focusing on ideas of lasting importance for posterity. Though both Gandhis are related in real time, they can be analytically separated for clarity. There were many followers of Gandhi and believers in his ideas both during and after his lifetime. Things might have dramatically changed, as far as his direct impact was concerned, within a decade after his death. Even as early as 1951, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote in his foreword to a multi volume work on the biography of Mahatma Gandhi that a "new generation grows up to whom he is almost a name, a great name to be revered but nonetheless a name."[1] By contrast, come two elusive words ("more relevant") in the title of this paper, in altogether different context of the twenty-first century, although with a note of interrogation. However, the discovery of the relevance of Gandhi's ideas in today's world also has a history of its own. It was admitted even as early as the middle of the 1980s by no less a person than the noted economist Sukhamoy Chakravarty that both the mainstream economists and their Marxist critics had by then started to learn from Gandhi, while the ecologically sensitive scholars even found a special interest in him[2]. Thus Gandhi was increasingly considered relevant to our current social, economic and political thinking.

It is, however, true that when we try to detect the cardinal ideas of Gandhi of lasting importance, we generally do not include his views on the caste question in India. Four cardinal issues are often detected from Gandhian literature, and they are non-violence, decentralization of power, ecological awareness, and goals of individual fulfillment. But there is scope for further understanding of Gandhi's position on caste, both historically as well as analytically.

General problems in any venture of understanding Gandhi are many. There is a plethora of secondary works on the great man, and there is always a chance of missing the wood for the trees. As the general attraction for him cross the boundaries of political ideologies, we are bound to face multiple interpretations of his thought. For many, he was the source of hope but for some others, he is still a subject of hostility. Indeed, he still remains as an enigma in the last analysis.

I will be highly in order to clarify the methodology followed in this article. The present paper should not be taken as a hagiography of Gandhi nor an exercise of his condemnation. The moot point is to understand the significance of his views on caste from the historical as well as contemporary standpoints. We have made use of his writings, rather schematically and sporadically, but never separately from his deeds. Gandhi himself was very categorical on this point as he once cautioned his readers about this: "what you do not get from my conduct, you will never get from my words."[3] In our study, however, Gandhian writings and deeds will be taken together, and they will sometimes be placed in contradiction, in order to get a better purview of them in analytical terms.

In this connection, I shall make a comparison of Gandhi and Ambedkar as far as their views on the question of caste were concerned. However, the paper should not be judged as a comparative work on the contributions of Gandhi and Ambedkar. My limited purpose here is to clarify some of Gandhi's ideas on the subject with special reference to those of Ambedkar. It never claims to be full-fledged work of comparison of the two great thinkers of modern India in the twentieth century.

Finally, this paper has made frequent use of certain historiographical and methodological tools in course of interpretation. Historiographical issues are those which often come out of the evaluation of ideas as they evolved over time on this question, and the contending discourses on their history. Methodological issues are

related to the discourses of analysis as they evolved in the intellectual history of the subject. Here the transformation of new social history into cultural history, and vice versa, and their impact on the use of attendant concepts and their direction of analysis come within the purview of our discussion. They also help our understanding of the contending and underlying issues of caste better both in historical and contemporary contexts. It is possible that a new understanding of Gandhian views on the subject may also be attempted in this way.

II

It is important to note that a critical understanding of Gandhi's views on caste is only possible if we can detect some of the cardinal features of it. It is not an easy task. It has been argued strongly by some scholars that the Gandhian views on caste changed over time. Though there are some opponents to it, the idea holds good and even seems important in analysis of the views as reflected in writings and deeds of Gandhi over half a century. He is, however, generally projected as a sort of a defender of caste system, as reflected in his early support of *varnasrama*. It is also stated that he was not an advocate of inter-dining and inter-caste and inter-communal marriages in his early life. However, he was definitely opposed to untouchability throughout his life. Simultaneously, he is often judged by the way he was looked by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, his cardinal opponent on the caste question, particularly from the 1930s onwards, when the caste question assumed a very important political question also.

It will be highly in order to detect and discuss the cardinal views of Gandhi on caste with special reference to four important contemporary issues associated with it in the early twentieth century. They were the prevailing prejudices for untouchability, the existing restrictions on commensality or inter-dining, endogamy or rules for marriages within one's caste, and finally prescriptions to follow one's hereditary occupation.

Of all these aspects, untouchability was one in which Gandhi took the most consistent position. It was clear from his boyhood as reflected

in his autobiography, and also followed in his South African days and thereafter. Untouchable friends used to come to his residence in South Africa, and he used to live and dine with them.[4] While coming from there in 1914, he brought with him the 'untouchable' boy Naicker with him and later adopted an 'untouchable' Lakshmi as his daughter. Gandhi did not believe the notion of purity and pollution, and restrictions on untouchability were meaningless to him.

As regards inter-dinning, Gandhi never followed the strict restrictions prevailing in the Hindu community. Though born in a strictly vegetarian Vaishnava family, Gandhi followed inter-dinning with his non-vegetarian friends both in India and abroad. In the Wardha ashram, a person called Govind, "who was untouchable by caste, generally prepared food for him"[5]. With regard to inter-caste and inter-communal marriage, he also changed his earlier position of indifference to support in his later days, particularly from the 1930s onwards. He allowed his sons Ramdas and Devdas to marry respectively outside their sub-caste and varna, and arranged the marriage his adopted daughter with a Brahmin boy.[6] From the1930s onwards, Gandhi was attending only those marriages which were inter-caste or inter-communal in nature and where he was personally invited.

From his personal experience, Gandhi knew that his family from his grandfather's days was not pursuing assigned to them according to the caste system. Gandhi himself "tried to master many activities prohibited for his caste, such as the work of a scavenger, barber, washerman, cobbler, tiller and tailor"[7]. In Gandhi's plan of basic education introduced around 1937, there was no insistence that one had to follow the hereditary occupation of one's forefathers. His earlier support for the continuance of the hereditary occupation in case of certain crafts may, therefore, be reviewed from a different perspective.

III

Before making a critical appreciation of some of Gandhi's views on caste in the next section, we shall very quickly look into the

similarities and differences of Gandhi and Ambedkar on the subject. Indeed, the differences between the two major thinkers on the question of caste were so well-known that they often over-shadowed their similarities. "Within India, Ambedkar is often contrasted to Gandhi, an opposition that is symbolized in their sculptural depiction"[8]: one in western image symbolizing the hopes of the dalits and the other in loincloth identifying himself with India's poor. It has been stated that while Gandhi opposed the restrictions associated with caste system, Ambedkar opposed the brahmanical notions of ritual and pollution coded in scriptures that sustained the caste system. The historical root of the caste differences also came in the latter's purview. Over and above all, there was a political question of representation within anti-colonial movements of resistance, as reflected within the debates on Communal Award. Since some of these questions of differences are taken up more elaborately in the next section, we shall only dwell here on the similarities of the thought and approach of these two thinkers in this section.

The most notable similarity in between Gandhi and Ambedkar was that both emphasized the role of 'non-violence' in the mobilization of people for the realization of any cause and the significance of the interest of the 'individual' in the entire exercise, within their respective ideological deliberations. As far as non-violence or *ahimsa* was concerned, it was for Gandhi "a positive state of love"[9] as well as "a weapon of matchless potency"[10]. Ambedkar also could very well go to support this, particularly its potentiality as a tool of achieving some social or political goal.

At the same time, the idea of individual came to the core of analogy of both Gandhi and Ambedkar. The core of Gandhi's understanding of individual freedom was an assumption in the 'essential unity of man' who was projected as a social animal, both independent and interdependent[11]. Unlike the social contract theorists of European enlightenment, Gandhi believed in the "Advaita philosophy for his understanding of man and his place in the world in which the

transcendental and metaphysical unity of human beings is assumed"[12]. A highly religious person, Gandhi derived his "politics from ethics or religion"[13] that an individual could sustain. As a result, in 'a letter' in 1932, he could categorically state: "I do not conceive religion as one of the many activities of mankind. The same activity may be either governed by the spirit of religion or irreligion. There is no such thing for me, therefore, as leaving politics for religion. For me, every, the tiniest activity is governed by what I consider to be my religion"[14]. Here individual comes to the fore out of a religious belief. In the case of Ambedkar, individual also came in the forefront of his analysis of an exploitative social system from which an uplift had to be made. Here religion played a checkered role especially in the last stage of his life, but throughout the goal of individual well-being played the most prominent role in the making of his thought.

Thirdly, both Gandhi and Ambedkar gave unusual importance to the 'socio-economic' and 'cultural' factors in the understanding of things that made the caste question as it appeared to be. Ambedkar in particular wrote books on it to focus on the 'cultural root' of the socio-economic disparity of caste[15]. Gandhi also gave unusual importance to temple entry movement which for him was "the crux of the movement for eradication of untouchability"[16]. He even went on to say that it was unparallel in its impact, and that it was "not a substitute for any other uplift".[17] He readily found the root of the organized opposition to his temple entry movement. Yamaguchi Heroichi has identified Gandhi's 'Speech at Prayer Meeting, Tanjore' where he declared: "I have been told not once but repeatedly that our *sanatanist* would associate with all other reforms with references to untouchability, if only I would surrender the claim of temple entry on behalf of the harijans"[18]. If these were the cultural aspects of caste disparity, Gandhi was equally concerned about the social-economic disparity as he told Radhakamal Mukherjee while presiding over one of his talks at St Stephen's College in Delhi in November 1917[19].

IV

It is one thing to identify the cardinal features of Gandhian thought on caste which we have already done in section II, but it is altogether another thing to make a critical appreciation of some of them, which we shall do now. Much of the criticism against the apparently conservative Gandhian views on caste emanate from an ignorance of the fact that these views largely changed over time. Bipan Chandra even went on to claim that many of Gandhi's views on "caste system, inter-caste and inter-religious dining and marriages…underwent changes – sometimes drastic – and, invariably in more radical directions".[20]

It will be quite in order to say a few words on the question of consistency and inconsistency of Gandhian thoughts over a period of fifty years of active writing and pronouncements based on public deeds. Gandhi often used to say that if there was any contradiction between his earlier and later writing, it would always be better to depend on the latter. The root of such observation is apparently a belief in the veracity of historical evolution of ideas. However, Nishikant Kolbe has tried to find out a kind of consistency in Gandhian thought, particularly on the caste question, by quoting Gandhi to enquire "if there is not an underlying and abiding consistency between the two seeming inconsistencies"[21]. Kolbe even goes on to make further claim regarding Gandhi's consistency of thought and deed on the subject. "His attitude towards the caste system remained more or less consistent throughout his life. It is obvious now that the inconsistencies or changes in his writings were deliberate and conscious, and not due to any changes in his opinion on the subjects."[22] Such a view entails the question of 'strategy' which we shall discuss later.

It has been argued that Gandhi never followed strict caste restrictions and rituals as applied to his family. Born in a Gujarati family belonging to the Vaishnava sect of Hinduism, Gandhi had worn the *sikha* (a long tuft or lock of hair) and the *tulasi-kanthi* (a

Vishnava necklace of *tulasi* beads) in his boyhood but before his journey to England for education, he "got rid of the *sikha*"[23]. He was not in the habit of regular wearing of *tulsi kanthi* in later life[24]. Gandhi's practice of vegetarianism, though rooted in the family's customs, was never carried on strictly religious or caste lines of restrictions, as he was accustomed to dine with the foreigners, non-vegetarians and even the so-called untouchables of his time. Though he spoke approvingly of certain aspects of *varnashrama dharma* at certain stages of his life, he did not regard it as fundamental feature of Hinduism, particularly in his later life.

Even then, there are scholars who think that Gandhi believed in the caste system in toto. One group, notably belonging to the dalit historiography, considers Gandhi only the product of the brahmanical order. As Braj Ranjan Mani puts it,

> Gandhi was an outstanding product of the orthodox milieu: he was a bania more brahmanical than Brahmans; his world-view and life philosophy were moulded and shaped by the age-old brahmanic values and way of life.[25]

Kancha Ilaiaha even goes to the extent of claiming that Gandhi "stood for the oppressor and the exploiting upper castes"[26]. On the other hand, some scholars such as Bhikhu Parekh have taken Gandhi merely as a defender of caste system and also have searched for the reasons 'why Gandhi defended the caste system'[27]. Parekh writes,

> Since Gandhi believed in rebirth and the law of karma, he thought that the characteristic occupation of an individual's caste corresponded to his natural abilities and dispositions and represented a necessary moment of his spiritual evolution.[28]

Nishikant Kolbe advances two reasons for not accepting this criticism[29]. First, Gandhi openly violated most of the important restrictions of caste system in his personal practice. Secondly, he also built ashrams in different parts of India, following a culture founded on principles that rejected all the basic value of caste system or

varnashrama dharma. When the marriage of Gandhi's son Ramdas took place in the Ashram, Gandhi did not hesitate to call the celebration as the 'last' one and added that henceforward the "rule should be on the part of the Ashram to discontinuance marriages between parties of the same caste and to encourage those between parties belonging to different sub-castes"[30].

By contrast, Margaret Chatterjee has argued that Gandhi supported caste as an instrument to provide a livelihood for millions of villages in India. While explaining the root of the religious thought of Gandhi, Chatterjee relates it to his opposition to industrialization as it failed to provide a livelihood for millions of Indians and his support of traditional hereditary modes of occupation over industrialization for resolving India's economic problems[31]. This argument is problematic for several reasons. First, Gandhi opposed industrialization not because that "it would gradually erode the network of traditional occupations" but because of the possibility that "it would destroy deeper values and create alienated individuals in an industrial society"[32]. Secondly, Gandhi was well aware of the possibility that hereditary occupation might crush individuality, another fundamental concern of him, even in a pre-modern society[33]. Later, when he promoted *Charkha* as the symbol of self-sufficiency and dignity of labour, "he did not ask any particular caste alone to spin but tried to persuade everyone across caste, religion, gender and economic status to spin every day"[34].

Even if we view Gandhi's thoughts on caste system in the light of above discussion, both in terms of their remarkable consistency and inconsistency, there is no denying the fact that there may be certain tactics or strategy about it. It was B.R. Nanda who first identified such tactics when he stated that "Gandhi's reluctance to make frontal assault on the caste system in the early years may have been a matter of tactics"[35], but he was later joined by a galaxy of scholars such as Rajmohan Gandhi, Anthony J. Parel, Judith Brown, David Hardiman, Dennis Dalton, Ramachandra Guha and Joseph Lelyveld[36]. Nishikant

Kolbe develops the arguments further and finds a unique 'strategy' in it, where the word strategy is not a negative concept, and it helps formulate a new interpretation of Gandhi's thought on caste over several decades[37].

As argued very forcefully by Nishikant Kolbe, the chronological presentation of Gandhi's writings and life from 1915 to 1948 reveals this strategy in many of the changes that came in the thoughts of Gandhi on a number of issues such as untouchability, caste, varna, inter-dining and inter-caste marriages[38]. Kolbe, for example, has specifically mentioned that during the period between1916-20, Gandhi was more concerned about the removal of untouchability in the form a fight to destroy the notion "that one gets polluted by the physical touch of someone"[39]. However, during the subsequent period between 1920 and 1927, Gandhi's stand shifted towards a stand "that children of the untouchables should be permitted entry in every national school"[40]. What Kolbe has not mentioned, Gandhi personally preferred attending only marriages between a so-called untouchable and a higher caste Hindu in the late 1930s and 1940s. These changes can be seen as strategic changes in the wake of social movements as they took place during this time. However, they may also be seen as extension of Gandhi's original stand against caste discrimination at various levels. It has been even argued that "to a practical man of non-violent creed these are stages of progress and not principles of contradiction"[41].

Even if someone thinks that Gandhi only took a strategic position with regard to cast, there is no denying the fact that he repeatedly asked the moot questions about it. As early as March 1933, in his letter to V.S.R. Sashtri, Gandhi stated that the learned *sanatanists* had hardly touched the fundamental points raised by him and then continued to ask,

> Where is the authority of the *Vedas* for regarding them (untouchables) as such? And if there is none in the Vedas, can the later *sashtras* impose disabilities or create classes not contemplated by the *Vedas*?[42]

It thus appears that the analysis of Gandhi's thought on the so-called untouchables or what was broadly identified as *antyajas* take a crucial position in our discussion. And this has to be done not only in the light of his writings but his deeds throughout his life, as he pointed out time and again.

V

In this section, we shall very briefly touch on the importance of the entire question of untouchability in the Gandhian thought on caste. We have already discussed the question of consistency and inconsistency in the evolution of Gandhian thought on the subject. But of all stands taken by Gandhi on the question of caste, his position vis-à-vis untouchability was most consistent. This was both reflected in his writings and deeds.

Ambedkar delivered his famous speech on caste and later published it by himself as *Annihilation of Caste* in 1936. The book was written on the basis of his critique of Brahmanism which opened an original line of perspective in the analysis of the caste question in India in the present and the past. Gandhi, on the other hand, ultimately spoke for the abolition of caste and justified it on the ground of the individual journey of fulfillment. This journey was connected with Gandhi's pleading for the purification of soul and search for truth.

There was an element of cultural question involved in this thought on untouchability. We are all aware of Iyothee Thas's famous statement against Brahmanism. This divided the stakeholders in two broad groups – Brahmins and non-Brahmins. Ambedkar articulated the cultural question by going deeper in the history of dalit communities – their origin and evolution – by making a critical study of brahminical texts and their interpretation. He came out with a political prescription of separate electorate in India in the late colonial era. Gandhi also realized the significance of this cultural question of untouchability for the society at large. He made a special drive to the so-called outcaste within society, but his final prescription was for cultural assimilation.

What is important here to note is that both Gandhi and Ambedkar never ignored the varieties of socio-economic question with regard to untouchability in India. Ambedkar worked for a series of state action for the social uplift of the dalits preceded by social movement. Gandhi also was quite aware of the stark socio-economic reality in which dalits were placed, and in his rural reconstruction programme they figured prominently. He mainly prescribed for social movement followed by state action, if necessary. Thus both socio-economic and cultural questions had their respective places in the thought processes of Gandhi and Ambedkar on the subject of caste in India.

The lasting historical significance of Gandhian thought on caste, therefore , cannot be denied. One of the crucial features of Indian history since the seventh century CE onwards is the caste mobility, despite its ostensible limitations. This mobility took a dramatic turn in the colonial era in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when Gandhi and Ambedkar spent major parts of their lives. Caste question in India, as we see it now-a-days, cannot be the same without their interventions.

VI

It is now to re-evaluate the relevance of Gandhian thought on caste in contemporary India. As we see it in the twenty-first century, it is neither 'annihilated' nor 'abolished' in India in the last seventy years, despite a series of legislation on this regard. Apparently, there was a vast dichotomy between the socio-cultural positions of different caste groups in India in the early twentieth and early twenty-first century. The political, economic and social questions related with caste also changed over time. With improvements of standards and opening of opportunities, more and more people are preferring to include themselves in the category of 'socially backward', over and above the dalits and maha-dalits of the category of scheduled castes as approved by the Indian constitution.

This is not an appropriate place to make a detailed study of the socio-economic dynamics of caste movements in contemporary India.

There are many signs of change, for each of which there is scope for further distinct analysis. But one thing is to be noted. The old analysis of this change, attempted exclusively through the critique of Brahmanism, needs partial revision because of the emergence of increasing conflicts between the dalit and the major non-Brahmin castes in recent years.

Hence comes the renewed significance of Gandhi's emphasis on the dalit question within the broad rubric of the caste question in Indian society and politics in general. It again appears that without addressing the issues associated with the dalit uplift, the caste question in India cannot be properly discussed. It also appears that both cultural and socio-economic standpoints are to be used for a proper understanding of the process of change, and the consequent uplift of the concerned social sections. Both Gandhi and Ambedkar did that. Herein comes the theoretical importance of the new social history without forgetting the very best part of cultural history[43] as valid tools of analysis of historical change as reflected in the caste question in India in the long run.

VII

Now to conclude. The amazing aspect in the analogy of caste by Gandhi and Ambedkar was that both realized the cultural root of it, while recognizing the socio-economic reality of it. One cannot be divorced from the other. It gives them an unusual insight on the socio-economic and cultural dynamism of caste in Indian history, though their practical prescriptions differ. Ideologically Ambedkar was more adamant in his crusade against Brahmanism, while Gandhi was more consistent in his emphasis on self-realisation of the individual. Viewed from the perspective of the checkered history of caste related questions and conflicts in contemporary India, where the schism between the upper and intermediate castes on the one hand and dalit castes on the other have more often been so acute in some of the conflicts in recent years, the relevance of Gandhian thought (along with Ambedkar) variously becomes a subject to be closely enquired into. However, the importance of dalit issue in its socio-

economic context, and of caste disparity in its cultural context is to be taken together for analysis to re-examine the real dynamism of caste in the politics and society in contemporary India. The scope of explorations on the nuances and broader implications of the Gandhian thought on the caste question is, therefore, still a thing to think about in India in the twenty-first century.

Notes

[1] The Foreword was written on 30 June 1951 for D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Vol. I, Bombay, 1951, p. xi.

[2] Sukhamoy Chakravarty, *Development Planning: The Indian Experience*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 37-38.

[3] *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (hereafter CWMG), Vol 73, New Delhi: Publication Division, Government of India, 1978, p.145.

[4] M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or the Story of my Experiments with Truth*, Penguin edition in English, 2001, p.360. The original Gujarati edition was published in two volumes, in 1927 and 1929, and it was first translated from Gujarati to English by Mahadev Desai in 1940.

[5] Belvant Sinha, *Under the Shelter of Bapu*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1962, p.93 as cited in Nishikant Kolge, *Gandhi Against Caste*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017, p.10

[6] Nishikant Kolbe, op.cit., p.11.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Gail Omvedt, *Ambedkar: Towards an Enlightened India*, Penguin Books, 2008, p. xv.

[9] As Gandhi wrote in *Young India* on 25 August 1920, "*Ahimsa* was not a negative state of harmlessness, but it is a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil-doer"

[10] *Young India*, 6 September 1926.

[11] CWMC, Vol. 25, pp.550-63.

[12] Nishikant Kolge, op.cit., p.75.

[13] CWMG, Vol. 72, p. 243.

[14] CWMG, Vol. 49, p.502.

[15] I am here particularly referring to such works of Ambedkar as *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development* (1916), *The Annihilation of Caste* (1936) or *Who were the Shudras* (1948).

[16] CWMG, Vol. 51, p.241

[17] CWMG, Vol 54, p. 336.

[18] CWMG, Vol. 57, p.160, cited in Yamaguchi Hiroichi, *How Relevant is Gandhi*

Today: A Japanese View, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2015, p. 152.

[19] Yamaguchi Hiroichi, op.cit., p.106.

[20] Bipan Chandra, "Gandhiji, Secularism and Communalism" in *Social Scientist*, Vol. 32, Nos 1-2, 2004, pp.3-4.

[21] CWMG, Vol. 70, p.320, quoted in Nishikant Kolbe, op.cit, p.37.

[22] Nishikant Kolbe, p.38.

[23] Ibid., p.14.

[24] M.K. Gandhi, *Caste Must Go and the Sin of Untouchability,* Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1964. "I have never given up *tulasi kanthi* but *tulasi kanthi* gave me up", p.92.

[25] Braj Ranjan Mani, *Debrahmanising History: Dominance and resistance in Indian Society,* New Delhi: Manahar, 2008, p.348, cited in Nishikant Kolbe, pp.26-27.

[26] Kancha Ilaiah, "Dalitism vs. Brahmanism: The Epistemological Conflict in History" in Ghanashyam Shah (ed.), *Dalit Identity and Politics: Cultural Subordination and Dalit Challenge,* New Delhi: Sage, 2001, p.126.

[27] Nishikant Kolbe, p. 31.

[28] Bhikhu Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhi's Political Discourse,* New Delhi: Sage, 1989, p. 226.

[29] Nishikant Kolbe, p.27.

[30] CWMG, Vol 35, p.500.

[31] Margaret Chatterjee, *Gandhi's Religious Thought,* Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983, pp.19-20.

[32] Nishikant Kolbe, p. 30.

[33] Nicholas F. Gier, *The Virtue of Non-violence: From Gautama to Gandhi,* New York: State University of New York Press, 2004, p.22.

[34] Nishikant Kolbe, p. 31.

[35] B.R. Nanda, *Gandhi and His Critics,* New Delhi: Oxford University press, 1985, p. 26.

[36] Rajmohan Gandhi, *The Good Boatman: A Portrait of* Gandhi, New Delhi: Viking, 1995; A.J. Parel, *Gandhi's Philosophy and Quest for Harmony,* New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2006; Judith Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope,* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990; David Hardiman, *Gandhi in His Time and Ours: The Global Legacy of His Ideas,* New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2003; Dennis Dalton, *Mahatma Gandhi: Non-violent Power in Action,* New York: Columbia University Press, 1993; Ramachandra Guha, *An Anthropologist among the Marxists and Other Essays,* New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001 and Joseph Lelyveld, *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle with India,* New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2011.

[37] Nishikant Kolbe, pp.38-40.

[38] Ibid., chapters 3 and 4, pp.98-227.

[39] Ibid., p.263.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Gora (G. Ramchandra Rao), *An Atheist with Gandhi*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1951, p.57.

[42] CWMG, Vol. 53, p. 476.

[43] William Sewell, Jr, *Logics of History*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. Swell gives a fascinating account of how these changes have influenced a practicing historian both in the realm of new social and cultural history of amalgamating analytical tools over a period of forty years.

Gandhi and Rural Reconstruction: Issue of Village Swaraj

Bipasha Raha

Gandhi's Perception of the Village —

> India lives in her seven and half lakhs of villages.[1]

Gandhi was convinced:

> If the villages perish, India will perish too. It will be no more India. Her own mission in the world will get lost.[2]

Rural resuscitation was to Gandhi, the only means towards the progress of the country. He held firmly to his belief:

> We are inheritors of a rural civilization. The vastness of our country, the vastness of the population, the situation and the climate of the country have, in my opinion, destined it for a rural civilization…To uproot it and substitute for it an urban civilization seems to me an impossibility…[3]

Ever since his return from South Africa, Gandhi's perception of the village in his narrative evolved. As he embarked on his extensive tours across the length and breadth of the countryside he was convinced that it was only through rural resuscitation that the country could be rebuilt. He wrote:

> I am convinced that if India is to attain true freedom and through India the world also, then sooner or later the fact must be recognized that the people will have to live in the villages, not in towns, in huts, not in palaces. Crores of people will never be able to live in peace with each other in towns and palaces. They will then have no recourse but to resort to both violence and untruth.[4]

Gandhi believed that India's future lay in her villages, in the development of rural economy. His plan for rural reconstruction

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involved attainment of self-sufficiency, inter-dependence for other wants, development of village industries.

Through his 18-point Constructive Programme, outlined in a small booklet titled *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place*, which he wrote on the train from Sevagram to Bardoli, Gandhi implemented his rural reconstruction activities in Sevagram centre near Wardha in 1935. He appealed to all those engaged in active politics or otherwise to address these issues. The original thirteen issues were: communal unity; removal of untouchability; prohibition; khadi; village industries; village sanitation; Nai Talim or Basic Education; adult education; women; knowledge of health and hygiene; provincial languages; national language and economic inequality. To these, he added five more issues: kisans; labourers; adivasis; lepers and students. Implementation of these principles, he believed, would give a new meaning to political independence.[5]

City versus Village

Gandhi strongly held that the village civilization and the city civilization were totally different things. One was dependent on machinery and industrialization and the other on handicrafts. He gave preference to the latter.[6] Industrialization and large-scale production that were only of comparatively recent growth, had brought in its wake the world wars. Indian villages suffered more than the towns.[7] Wealth of the cities came from the villages. The latter, he said, were exploited by the foreign government and also their own countrymen, the city-dwellers. They produced the food and went hungry. He said:

> The half a dozen modern cities are excrescence and serve at the present moment the evil purpose of draining the life-blood of the villages…The cities with their insolent torts are a constant menace to the life and liberty of the villagers.[8]

Gandhi was quite vehement in his denouncement:

> I regard the growth of cities as an evil thing, unfortunate for mankind and the world, unfortunate for England and certainly

> unfortunate for India. The British have exploited India through its cities. The latter have exploited the villages. The blood of the villages is the cement with which the edifice of the cities is built. I want the blood that is today inflating the arteries of the cities to run once again in the blood vessels of the villages. [9]

Being a nature curist, Gandhi claimed, he was naturally in favour of nature's method of cure by a general purification of the system. If the hearts of the city-dwellers remained rooted in the villages, if they became truly village-minded, all other things would automatically follow and the malady in the body politic would heal fast.[10]

Gandhi repeatedly harped on the poverty, helplessness, starvation and deprivation that he witnessed in the villages. He bemoaned:

> But we town-dwellers have believed that India is to be found in its towns and the villages were created to minister to our needs. We have hardly ever paused to inquire if those poor folk get sufficient to eat and clothe themselves with and whether they have a roof to shelter themselves from sun and rain.[11]

The town-dweller, he said, had lived on the poor villager's subsistence. The bulk of the population live on the verge of starvation and ten per cent are semi-starved, and that millions have to rest content with a pinch of dirty salt and chillies and polished rice or parched grain.[12] While the cities, he said, were capable of taking care of themselves the villages were not.

The villages, Gandhi observed, would have to be made free of their prejudices, their superstitions, narrow outlook and the only way to do this would be by staying amongst them and sharing their joys and sorrows and spreading education among them.[13] He suggested that the town-dwellers should be ideal villagers, and must identify themselves with the villagers who toil under the hot sun and only then would they represent the masses.[14] It was profitless, he said, to find out whether the villages of India were always as they were during contemporary times. If they had not been in a better condition earlier then it was a reflection upon the ancient culture in which Indians took so much pride. 'But if they were never better,' he said, 'how is

it that they have survived centuries of decay which we see going on around us.'[15]

The task before every patriot, said Gandhi, was to reconstruct the villages so that it would be easy for anyone to live in them as it was supposed to be in the cities. He said:

> It may be that the villagers are beyond redemption, that rural civilization has had its day and that the seven hundred thousand villages have to give place to seven hundred well-ordered cities supporting a population not of three hundred millions but thirty. If such is to be India's fate, even that won't come in a day. It must take time to wipe out a number of villages and villagers and transform the remainder into cities and citizens.[16]

The village movement was, said Gandhi, as much an education of the city people as of the villagers. Workers drawn from cities would have to develop village mentality and learn the art of living like the villagers. Gandhi did not suggest that they would have to starve like the villagers but what was required was a radical change in the life style.[17] He said:

> The only way is to sit down in their midst and work away in steadfast faith, as their scavengers, their nurses, their servants, not as their patrons, and to forget all our prejudices and prepossessions. Let us for a moment forget even Swaraj, and certainly forget the 'haves' whose presence oppresses us at every step. They are there. There are many who are dealing with these big problems. Let us tackle the humbler work of the village which is necessary now and would be even after we have reached our goal.[18]

The village work, said Gandhi, when it becomes successful will bring us nearer the goal. The village communities should be revived.

Indian villages produced and supplied to the Indian towns and cities all their wants. India became impoverished, he said, when her cities became foreign markets and began to drain the villages dry by dumping cheap and shoddy goods from foreign lands.[19] It was only when the cities realized the duty of making an adequate return to the

villages for the strength and sustenance which they derived from them, instead of selfishly exploiting them, that a healthy and moral relationship between the two will spring up. Gandhi also said that if the city children were to play their part in the great and noble work of social reconstruction, the vocations through which they were to receive their education ought to be directly related to the requirements of the villages. He said:

> I can therefore suggest remedies on the assumption that we must perpetuate the present rural civilization and endeavour to rid it of its acknowledged defects.[20]

To serve our villages, he said, was to establish Swaraj. Everything else was but an ideal dream.[21]The cities were a creation of foreign domination. Exploitation of villages was itself organized violence. If we want Swaraj to be built on non-violence, he said, we will have to give the villages their proper place.[22]

Gandhian Dream of Indian Villages

Gandhi's ideal of the Indian village was the pre-British model. The republican character of the village was undisturbed by foreign invasions. It was only colonial rule that destroyed this character. He upheld this republican model where there was no scope for exploitation. His aim was the realization of village swaraj:

> My idea of Village Swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants and get inter-dependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity. Thus every villages' first concern will be to grow its own food crop and cotton for its cloth. It could have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and playground for its adults and children. Then if there is more land available, it will grow useful money crops, thus excluding *ganja*, tobacco, opium and the like. The village will maintain a village theatre, school and public hall. It will have its own waterworks ensuring clean water supply. This can be done through controlled wells or tanks. Education will be compulsory

> up to the final basic course. As far as possible every activity will be conducted on the co-operative basis. [23]

In this scheme of village swaraj there were to be no castes with their graded untouchability. Non-violence with its techniques of Satyagraha and non-cooperation were to be the sanction of the village community. There would be a compulsory service of village guards who were to be selected by rotation from the register to be maintained by the village.

The government of the village, he said, would be conducted by the Panchayat of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. These would have all the authority and jurisdiction required. Since there would be no system of punishments in the accepted sense, this Panchayat would be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate during its term of office. There was to be perfect democracy based upon individual freedom in the scheme of village government outlined by Gandhi.

In his perception, the individual was to be the architect of his own government and the law of non-violence would rule him and his government. It was to be the work of a lifetime to model such a village. In his opinion any lover of true democracy and village life could take up a village, treat it as his world and sole work and thereby ensure a positive outcome. Anyone willing to undertake such a task would have to start work by assuming the role of the village scavenger, spinner, watchman, medicine man and school-master all at the same time. Even if none agreed to come near him, he would have to be satisfied with scavenging and spinning.[24]

Gandhi was firmly convinced that industrialization of the western type would destroy Indian society by spelling the doom for Indian traditional rural industries. He said:

> My ideal village will contain intelligent human beings. They will not live in dirt and darkness as animals. Men and women will be free and able to hold their own against anyone in the world. There will be neither plague, nor cholera, nor smallpox; no one will be idle, no one will wallow in luxury. Everyone will have to contribute

his quota of manual labour…It is possible to envisage railways, post and telegraph…and the like…[25]

In Gandhi's plan of things, the ideal village would have proper sanitation, proper dwelling places, drinking water facilities, houses of worship for all, common meeting place, a village common for grazing its cattle, a co-operative dairy, primary and secondary schools in which industrial education would be central. There would be panchayats for settling disputes. Gandhi's model village was to produce its own grains, vegetables and fruits and its own khadi. He asserted in forceful language that Indian villages had inexhaustible resources. This may not suffice for commercial purposes at all instances, but they were certainly sufficient for local consumption at all times. What was lacking, Gandhi bemoaned, was the hopeless unwillingness of the rural populace to initiate or undertake any attempt at improvement in their existing condition.[26]

Basic Principles of Village Swaraj

According to Gandhi, in this whole scheme of village swaraj it was man that was to be the prime consideration. Human happiness was to be the ultimate end of all endeavours. Mental and moral or spiritual development was also to be ensured.[27] Decentralization alone, Gandhi believed, could ensure success in this pursuit. In a non-violent framework of government, centralization of administration was anathema.[28] Provision of food and clothing for all was to Gandhi basic to rural work and village swaraj. He was categorical in his assertion that no villager was to go in want of these basic needs. Provision had to be made to ensure sufficient work for all so that they would be in a position to meet these basic needs. Mass control over the means of production of the elementary necessities of life alone could ensure that this ideal of village swaraj could be universally realized. These, he said, should be made available to all and should not be used as a means to oppress and exploit the hapless. To allow monopolization of the means of production of the basic necessities of life by any country, nation or a group of persons would be extremely

unjust. That economics, he said, was untrue which ignored or disregarded moral values.[29] Moral values, he upheld, should be a factor in regulating international commerce. This would ensure the extension of the law of non-violence in the domain of economics. All human beings, asserted Gandhi, had the right to live. This meant they had the right to find the means to feed himself as also where necessary to clothe and house himself.[30] To him, the test of orderliness in a country was the absence of starvation among its masses.

Body labour or bread labour was yet another principle of village swaraj. Each man, in Gandhi's opinion, should undertake physical labour to earn his bread. If all laboured only for their bread then there would be sufficient food and leisure for all. The problems of over-population, disease and the abounding misery could be eliminated in this way. It was the ideas of Ruskin and Tolstoy that impacted on Gandhi's perception of bread labour. Such labour, according to Gandhi, was the highest form of sacrifice. The works of the body, he said, should cater to its needs. All other activities performed by man through their bodies or through their minds would only be labour of love for the common good. This would then ensure that there were no rich and no poor, none high and none low, no touchable and no untouchable. Return to the villages, said Gandhi, meant a definite voluntary recognition of the duty of bread labour.[31] Gandhi did not deny the importance of intellectual work in the scheme of life. But all such labour was for one's own satisfaction and therefore, none should demand payment for it in exchange. However, he insisted upon the necessity of physical labour and none should be free from its obligation.[32] He considered all those who ate without work to be thieves because God had created man to work for his food.[33] The needs of the body, he felt, should be met by the work of the body.[34] Anyone who did not work should not have the right to his bread. Gandhi believed that even engineers, scientists, professors, lawyers, playwrights and poets would have to undertake physical labour to maintain themselves and earn a livelihood. They could not do so with their intellectual labour as that was not chargeable and therefore, not

in lieu of any payment. It was only for satisfaction of the soul.[35] Application and acceptance of the theory of bread labour, Gandhi was convinced, would eliminate any possibility of unemployment. It would ensure food, clothing and shelter, the basic necessities for human existence sufficiently for all. Consequently, mandatory physical labour would guarantee a healthy existence for all and eliminate disease and malady from society. Gandhi vehemently opposed any form of beggary. He said:

> My Ahimsa would not tolerate the idea of giving a free meal to a healthy person who has not worked for it in some honest way…[36]

His clarion call for a return to the villages was a definite and voluntary recognition of the duty of bread labour.

Gandhi laid strong emphasis on the principle of equality. Economic equality was for him cardinal to village swaraj work. All persons in society should be ensured of adequate and wholesome nutritious food to eat, proper shelter to live in, sufficient khadi to wear, access to timely medical aid and educational facilities for development. Gandhi observed:

> I want to bring about an equalization of status.[37]

The eternal conflict between labour and capital should be abolished to ensure this. There should be enough to satisfy everyone's need for basic necessities. Equal pay for all was to be the ultimate end for the realization of Gandhi's belief in the concept of economic equality. This would in the long run reduce class differences. Economic equality would help realize non-violent independence.

Gandhi strongly believed that everything on earth belonged to God and was from Him. Nothing on earth was for a single or a particular individual. Everything belonged to the people as a whole and not to particular individuals. The doctrine of trusteeship of the wealthy for disproportionate wealth possessed by them constituted the basis of his doctrine of equal distribution of wealth. No one, according to this doctrine, was to possess more than the person next to him, not a rupee more than the neighbour. This could be possible either non-violently or by dispossessing the wealthy of their

possessions. The latter would involve resort to violence which could never be beneficial to society which, according to Gandhi, would be poorer as it would lose the gifts of a man who knew how to accumulate wealth. So, he believed, the non-violent way was most superior. The rich man, Gandhi said, would be left in possession of his wealth of which he would use what he reasonably required for his own personal needs. The rest of the wealth he would hold as a trustee for the society at large to be used in the interest of the society.[38] Hence, any individual who enjoyed more than his proportionate share was actually a trustee of that portion for God's people.[39] This was particularly so in the case of land, which Gandhi held should be used for the welfare of the community. Land belonged to God and thus belonged to the community. Gandhi believed that by peaceful non-violent persuasion the landowners would be amenable to the trusteeship. The poor people had the option of organizing non-violent non-cooperation and civil disobedience against them in case of no-compliance. On the other hand, Gandhi was also convinced that accumulation of wealth by the wealthy was unconceivable without the co-operation of the poor. He said:

> The moment the cultivators of the soil realize their power, the Zamindari evil will be sterilized. What can the poor Zamindar do when they [cultivator] say that they will not simply work the land unless they are paid enough to feed and clothe and educate themselves and their children. In reality the toiler is the owner of what he produces. If the toilers intelligently combine, they will become an irresistible power.[40]

If the poor realized the strength of their own prowess and capability they would be emboldened and acquire the knowledge to free themselves using the technique of non-violence by destroying all inequalities and deprivation that had resulted in their misery and starvation.[41]

Another technique that was to be adopted for India's evolution along non-violent lines was decentralization. Sustenance and defence of centralization necessitated adequate force. There was no policing

required for simple homes without much material goods. Rural India, Gandhi said, would be in lesser danger of external invasions than urbanized India with its well equipped navy, air force and militia.[42] An industrial civilization unlike self-contained villages was not conducive to promotion of non-violence. It may be argued that the rural economy as envisaged by Gandhi eschewed exploitation, the essence of violence, altogether.[43]

In Gandhi's plan it was the principle of swadeshi that constituted the moral force underlying a decentralized self-sufficient economic structure. Gandhi observed:

> Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote.[44]

The emergence of a decentralized self-sufficient economy would be facilitated by a rigid adherence to the doctrine of swadeshi in economic terms. Here producers and traders and merchants with mutual interests at stake would work in unison would then be enthused to make common use of local resources thereby contributing to the uplift of their respective local areas. This would then ensure, said Gandhi, every village of India will almost be a self-supporting and self-contained unit exchanging only such necessary commodities to other villages where they are not locally produced.'[45] Gandhi consequently observed:

> A true votary of Swadeshi will not harbor ill-will towards a foreigner and not be actuated by antagonism towards anybody on the earth. Swadeshi is not a cult of hatred. It is a doctrine of self-less service that has its roots in the purest Ahimsa i.e. love.[46]

Gandhi blamed the centralization of economic powers in the hands of a few belonging to the capitalist class for accentuating the poverty of the masses. The theory of trusteeship was enunciated by him to facilitate the transformation to a more equitable system by the adoption of the technique of non-violence.

All this would ensure self-sufficiency for the Indian villages. Dependence promoted exploitation and was thus the root cause of

violence.[47] Self-sufficiency would become a reality only when each villager was able to take care of his basic needs for food and clothing, produce both food and cotton crops.[48] A village was to be self-sufficient in food and clothing and be able to protect itself against all external forces. This was, he said, the central fact of khaddar. Cultivation of cotton had to be decentralized to make self-sufficient khadi a reality. The spinners had to grow their cotton in every village.[49]

The principle of co-operation underlay Gandhi's village work. This alone could ensure self-sufficiency in the villages albeit in a non-violent manner. He observed:

> As far as possible every activity will be conducted on the co-operative basis. [50]

Co-operation was far more imperative in the sphere of agriculture than in many other economic activities viz., mat-weaving. Land, he said, belonged to the state. Maximization of returns from land was viable when it was worked on a co-operative basis, thereby minimizing the use of farm equipments, labour and capital. Co-operative farming would also facilitate greater employment opportunities and increased production.[51] The co-operative principle could also be profitably applied in case of cattle farming and spinning. He said:

> The secret of successful co-operative effort is that the members must be honest and know the great merit of co-operation and it must have a definite progressive goal.[52]

This co-operation should be on the basis of non-violence.

Gandhi gave prime importance to the techniques of Satyagraha and non-co-operation as indispensible to the principle of non-violence. Gandhi attempted to extend the principle for the first time from the individual to the social and political plane. The village community was to be the sanctioning force.[53] He said:

> Just as one must learn the art of killing in the training for violence, so one must learn the art of dying in the training for non-violence. Violence does not mean emancipation from fear, but discovering the means of combating the cause for fear. The votary of non-

> violence has to cultivate the capacity for sacrifice of the highest type in order to be free from fear. He recks not if he should lose his land, his wealth, his life. He who has not overcome all fear cannot practice *ahimsa* to perfection. The votary of *ahimsa* has only one fear, that is of God.[54]

Gandhi held the non-violent weapon of Satyagraha and non-co-operation to be a complete substitute of violence. The principle of non-violence, said Gandhi, necessitated complete abstention from exploitation in any form.[55] Therefore, according to him:

> If we are to be non-violent, we must then not wish for anything on this earth which the meanest or the lowest of human beings cannot have.[56]

Gandhi hated privilege and monopoly. Whatever could not be shared with the masses, 'he said, is taboo to me.'[57] Every man, he said, had an equal right to the necessities of life and since every right carried with it a corresponding duty and 'the corresponding remedy for resisting any attack upon it, it is merely a matter of finding out the corresponding duties and remedies to vindicate the elementary fundamental equality.'[58] The corresponding duty was body labour and the remedy was to non-co-operate with one who deprived him of the fruits of labour:

> And if I would recognize the fundamental equality, as I must, of the capitalist and the labourer, I must not aim at his destruction. I must strive for his conversion. My non-co-operation with him will open his eyes to the wrong he may be doing.[59]

Exploitation of the poor, Gandhi believed, could be extinguished not by effecting the destruction of the rich, but by removing the ignorance of the poor and teaching them to non-co-operate with their exploiters. This would convert the exploiters too and ultimately lead to both being equal partners. Capital as such, he said, was not evil. It was its inappropriate use that was evil. Capital in some form or other would always be needed.[60] Gandhi did not believe that the capitalists and the landlords were all exploiters by an inherent

necessity, or that there was a basic or irreconcilable antagonism between their interests or those of the masses. All exploitation was based on co-operation, willing or forced, of the exploited. What was imperative was not the extinction of landlords and capitalists, but a transformation of the existing relationship between them and the masses into something that was healthier and purer. The idea of class war did not appeal to Gandhi. In India, a class war was not inevitable. It could be avoided by a clear understanding of the implications of non-violence.[61] The extension of the law of non-violence in the domain of economics signified, according to Gandhi, the introduction of moral values as a factor to be considered in regulating international commerce. He strongly believed in equal distribution. [62]

Gandhi's belief in the equality of religions too was solidly grounded in his philosophical moorings. Every religion, he said, had its full and equal place:

> We are all leaves of a majestic tree whose trunk cannot be shaken off its roots which are deep down in the bowels of the earth. The mightiest of winds cannot move.[63]

By religion Gandhi meant, not any formal or customary religion, that religion which underlay all religions and brought one face to face with the Maker. He said:

> It is not the Hindu religion which I certainly prize above all other religions, but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and which ever purifies.[64]

In his view:

> To me God is Truth and Love; God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness, God is the source of Light and Life and yet He is above and beyond all these.[65]

Religion, he said, should pervade every action of man. Here, religion did not signify sectarianism. It was a belief in ordered moral government of the universe. This religion transcended Hinduism,

Islam, and Christianity, not superseding them but harmonizing them and giving them reality.[66] Gandhi believed in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world. He said:

> I believe that they are all God-given, and I believe that they were necessary for the people to whom these religions were revealed. And I believe that, if only we could all of us read the scriptures of the different faiths from the standpoint of the followers of those faiths, we should find that they were at the bottom all one and were all helpful to one another.[67]

Gandhi did not believe in the exclusive divinity of the Vedas. He held the Bible, the Koran and the Zend Avesta to be equally divinely inspired.[68] Man's ultimate aim was the realization of God and all his activities, political, social and religious, had to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God.:

> The immediate service of all human beings becomes a necessary part of the endeavour simply because the only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and be one with it. This can only be done by service of all. And this cannot be done except through one's country.[69]

He bemoaned that 'religion for us means today nothing more than restrictions on food and drink, nothing more than adherence to a sense of superiority and inferiority.'[70] He was convinced that birth and observance of form could not determine one's superiority and inferiority. Character was the only determining factor. He was categorical in his assertion that no scripture that labeled a human being as inferior or untouchable because of his or her birth could command our allegiance. It was a denial of God and truth which was God.[71]He regarded untouchability as the greatest blot on Hinduism.[72]

By the 1940s Gandhi's idea of Panchayat became clearer. He was able to provide a comprehensive scheme. He said every Panchayat consisting of five adult men or women who were villagers or village-minded would form a unit. Two such contagious Panchayats should form a working party under a leader elected from among themselves.

When there were a hundred such Panchayats, the first fifty grade leaders should elect from among themselves a second grade leader and so on. The first grade leader in the meanwhile would work under the second grade leader. Parallel groups of two hundred Panchayats should continue to be formed till they covered the whole of India. Each succeeding group of Panchayats would elect the second grade leader after the manner of the first. All second grade leaders should serve jointly for the whole of India and severally for their respective areas. The second grade leaders may elect whenever they deem necessary, from among themselves a chief who will regulate and command all the groups.[73] Each Panchayat would look after education of boys and girls in its village, sanitation, medical needs, upkeep and cleanliness of village ponds or wells and upkeep of and daily wants of so-called untouchables. A panchayat that failed without just cause to attend these requirements within six months of its election or failed otherwise to retain the goodwill of the villagers or stood self-condemned for any other cause was to be disbanded and another elected.[74] It was imperative at least in the initial stages, said Gandhi, to restrict the ability to impose fines or social boycott. Ignorant or unscrupulous men in the villages, it had been found, made wrongful and dangerous use of the custom of social boycott. Imposition of fines, he said, could cause mischief and be self-defeating thereby, causing grievous harm to the bigger cause. Once the Panchayat was able to gain popularity through implementation of the constructive programme, the moral prestige that it would acquire in the process would ensure compliance and acceptance of its judgement and authority. This popular acceptance was the greatest sanction possible.[75]

Education constituted one of the basic pillars of Gandhi's rural work. This signified an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man- body, mind and spirit. Literacy was just one of the means to educate man and women. It was neither the beginning nor the end of education. Therefore, he said, the education of a child should begin with imparting to him the knowledge of a useful handicraft. He should be taught to produce from the commencement of his training. In this

fashion, every school would become self-supporting. The products of the schools should be taken over by the estate.[76] This was Gandhi's idea of Nai Talim. It signified education through handicrafts. It may be argued that this idea was based on the belief in truth and love permeating life's activities. True education should be made easily accessible to all. This was real love for mankind. This education was to be of a kind that would be useful for all villagers in their day-to-day existence. This was not education that was based on bookish knowledge. This was based on universal religion. It was learnt from the Book of Life.[77] It was His experiments with physical, literary and moral training at Tolstoy Farm at South Africa that informed his philosophy of education. Here the teacher was the role model. Through carpentry, gardening, shoe-making and such other crafts vocational training was imparted. Education through the medium of village handicrafts would revolutionize socio-economic and political life by eliminating unemployment and providing economic and social security to the people. This would inculcate a sense of dignity of labour and promote harmony among classes. Besides, decentralized production in every village would pave the way for a decentralized political system. Therein lay the importance of the system of education envisaged by Gandhi. Students educated in such a system would be politically awakened and give a new dimension to the political system having imbibed a sense of dignity of labour, self-reliance, moral uprightness, useful literary knowledge, social awareness and responsibility. True education of the intellect, Gandhi believed strongly, could only come through a proper exercise and training of the bodily organs.[78] Spiritual training was to him education of the heart. He said that a proper and harmonious blending of intellect or mind, body and soul was required for the making of a whole man and constituted the 'true economics of education.' Primary education involved that inculcation of skills viz., reading, writing, elementary knowledge of history, geography, mental arithmetic and some crafts like spinning etc. should always accompany the learning of alphabets.[79]

Gandhi's scheme of Basic Education had certain fundamental principles. All education to be true must be self-supporting. In the

end, it would pay its expenses excepting the capital which would remain intact. In it 'the cunning of the hand' would be utilized even up to the final stage. This implied that the hands of the pupils would be skillfully working at some industry for some period during the day. Provincial language should be the medium of all education. Sectional religious training should have no place in this system of education while fundamental universal ethics would have full scope. This education, he held, whether it was confined to children or adults, male or female, would find its way to homes of pupils. Since millions of students receiving this education would consider themselves as of the whole of India, they should learn an inter-provincial language. This could only be Hindustani written in Nagari or Urdu script. So the pupils would have to master both the scripts.[80]

This type of an educational scheme required teachers with originality who could teach through the chosen craft. Basic Education would transform village children into model villagers. It would link the children, whether of the cities or of the villages, to all that was best and lasting in India.[81] In fact, this scheme of Gandhi had a long process of gestation. In April 1941, a Basic Education Conference was held at Jamia Nagar Delhi where Dr. Zakir Hussain played a prominent role.

Gandhi and Grama Swaraj

The essence of Gandhi's economic theory was self-sufficiency of the villages or Grama Swaraj. It meant that every village should be self-sufficient in two essential and indispensible necessities i.e. food and clothing. All the members of a family were required to ply the loom and spin yarn. The village weaver would ply the loom and produce the cloth necessary for the village. The village should produce its own rice, vegetables etc.

One may argue that Ramrajya of Gandhi's dream was to be realized in three stages. In the initial stage, the goal was Swaraj i.e. to achieve independence for India. In the second stage, the objective was to bring about a predominantly non-violent state through the evolution of village republics i.e. Gram Swaraj. The purpose in the final stage was to achieve Ramraj i.e. the kingdom of God on this Earth which

would be a totally non-violent and purely democratic stateless society. The ideal social order in Gandhi's vision would thus be achieved through the attainment of Swaraj, Grama Swaraj and Ramraj.

Gandhi's Constructive Programme

In 1935, Gandhi started his rural reconstruction activities in Sevagram to implement his idea of Constructive Programme which included items of particular relevance.[82] All these activities were incorporated under his eighteen point Constructive Programme. His *Constructive Programme (Its Meaning and Place)* was first published in 1941 which was later revised in 1945. He considered the implementation of the programme as the truthful and non-violent way of attaining 'Poorna Swaraj'. Constructive Programme was not a fragmented approach but an attempt to develop society at the grassroots level with the resources that were locally available.[83] He wrote:

> The constructive programme may otherwise and more fittingly be called construction of Poorna Swaraj or complete independence by truthful and non-violent means.[84]

The programme was based on certain indispensable principles of work.

Communal harmony or unbreakable heart unity was the first principle to be adopted. It had a significance that was much wider than political unity. Every social worker should aim at developing and encouraging bond of love and regard among the Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Zoroastrian and Jew. They should cultivate a unity based on mutual love and regard. Gandhi was convinced that social stability of the country could not be achieved without social unity among the communities. This could be attained by the adoption of certain specific means: educate people in sense of common citizenship; enjoy equal rights by all; inculcate tolerance and; they must reconcile themselves to the environment of living together as free and equal citizens. The leaders would have to play a pro-active role.

Gandhi considered untouchability to be the worst evil effect of Hinduism. So its removal was absolutely indispensable. In 1932, Gandhi introduced Harijan Sevak Sangh. It was a non-political

association for self-improvement of Harijans. He suggested their economic self-reliance through adoption of spinning and weaving. He advocated non-violent methods to be adopted by them for their self-employment and proper realization of rights. In his concept of Swaraj none should enjoy a status that was high or low. There should be no social exploitation. He believed in the awakening of the Harijans.[85]

Adoption of the principle of prohibition against drinks, intoxicating drugs and gambling was also advocated. Gandhi suggested various measures for their prohibition. He wanted the government to take the initiative to close all liquor shops. The factory owners were advised to create humane conditions for work. The social workers were to spread education and dissuade people from drinking. Along with them the doctors, women and students were also requested to take an initiative and play an active role in ensuring the success of the policy of prohibition.[86]

Gandhi also advocated khadi as a technique for the decentralization of production and distribution of the necessities of life. He considered khadi as means for all round development. Adoption of khadi would ensure for the poor cloth, work and self confidence to articulate themselves. It would ensure self-sufficiency for the villages and help augment the income of the villagers. During famine and other scarcities there would be work. Blacksmiths and carpenters would secure alternative employment. Under khadi economy capital would be under control of labour. Supremacy of man over machinery would be established. It would ensure an honourable profession for women. No capital outlay was required.[87]

Equal emphasis was put on the promotion of other industries viz., hand-grinding, hand-pounding, soap-making, paper making, tanning, and oil pressing etc. for an overall healthy development of the economy. This would ensure employment opportunities and provide a platform for flowering of various skills. While a minimum wage had to be fixed, all work was to be carried out on the basis of co-operation.

In his pursuit of creation of an ideal village, Gandhi was firm in his belief in the necessity of adoption of the principles of public

health and hygiene. He was firm in his conviction that houses had to be scientifically built, cleanliness maintained and the garbage removed. He observed that the latter had to be converted into manure.[88]

Along with Nai Talim or basic education, Gandhi was insistent on the promotion of adult education. He said, literary education of illiterate adults should be accompanied by spread of knowledge that was useful in daily life. Arithmetic, Geography, History and other subjects needed to be with special reference to village life and needs.

In Gandhi's constructive programme, women were given their due importance. He insisted that they should be given equal opportunities in life as they could be co-workers. They should be equipped to realize their full status and play their part as equal to the men folk. Women were after all teachers of children.[89]

Imparting of education in health and hygiene was given considerable importance. Social workers were to explain simple rules of health and hygiene to villagers. They were to entrusted to provide pure water and maintain public sanitation and hygiene in villages.

As to the issue of national language, Gandhi wanted the place to be given to Hindi as it was spoken by large groups in north India. It could be easily learnt by the people of Maharashtra, Gujarat and Bengal. Both Hindus and Muslims in north India spoke Hindustani. English could be a subject that was to be taught.

Even while stressing on economic equality and trusteeship with an emphasis on equal pay, Gandhi underlined the fact that kisans formed the backbone of the rural country that was India. The majority depended on agriculture, which needed to be improved. The peasants needed to be taught improved means of agriculture.

In his plan of constructive work, the landless labourers were to be given sufficient wages. The standard of living needed to be improved. They had to be given their due status and minimum essentials. In his eighteen point constructive programme, Gandhi implied the landless labour and not factory workers.

Welfare of adivasis was central to his plan. They were the original inhabitants of the land. Constructive workers were instructed to look after their welfare.[90]

Gandhi also insisted on service to lepers. He said that social workers with missionary zeal should be entrusted to look after them.

He visualized an active role for students in the work of rural development. They were to inculcate a sense of service to the community. They were to wear khadi and engage in constructive work and in sacrificial spinning.

These principles of work were indispensable according to Gandhi for the attainment of village swaraj and establishment of equality among all. These would help maximize production of minimum material essentials for existence and ensure the moral well-being and maximum welfare of the people.

General Arguments

Gandhi's philosophy and economic ideas need to be contextualized against the backdrop of the historical conjuncture. While it may be fashionable to seek their relevance in contemporary times it need be remembered that he was a political leader leading his people in a formidable struggle for swaraj and freedom against the might of the colonial empire.

Notes

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[7] Hindustan Standard, 6 December, 1944.
[8] *Young India*, 17 March 1927, p. 86.
[9] *Harijan*, 23 June 1946, p. 198.
[10] Ibid., *25 August 1946*, p. 282.
[11] Ibid., *4 April 1936*, p. 63.
[12] Ibid.
[13] *Young India*, 30 April 1931, p. 94.
[14] Ibid., 11 September 1924, p. 300; *Harijan*, 1 March 1935.

[15] *Harijan,* 7 March 1936, p. 30.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 11 April 1936, p. 68.
[18] Ibid., 16 May 1936, p. 112.
[19] Ibid., 27 February 1937, p. 18.
[20] *Young India*, 9 November 1929, p. 364.
[21] Ibid., 26 December 1929, p9. 420.
[22] *Harijan,* 20 January 1940, p. 423.
[23] Ibid., 26 July 1942, p. 238.
[24] Ibid.
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[47] *Harijan,* 26 July 1942, p.238.
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[50] *Harijan*, 26 July 1942, p. 238.
[51] Ibid., 9 March 1947, pp. 58-59.
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[61] Ibid., pp.91-92.
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Friendships of 'largeness and freedom': Andrews, Tagore, Gandhi

Uma Das Gupta

My recently published monograph titled *Friendships of 'largeness and freedom': Andrews, Tagore, Gandhi : An Epistolary Account, 1912-1940* (OUP, 2018) is not a systematic study of the Indian freedom movement nor is it meant to be. But it is certainly an essential corollary to the historiography of the Nationalist Movement as it is based upon hitherto unpublished sources on that very subject.

There are many standard texts on the history of the Indian Nationalist Movement. The facts in them are similar to those in my above-mentioned monograph. The difference lies in the approach. While the standard texts focus on analyzing the conflict between the colonial rulers and the nationalists, my monograph explores the spirit of 'largeness and freedom' that was deeply felt and assiduously practiced by the three remarkable individuals studied in my book. The individuals were Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) and the Church of England missionary, Charles Freer Andrews(1871-1940). The book's title, *Friendships of 'largeness and freedom'*, is taken from a letter C.F. Andrews wrote to Rabindranath Tagore from which I quote below:

At Sea, 7 December [1913]

My dear friend

Yesterday and today I have been spending in all the discomforts of sea-sickness and they seem likely to go on throughout the voyage. The boat is a small one and very unsteady and I seem to become a worse sailor every new voyage I take. But I have not been mentally unhappy: for while I have kept still in my chair for hours together, with eyes

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closed, the picture of those last days with you has cheered me. And now this afternoon I am going to forget the physical trouble by writing to you. There is much I want to say about the future and it will be a relief to write.

As to the deepest thing of all, my religious faith, I have no need now to write at all. I believe that the harmony between us that has already come into being is the deepest root of our friendship. It has come without words and has gone all the deeper for that very reason. I believe there will never be any need of reticence or reserve between us for we both know ourselves to be the learners and seekers after truth, not after party or seat. Indeed you have already given me in this matter the greatest thing of all — the sense of largeness and freedom … Apart from this freedom I could not be your friend in any true degree.[1]

My focus is drawn from the letters on two related themes, their friendship and their principles in the struggle for Indian freedom. I believe their principles have left us with a life changing legacy. What is this legacy? It is the legacy of a restrained nationalism, the legacy of Ahimsa or Non-Violence towards the opponent, a legacy that put a stop to the movement whenever it turned violent, that was pledged to bear no ill will towards the wrongdoer, that proclaimed the way forward to be in self-suffering and not in hatred of the enemy, a legacy that advocated there must be no separation between the religious and the political even in a political struggle. Such a movement for *Ahimsa* or Non-Violence towards the opponent in a highly charged political struggle was hitherto unknown the world over.

The three protagonists acted upon those principles through their campaigns. Their campaigns emerged from two important historical events. These were, first, Mahatma Gandhi's encounter with the racially unjust treatment of the Indian community in South Africa which inspired his phenomenal *Satyagraha* Movement and, second, his emerging leadership of an all-India Nationalist Movement. The basic struggle was to challenge the Racism that Empire had spread and legitimized. The three remarkable individuals worked against all odds to show the way to an ideal for humanity. For this they undertook any amount of self-suffering in their own spheres of activity, individually and collectively. Their ideal was deeply expressed in what Tagore wrote to Andrews, 'We

have to build a seat for the one God revealed to all human races standing in the heart of this struggle' and, in what Gandhi wrote to Tagore, 'Our national struggle is in reality a struggle for liberty worthy of a self-respecting nation'. [2]

The correspondence of the three friends helps us to understand how it was not until they were completely convinced of a failure of justice by the colonial government that their attitude changed to rebellion. This statement is as factually relevant about their goal in South Africa as well as India. It is through these significant insights that the letters enable us to look at the Indian Nationalist Movement 'differently', and to find in them some of the seminal ideas that went into the making of modern India.

Let me start with the theme of their friendship to see how the correspondence began. The story of their friendship will relate to their life's work in Delhi, London, Shimla, Santiniketan, and Durban. In 1912 Tagore took some English translations from his Bengali *Gitanjali* to London and presented them to the British painter William Rothenstein who had met Tagore in Calcutta in 1910.[3] Moved by the translations Rothenstein hosted a reading of Tagore's poetry at his house on 30 June 1912. Andrews was in the audience being on home leave in England from his missionary post in Delhi.[4] An evening of Tagore's poetry transformed Andrews into a different world. A genuine Christian at heart and a Cambridge University graduate in Theology Andrews had been in despair over what he saw of White racism in India. About Tagore's poetry he wrote, 'I could at last think ... of the universal human heart, the mystery of the One Spirit of the human race ... that night, Rabindra had made them no cold empty truism to me, but a burning reality...' He wrote also a poem to celebrate his feelings of that experience.[5]

Rabindra, lord of a new world of song,
Heir of the sacred *rishis* of old time,
This homage comes from a far distant clime
To hail thee crowned among the immortal throng.
Whose words have power to make man's spirit strong:
For thou hast reared a citadel of rhyme
Great and majestic, with its towers sublime,
Above the lower mists, which to this world belong.

This then was the beginning of a remarkable friendship, not just a friendship but a communion for life. Soon, within a year, another remarkable individual would participate in this communion, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Andrews and Gandhi met in January 1914, as we shall see with the unfolding of the story, while Tagore and Gandhi met later in February 1915 on Gandhi's return from South Africa.

On his return to India from England Andrews decided to resign from his missionary post and asked Tagore if he could come to Santiniketan and teach in the school there. Tagore assured him by replying 'Love is free even when the circumstances are narrow and nothing will hamper you when your heart is full'.[6] However, Andrews could not move to Santiniketan right then due to other developments which now brings us to Gandhi, who was then in South Africa, leading a Movement of Non Violent Passive Resistance to establish the human rights of the Indian community in South Africa. Gandhi had gone to South Africa in 1893 to work as a barrister in a legal suit involving two Indian merchants. This professional legal work brought Gandhi into contact with the Indian indentured labourers who worked for South Africa's European planters. Those Indian labourers lived, Gandhi wrote, 'virtually' as 'slaves'. He also saw how the Indian community were oblivious of that fact and did nothing to protest against the wrongs. Gandhi was determined to bring about a change. In 1894 he founded the Natal Indian Congress to build up a constitutional movement of nonviolent resistance to obtain fundamental human rights for the Indian indentured labourers. This was the origin of Gandhi's phenomenal Satyagraha Movement. He also started a newspaper named *Indian Opinion*.[7]

By 1910 the South African government had heightened their repressive measures against Gandhi's Movement. The editor of *Indian Opinion* was imprisoned, to take an example. Gandhi sought guidance and intervention in the South African problem from his mentor Gopal Krishna Gokhale in India. In South Africa itself Gandhi sought an interview with South Africa's Minister of the Interior, General Smuts, which was taking time to come through. In December1913 Gokhale called a public meeting in Delhi and appealed for moral and financial help for Gandhi's Satyagraha in South Africa. Andrews jumped to this call and offered his entire savings for it. Gokhale requested Andrews to go at once to South

Africa and assist in Gandhi's talks with Smuts. That now brings us to the South Africa part of the story, to their first political struggle. [8]

Gandhi was waiting at the dockyard to receive Andrews when the ship S.S.Umtali arrived on 2 January 1914. Andrews stooped at once to touch Gandhi's feet. At that very first meeting Andrews asked, 'Gandhiji, isn't it simply a question of India's honour?' Back came Gandhi's reply, 'Yes! That is it, that is it. That is the real point at issue'. 'Then', said Andrews, 'I am sure you are right to stand out. There must be no sacrifice of honour'.[9] Andrews and Gandhi became very dear friends from that hour. They became 'Mohan' and 'Charlie' to one another.

Writing from Durban about the South African problem Andrews explained their collective principles best in a letter to Tagore thus. 'I had *no* difficulty [emphasis his] in seeing from the first Mr. Gandhi's position and accepting it; for, in principle, it is essentially yours … The principles were a true independence, a reliance upon spiritual force, a fearless courage in the face of temporal power, and withal a deep and burning charity for all men.'[10]

Having obtained an interview with Smuts at Pretoria, Gandhi and Andrews went there together by train. Smuts agreed on setting up a Commission of Inquiry to examine the grievances of the Indians, on the terms that were acceptable to Gandhi. At this time, coincidentally, there was a massive strike of the European miners and railway employees. Andrews and Gandhi were almost caught in it on their rail journey to Pretoria. On arriving they found that the telegraph lines had been cut off. The European strikers even made overtures to Gandhi to join their movement against the South African government so as to double their chances of success. Gandhi refused. He wrote, 'As a *satyagrahi* I did not require a moment's consideration to decline to do so'. He went further than only decline the overtures of the European Railway strikers. He suspended his own *Satyagraha* movement with immediate effect as he did not want to make trouble for the South African Government when it was in trouble from its own people.[11]

Andrews noted how Gandhi's decision to suspend *Satyagraha* in a situation of violence created a wonderful understanding in the mind of General Smuts of Gandhi's absolutely honest intentions. So much so that *Satyagraha* thereupon came to be recognised by the South African

Government as an honourable and honest movement. Indeed, in the words of General Smuts, 'a constitutional movement'. [12]

It took Gandhi eight years of continuous struggle by the method of *Satyagraha* to reach the final anti-indenture settlement through his South Africa campaign. The gain was best summed up in Gandhi's essay for the Golden Number of *Indian Opinion* titled 'The Struggle and What It Has Meant'. In conclusion Gandhi wrote, 'The flag of legal racial equality has been kept flying, and it is now recognized that Indians have rights and aspirations and ideals that cannot be ignored. The struggle has more than proved the immense superiority of right over might, of soul-force over brute-force, of love and reason over hate and passion'.[13]

Back in India from South Africa in 1915 Gandhi turned to the Indian freedom movement and led it step by step to become an all-India Nationalist Movement. On 30 April 1918 he was writing to Tagore that they had reached the 'threshold' of a 'mighty change' in India.[14] What then pushed the struggle over the 'threshold' was the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of April 1919 when Gandhi declared that 'nothing short of Satyagraha could morally affect the issue ...'. [15] Gandhi added in the same letter that Tagore and he were 'one on this'. The Satyagraha Pledge declared that if at all the Rowlatt Bills became law, the people would 'refuse civilly' to obey those laws. It further stated that the struggle would faithfully follow 'truth' but 'refrain' from 'violence' to 'life, person and property'.[16]

The protests that followed against the Rowlatt Bills were peaceful until the arrest of the popular leaders in the Punjab on the authority of the Rowlatt Bills. Disturbances broke out in the aftermath of the arrests with the burning of buildings and the killing of some Europeans. On 13 April 1919 the government retaliated with the disastrous Jallianwalla Bagh massacre and also by imposing martial law in large areas of the Punjab. Gandhi called off his Civil Disobedience campaign declaring it a 'Himalayan miscalculation' to have expected Non-Violent revolt from a people until they were trained and prepared for it. Tagore praised Gandhi's decision to halt the Movement and thus uphold 'moral power' above 'brute forces'. Andrews announced Gandhi's action to be the 'bravest' step of all. What Gandhi did — in withdrawing Civil Disobedience under those circumstances — was to seek 'understanding'.[17]

The campaign against the Rowlatt Bills thus raised the nation's self-respect and transformed what began as a constitutional agitation for modest political rights into a mass national struggle that was to go forward increasingly on popular sanctions in the future. It catapulted Gandhi into the centre of the struggle. He turned it into his 'opportunity' to travel the length and breadth of the country and 'educate' the populace in the principles of *Satyagraha*. There was no doubt that there would be no turning back from the national struggle for freedom. Gandhi appealed to Tagore for a message of 'hope and inspiration' in the national struggle — 'a message of hope and inspiration for those who would have to go through the fire'— were Gandhi's own words to Tagore.[18] He reminded Tagore that he had blessed the movement when Gandhi first embarked upon the struggle pointing out that 'all' forces work through the 'human agency'. Therefore, Gandhi wrote, what he needed most of all in facing the big struggle was the 'ennobling' assistance of 'those' who 'approve' of his moves. Gandhi assured Tagore that he was ready even for 'adverse' opinions because such opinions would serve as 'lighthouses' to warn him of the 'dangers' that lay ahead in the 'stormy' paths of 'life'. He pleaded with Tagore to tell him 'frankly' if his opinion had 'changed' from the early days of the struggle, adding how Andrews 'never' hesitated to 'dissent'. Gandhi asked if Tagore would extend the same 'great privilege' like Andrews did to Gandhi.[19]

In his reply Tagore hailed Gandhi as 'Mahatma', for the first time, in the public domain. He announced confidently that, as a 'great leader of men', only Gandhi could lead the country to a 'true' path of 'conquest' by overcoming the 'feebleness' of its 'politics'. Tagore went on to declare that Gandhi's ideal was India's ideal.[20] That Gandhi's ideal was what Tagore expected from the struggle. That ideal was to wait for India's 'moment' of freedom till India could prove that she was 'morally' superior to the people who 'ruled' over her by the 'right of conquest'. Till then, India would have to 'willingly' accept her 'penance' of 'suffering'. Continuing his letter to Gandhi in the same vein Tagore wrote, 'I have always felt, and said accordingly, that the great gift of freedom can never come to a people through charity'.[21]

The rest is history, as we all know it. On that thought let me conclude by reminding ourselves that 'Independence' was everybody's objective but, as these letters between the three leaders reveal, their struggle was

over the mind boggling question 'how'. That is why these letters have to be included in the essential historiography of the Indian Nationalist Movement.

Notes

[1] Andrews to Tagore, 7 December 1913, English Letters, File: Andrews, Rabindra-Bhavana Archives [RBA], Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan.
[2] Gandhi to Tagore, 5 April 1919, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, [*CWMG*], 100 Volumes, Delhi : Government of India, Publications Division, vol. 15, pp. 179-80.
[3] *Imperfect Encounter, Letters of William Rothenstein and Rabindranath Tagore1911-1941*, Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Mary M. Lago, Harvard University Press, 1972, pp.17-18.
[4] A Cambridge graduate in Classics and an Anglican by religious affiliation Andrews came to India in 1904 to work for the Cambridge Brotherhood Mission at St. Stephen's College, Delhi.
[5] Andrews, 'To Rabindranath Tagore', *The Modern Review*, March 1912, p.292.
[6] Tagore to Andrews, 19 August 1913, English Letters, File: Andrews, RBA.
[7] Rajmohan Gandhi, *Mohandas: A True Story of a Man, his People, and an Empire*, Delhi : Penguin Books, 2007.
[8] Jan Christiaan Smuts, (1870-1950), Field General in the South African Armies against Germany in World War I, Minister of the Interior, Defence and Mines in the first Union Cabinet.
[9] Benarsidas Chaturvedi and Marjorie Sykes, *Charles Freer Andrews*, Delhi : Government of India, Publications Division, 1971, p.95.
[10] Andrews to Tagore, Durban, 6 January [1914], English Letters, File: Andrews, RBA.
[11] Gandhi, 'A South African Reminiscence', *The Modern Review*, May 1919, p.556.
[12] *Friendships of 'Largeness and Freedom': Andrews, Tagore, and Gandhi, An Epistolary Account, 1912-1940*, Edited and Introduced by Uma Das Gupta, Delhi : Oxford University Press, 2018, p. xlvi.
[13] Gandhi, 'The Struggle and What It Has Meant', *CWMG*, vol. 12, pp. 632-642.
[14] Gandhi to Tagore, 30 April 1918, *The Mahatma and the Poet*, Compiled and Edited by S. Bhattacharya, Delhi : National Book Trust, 1997, p. 46.
[15] Andrews to Gandhi, n.d. [1919], S.N. 6484a, Sabarmati Ashram Archives, Ahmedabad.
[16] Gandhi, 'The Satyagraha Pledge', 24 February 1919, *CWMG*, vol. 15, pp.104-105.
[17] *Mahatma Gandhi at Work : His Own Story*, Edited with an Introduction by C.F. Andrews, London : Allen and Unwin, 1930, p. 310.
[18] Gandhi to Tagore, 5 April 1919, English Letters, File: Gandhi, RBA.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Tagore to Gandhi, 12 April 1919, *The Mahatma and the Poet*, Compiled and Edited by S. Bhattacharya, Delhi : National Book Trust, 1997, p. 50.
[21] Ibid.

The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner

Prasanta Ray

It is necessity and anxiety which make a people look back at philosophies and programmes of transformation towards a good society formulated in the past: the necessity of exiting, even escaping, an insecure frame of present existence; anxiety about how and how soon the desired change would come. Without claiming that the present time is Indian history's first moment of turbulence, for each generation living in its present time, a conjunction of crises appears to be unprecedented – compelling at least some people to turn to history of ideas and practices to discover the antecedents; and, a few others, to acquire the moral courage to intervene in present history. Still, their present agonies are their point of departure. We obviously keep aside those who make a feast out of the chaos, and the birdbrains.

The harshness of the present neo-liberal moment here in India – and possibly in the global south — is aggravated by slow yet steady formation of 'inverted totalitarianism' and 'inverted orientalism'.[1] The first comes into being when an increasing demand for citizenship entitlement makes citizens vulnerable to entrapments of populist politics as well as to regimentation by the state which employs public institutions to 'control, punish, survey, direct and influence citizens'. The more disturbing shift in this making of inverted totalitarianism is 'economic rather than political power [becoming] dangerously dominant'.[2] Inversion of orientalism was the work of the 'orientalist scholars, missionaries, and colonial administrators in the Indian subcontinent since the seventeenth century'.[3] They '… shifted social and political issues from the material to the spiritual plane – serving

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the needs of both the colonial masters and the privileged elites of Brahminical Hinduism.'[4] Now, the needs of the ruling class and those of one kind of politicians who variously induce vulnerability to dramatic rituals of spirituality in unsuspecting people are being served by this inverted orientalism.

Is it likely that those who feel threatened by this conjunction of neo-liberalism, inverted totalitarianism and inverted orientalism, could return to Gandhi's thoughts and practices for an understanding of the state of affairs and a possible way out? Gandhi too had felt both the Indian people's necessity of exiting the colonial frame and their anxiety about an appropriate way of exiting, though in a different historical moment. He gave expressions to contemporary popular discontent and aspiration – as well as indecisions in the face of interlocking contradictions of the late colonial society. This apart, what can induce a conjecture about re-visiting Gandhian theory and practice, is the fact that something similar is taking place in the global north: young persons, uninhibited by the memories of the Soviet Communist Party's excesses because they have none, reading the *Communist Manifesto* and *Grundrisse.* In the wake of the Yellow Vest movement in France, some people are re-reading Smith, Marx and Lenin.[5] In such a situation, the cunning of a ruling ideology is usually deployed to deactivate the politically enterprising and impatient minds looking for instigation in past thoughts and political practices. Despite – may be, in spite of, these — some public intellectuals as well as sections of the masses, do explore the way out – in some cases by falling back on forlorn thoughts. They re-visit preeminent past thoughts and practices.

However, there are no firm signs that common people in India are desperately seeking Gandhi. This is not surprising given the fact that much of popular political information/knowledge of politics is party-initiated and party-surveilled. Except for a Gandhian party, none would direct the lay people to Gandhi's thoughts, programmes and actions. Apparently, there is only the Indian Gandhiyan Party (IGP) in Kerala but without any electoral base. As far as the other political parties and the state agencies are concerned, Gandhi is rarely referred

to except on commemorative dates in political calendar, for ritual naming of state provisions like those under MGNREGA, or to 'hitch the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) to the aura of Mahatma Gandhi'.[6] Even in the times when Gandhian charisma was unfolding, Nirmal Kumar Bose felt in late 1930s the necessity of 'an intellectual movement to support and energize the political and social movement initiated by Gandhi'. It was rebuffed by Congress politicians.[7] Gandhi was not surprised. He was aware that alternatives to Gandhism were in firm formation. A reasoned believer in tolerance and dialogue, he never wanted to be the single helmsman – unlike a few of his Asian contemporaries — of a nation-state in the making. He believed in self-cultivation by his fellow men and particularly by *satyagrahi*s. But he did not write anything comparable to Liu Shaoqi's *How to Be a Good Communist* (1939).[8] He, in fact, did not appreciate excessive dependence on him by those who were volunteers in organisations he set up. This, Gandhi thought, interfered with the practice of self-rule. His steadfast commitment to self-cultivation and self-rule was a part of his grand global project on social transformation in which the altered individual would be the critical agent of social progress.[9]

As of now, this indeed is utopian as is Gandhi's objective of final solution of social conflicts and the principal method of resolution of contradictions, namely, non-violent non-cooperation. Given this, it is unlikely that any state power-centric political party or movement today would think of implementing any of Gandhi's projects on radical alteration of the individual self, the economy and the polity in the hope of a final solution. What is of greater significance is that many in Gandhi's lifetime, considered his project to be radically regressive. Village had a central place in Gandhi's plan of Indian renewal. Nehru's response to this reveals strong disagreement. Nehru was categorical: 'I do not understand why a village should necessarily embody truth and non-violence. A village, normally speaking, is backward intellectually and culturally and no progress can be made from a backward environment. Narrow-minded people are much more likely to be untruthful and violent.'[10] He had a different priority also: '… we

have to put down certain objectives like a sufficiency of food, clothing, housing, education, sanitation etc. which should be the minimum requirements for the country and for everyone. It is with these objectives in view that we must find out specifically how to attain them speedily'.[11] These indeed continue to be the pressing needs of the Indian masses, a reality whose imperative representation is compromised by those who propound inverted orientalism.

But, in all fairness, it must be conceded that 'the village Gandhi idealized was not just a geographic place, or a statistic, or a social class. It was an event, a dream, a happening, a culture.' It was intended to germinate his cherished swaraj: self-respect, self-realisation and self-reliance.[12]

Again, in all fairness it must be admitted that Gandhi was aware of such challenges to his thought and practices. But this did not deter him from projecting his vision of good society even if that would have to wait till all humanity would reach sainthood. Like a good communist – though he and his adherents would detest this comparison – he struggled '… for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of that movement.'[13] We, of course, have to replace 'the working class' by a more inclusive 'people' whose interests Gandhi addressed. But we have to remember that Gandhi insisted on radical equality, much beyond what the communists envisaged. He would have equal wages and bread labour for all. In his 'Constructive Programme' (CW, 75:146-66), Gandhi's concept of equality is not grounded in impersonal and competitive individualism, as it seems to be in the west, but in cooperative and compassionate non-violence, on 'fraternity' not just 'liberty'.'[14] The objective of his movement was *swaraj* in the twin senses of self-rule and self-government.

Coming back to the present concerns in the forms of three negatives of crony capitalism, inverted totalitarianism and inverted orientalism, would the perplexed and perturbed among the Indian people read or re-read Gandhi's preaching and practices, for comprehension and

critique of the present state of affairs?

Gandhi's profound moral 'repugnance to a [capitalist] system where profit is allowed to degrade labour, where the machines are valued more than humans, where automation is preferred to humanism' is well-known.[15] This is definitely relevant to a variety of critics of finance capitalism, which Gandhi did not experience. Given power, he promised he would abolish capitalism. But Gandhi was focused on the capitalist — or, rather the property-holder – not so much on capitalism as an economic system. He wanted the capitalist to be a morally reformed moralizer of other individuals related to him in the process of production. As for land: 'The only rightful owner of the land was he who tilled it.The present proprietors were morally entitled to hold land only if they became trustees for it. If the cultivators of the fields of a proprietor, who had become a trustee, refused to till the land for him, he would not sue them or seek otherwise to coerce them. He would leave them alone and try to earn his livelihood independently by his honest industry. If he has been discharging his function as trustee honestly, they would come to him before long in contrition and seek his guidance and help. For, he would use his privilege, not to fill his pockets by the exploitation of the labourers, but teach the latter co-operation and organization so as to increase their produce and generally ameliorate their condition. This would mean that the proprietor must himself become a cultivator 'par excellence.''[16] For his children to inherit the land, they must also become worthy trustees.[17]

As to accumulation of capital, Gandhi believed that it was 'impossible except through violent means'. In his interview (1932) with Charles Petrasch, Gandhi maintained that 'Indian princes, landowners, industrialists and bankers' acquired their wealth by 'exploiting the masses'/ 'by the appropriation of the fruit of their labour'.[18] He had no problem with somebody using his intelligence to 'gain more [material wealth]' but 'the surplus of his gains ought to return to the people'. This was despite Gandhi's apprehension of being 'sadly disappointed in this'. If he would come to power, he would 'certainly' abolish capitalism but not abolish capital and

capitalists. He was 'convinced that coordination of capital and labour [was] perfectly possible.' Silent on how such coordination would come about, he observed that he would bring about a revolution without violence all by himself on their behalf rather than approve of Indian peasants and workers plunging into violent class struggle.

One might argue that the Indian policy on compulsory investment of a part of business profit in social welfare activities could be seen as giving a Gandhian moral directive to profit-earning enterprise. Both the Corporate Social Responsibility Voluntary Guidelines (2009) and the subsequent enactment of section 135 of the Companies Act (2013) making CSR spending and its disclosure mandatory, did bring to notice the Gandhian influence on businessmen in his times.The document recalled that 'many of India's leading businessmen were influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and his theory of trusteeship of wealth contributed liberally to his programmes for removal of untouchability, women's emancipation and rural reconstruction'.[19] But it was that much only by way of taking note of the Gandhian inspiration. Since Gandhi believed in the possibility of induced withering away of capitalism rather than in its deliberate disbanding in a communist rule or in a misplaced anarchical fit, his understanding can be easily placed in what is termed the Projectionist approach to CSR. It subscribes to the line of thinking which recognizes the urgency to reform capitalism in the interest of capitalism.[20] But corporate goals and social goals are impossible to reconcile. In any case, the issues like what constitutes reconciliation and for whom remain ambiguous. Fundamentally, CSR can blur capitalist exploitation of labour and accumulation. Gandhi, however, was categorical: 'My theory of trusteeship is no make-shift, certainly no camouflage.'[21]

So, there is nothing much to draw on except Gandhi's moral critique of capitalism. For the various categories of impatient victims of capitalism, the Gandhian procedure of moral reform of the capitalists is hardly reassuring. In any case, the questions like who will reform the capitalists, how and on what authority, remain unresolved; so

also the question why the capitalists would submit to moral transformation of their selves and practices.

Given his preference for non-violent non-cooperation as the mode of negotiation with one's adversaries, the same problems crop up again on the question of coping with the challenges thrown up by inverted totalitarianism. State authority's resolve to 'control, punish, survey, direct and influence citizens' was obviously not unknown to Gandhi. Fundamentally, for him imperialism was an expression of *himsa* (violence). For him, passive non-violent collective resistance was the only morally permissible and tactically appropriate for the mass of subjects. For him, this only would ensure enduring conflict resolution. Even when anti-Semitic riots were intense, to Gandhi, civil resistance by the persecuted Jews was the only way they could preserve their self-respect. He was confident that 'voluntary sufferance' by the Jews would eventually prevail over 'calculated violence' by the Nazis.[22]

For the impatient and long-time victims of the state, imperial or otherwise, this would mean an indefinite wait, hence an unattractive proposition. The same holds true – may be, more — for the leaders of resistance. Since we have here a reference to contemporary capitalism, a quantum increase in digital surveillance in times of surveillance capitalism has definitely added to the vulnerabilities of people, which include covert 'thieving' of their experiences and practices in everyday living.[23] We, of course, concede the reality of socialist and post-socialist surveillance. This is because fundamentally the imperatives of power-holding and power-wielding include surveillance over the subjects. Assuming that disenchanted subjects of state power will find in Gandhi's wise counsel of making the state eventually redundant relevant today, working out an agenda for a transformative intervention – that too involving the humankind — towards re-placement of state institutions by communitarian alternatives, is no easy task. And, wouldn't that also need power as a resource? Gandhi would suggest that that power would be a different order. But isn't power is power? Is it impossible that moral change of individual characters may not have an even speed and simultaneity?

Is it impossible that some may need to be assisted in working out moral overhauling of diehard traces of selfishness? Wouldn't, in that case, morally superior individuals may be 'forced' to take the Rousseauian solution of forcing a recalcitrant individual to be free? Is it improbable that benign power may mutate to become malign power? In the face of these, we are left only with Gandhian optimism as expressed by Nirmal Kumar Bose 'In moments of deeper crisis, when the simple people of the world ['not individuals like Socrates and Gandhi'], those who labour and wish to live in peace, may find one day in the methods of Gandhi, a way of asserting their own dignity and of the establishment of peace, Justice and Equality for which all the world thirsts.'[24]

In inversion of orientalism, Gandhi's apparent inducement cannot be discounted if we do one kind of reading. For example, Manfred B Steger found: 'Indeed his nationalist discourse assumes the character of a moral political enterprise…the political restoration of the community must go hand in hand with the moral reordering of the collective psyche. One by one, each individual soul must be turned away from the enticing shadows of modern civilization and reoriented toward the ancient ideals of community, equality, physical health and spiritual Truth.'[25] Such a reading draws on Gandhi's other writings too, like what he wrote in 1909: 'There was true wisdom in the sages of old having so regulated society as to limit the material condition of the people: the rude plough of perhaps five thousand years ago is the plough of the husbandman today. Therein lies salvation. People live long, under such conditions, in comparative peace much greater than Europe has enjoyed after having taken up modern activity …'[26] He was firm: 'Increase of material comforts, it may be generally be laid down, does not in any way whatsoever conduce to moral growth.'[27]And he wanted: 'instead of boasting of the glorious past, we express the ancient moral glory in our own lives and let our lives bear witness to our past'.[28]

But another reading is more honest to Gandhi's re-working on the notion of dharma. What the present practitioners of such orientalism

do not re-call is the fact that Gandhi redefined the notion of dharma. Anthony J. Parel re-connects us with this Gandhian endeavour: '…Gandhi believed that through *Hind Swaraj* he would be able to give Indians a practical philosophy, an updated conception of dharma, that would fit them for life in the modern world. In the past dharma was tied to a hierarchical system of duties and obligations and to the preservation of status. It gave little or no attention to the idea of democratic citizenship. Gandhi felt that the time had come to redefine the scope of dharma to include notions of citizenship, equality, liberty, fraternity and mutual assistance. And in *Hind Swaraj* he presents in simple language his notion of such a redefined dharma, the vision of a new Indian or Gandhian civic humanism, one that the *Gita* and the *Ramayana* had always contained *in potentia,* but something which Indian civilisation had not actualised fully in practice.'[29] In any case, Hindutva the present day contemporary political right preaches and practices is nothing more than 'a contemporary synthesis of brahminism'. But the preachers of Hindutva overlook Gandhi's assertion: 'Every formula of every religion has, in this age of reason, to submit to the acid test of reason and universal justice if it is to ask for universal assent. Error can claim no exemption even if it can be supported by the scriptures of the world.'[30]

Further, they deliberately obliterate Gandhi's position on how history should not be re-written as well as how it should be. This is relevant today because re-writing history to secure hegemony is a part of inverted orientalist design. Reacting to KM Munshi's historical novel *Prithviballabh*, Gandhi wanted to do know in 1945: 'Can you, as a historian, forget the whole of Muslim history? Even if you can do so, can you make the whole of India forget it? Can you reverse the flow of water and make it go upward? After the British have left, will it be possible to wipe out all the consequences of the British connection off history?'[31] Edward Said made a similar observation though in a different context: 'What our leaders and their intellectual lackeys seem incapable of understanding is that history cannot be swept clean like a blackboard, clean so that "we" might inscribe our own future there and impose our

own forms of life for these lesser people to follow.'[32] Regretting lack of attention to people, Gandhi wrote in 1931: 'We have to rewrite our history books. History has ceased to be a record of the deeds of kings, and has become a record of the deeds of people, but it is still a record of the violent deeds of people. Not of their non-violence. [33]

In the present conjunction of neo-liberalism, inverted totalitarianism and inverted orientalism, ordinary people and their equally ordinary leaders will not find anything – a programme of action – to bring about quick resolution of the problems created by the three negatives invigorating each other. Gandhi recognized the popular need for amelioration; even, for antidotal interventions. But he was wise to realize that, until the fundamental antagonistic contradictions would be resolved, temporary truce between the antagonists would remain fragile. Wisdom is usually lonely, crowded out by the welter of interests which relate to the present and the immediate future. Gandhian wisdom is no exception. As it has turned out, Gandhi has become like a long distance runner, running alone in long empty stretches because he has long left behind his fellow competitors in his single-minded resolve to reach his goal.[34] Lonely though, the runner has the time to reflect on contradictions which lie along his path. Gandhi transformed this predicament into a performative resolve: *Jodi tor dak shune keu naa ase tobe ekla cholo re* ('If they pay no heed to your call walk on your own/Walk alone, walk alone, walk alone, walk all alone').[35]Whether the common people and their organic leaders would join the Gandhian journey remains a matter of conjecture. Going by the accounts by Nirmal Kumar Bose of Gandhi's capacity to engage with the masses in riot-torn Bengal in his *My Days with Gandhi* and by Irfan Habib's reminiscence of Gandhi's moral politics to contain the traumatic violence in Punjab,[36] Gandhi had played his part, all by himself. It is now his followers' turn to engage with Gandhism.

Notes

[1] 'Orientalism' has acquired a large number of prefixes. 'Inverse orientalism' is akin to 'reverse orientalism'. 'Orientalism: a Glossary', *Orientalism Studies*. www.orientalismstudies.com/post.php?pid=2, accessed on 19.5.19

[2] The concept of 'inverted totalitarianism' is used by Sheldon Wolin to characterize the contemporary US system. But it is a useful concept to understand politics and state in neo-liberal clones in the global south. Wolin, Sheldon S., *Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.

[3] Hansen, Thomas Blum, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, New Delhi: Oxford, India, 2001 quoted by Gray, Neil, 'Orientalism Inverted: The Rise of 'Hindu Nation', *Mute*,July 30,2008.

[4] Gray, Neil, 'Orientalism Inverted: The Rise of 'Hindu Nation', *Mute*,July 30, 2008.

[5] Toussaint, Éric, 'Adam Smith and the Yellow Vest Movement', *MR Online*, December 24, 2018.

[6] Kalbag, Chaitanya, 'Cleaning Up India With Gandhiji', *The Economic Times*, September 20, 2018.

[7] It is interesting that the front piece essay 'The Case for an Intellectual Movement to Support Gandhism' in the first edition of his *Studies in Gandhism* (1940) was not reproduced in its two subsequent editions (1947, 1962).

[8] What might be a little close to *How To Be a Good Communist*, are Gandhi's observations on the satyagrahis grouped in the section on 'The Life of the Satyagrahi', in Bose, Nirmal Kumar, *Selections from Gandhi*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1948.

[9] It is interesting that despite his differences from Leninist methods for the communist project, he attached great value to what Marx and Engels stipulated as 'the alteration of men on a mass scale' in *The German Ideology* (1846).

[10] 'Nehru's reply to Gandhi' (October 9, 1945), *Hind Swaraj and other writings*, ed. Parel, Anthony J., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997: 152.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Heredia, Rudolf C, 'Interpreting Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*', *EPW*, June 12, 1999: 1499.

[13] Marx, Karl and Engels, Friedrich, *Communist Manifesto* (1848), Ed. Joseph Katz.Intro. Francis B. Randall, Tran. Samuel Moore, New York: Pocket Books, 1964: 114.

[14] Heredia, Rudolf C, 'Interpreting Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*', *EPW*, June 12, 1999: 1500.

[15] Ibid., 1497.

[16] Bose, Nirmal Kumar, *My Days with Gandhi*, Calcutta: Nishana, 1953: 26

[17] Ibid.: 27.

[18] Petrasch, Charles, 'An Interview with Gandhi', *Think India Quarterly*, vol.14, no. 3, 1932: 37-40. Originally published in *The Labour Monthly*, vol.14, April, 1932: 217-224.

[19] 'National Voluntary Guidelines on Social, Environmental & Economic Responsibilities of Business', Ministry of Corporate Affair, Government of India. www.mca.gov.in/Ministry/.../National_Voluntary_Guidelines_2011_12jul2011.pdf accessed on 20.4.19.

[20] For an overview of different approaches to CSR, See Sandoval, M. 'From CSR to RSC: A Contribution to the Critique of the Political Economy of Corporate Social Responsibility', *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 47(4), 2015: 608-624. doi: 10.1177/0486613415574266.

[21] *Harijan*, 16-12-1939:376.

[22] Murti, V. V. Ramana, 'Buber's Dialogue and Gandhi's Satyagraha', *Journal of the History of Ideas*,Vol. 29, No. 4, Oct. - Dec., 1968: 605-613.

[23] Zuboff, Shoshana, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, London: Profiles Books Ltd., 2019.

[24] Bose, Nirmal Kumar, *Gandhism and Modern India: Gandhi Memorial Lectures, 1969*, Gauhati: University of Gauhati, 1970: 117-118.

[25] Steger, Manfred B, 'Comparative Nationalisms in Gandhi's global village', Goodman, James and James, Paul eds., *Nationalism and Global Solidarities: Alternative Projections to Neo-liberal Globalization*, Oxon, New York, Routledge, 2007: 130

[26] 'Gandhi's Letter to H. S. L Polak' (1909), *Hind Swaraj and other writings*, ed. Parel, Anthony J., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997:131.

[27] Anthony J. Parel, ed. 'Gandhi's Letter to H. S. L Polak' (1909), *Hind Swaraj and other writings*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997: 130.

[28] Anthony J. Parel, ed. 'Economic Development and Moral Development' (1916), *Hind Swaraj and other writings*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997 : 162.

[29] Parel, Anthony J. 'Introduction', *Hind Swaraj and other writings*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977: xvi.

[30] *Young India*, February 26, 1925, CWMG, Vol. 26: 202, quoted in Mehta, Arun J., *Lessons In Non-violent Civil Disobedience (Satyagraha): From the life of M. K. Gandhi And His Legacy* , 2014: 52.

[31] Guha, Ramchandra, 'Gandhi and the idea of an anti-chauvinist history', *Hindusthan Times*, May 31, 2019. https://www.hindustantimes.com/.../gandhi...of...history/story-U9kgGcfAVYVT3amC... Accessed on 31.5.19

[32] Said, Edward, 'Preface To Orientalism', *The Outlook*, August 8, 2003.

[33] Guha, Ramchandra, 'Gandhi and the idea of an anti-chauvinist history', *Hindusthan Times*, May 31, 2019.

[34] It is the title of a short story by Alan Sillitoe (1959, adapted for a film by the same title in 1962). It belongs to social realism genre. Story line-wise, it expectedly misfits Gandhi's life story. It is used here as a metaphor – though not for the first time – to a person, who not being a part of team, enjoys the freedom from the usual constraints on thinking as he runs through long empty stretches because he is ahead of the fellow competitors but in the process becoming sad and lonely.

[35] Originally titled *Eka*(Alone), it was written in Bengali by Rabindranath Tagore in 1905 as a protest song in the genre of 'swadesh' songs. Gandhi was deeply influenced by the song for the anti-Partition movement. The English translation used here is by Sumana Roy.

[36] Habib, Irfan, 'Criticism of Gandhi not based on history', *The Economics Times*, March 30, 2015.

Look Back in Anger and Despair : Mahatma Gandhi's Intriguing Legacy

Supratim Das

Let me begin with the humble submission that I am not an expert in Gandhi Studies, nor a familiar writer on Gandhi, far less a scholar. I am afraid my article may frustrate many of the readers eager to find a somewhat original position on Gandhi and accept or contest it. I would like to clarify my purpose with a reference to the title of the lecture. The British playwright John Osborne wrote a play 'Look Back in Anger' in 1956 to confront and challenge the attitudes, beliefs and practices of contemporary Britain and critique capitalism. My title has been influenced by it. In 1922 Gandhi wrote: "I am not a quick despairer". We know this is true. But in 2019 as we face an alarmingly increasing spectre of right-wing fascism in the country, I look back on Gandhi's refreshingly modern legacy in anger and despair. This legacy has been mostly marginalised into classroom teaching and lofty scholarship. In other words, we are bogged down into the basics and far away from application.

It is generally agreed that Mahatma Gandhi is a figure of global significance. However, debate goes on about the exact nature of his contribution. What is the essence of his greatness, then and now? Was it his capacity to give rise to an articulate world view of nonviolence? Was it his keenness to sacrifice everything for the sake of ideals that he found priceless? Or was it his deep sympathy for the poor and distressed of his society? No simple answer will be sufficient.

The paper was presented at the Asiatic Society, Kolkata on 27th March 2019 under the special lecture series *Remembering Mahatma Gandhi.*

In a 1921 lecture on "Who is the Greatest Man in the World Today?" John Haynes Holmes, the pastor of New York City's largest liberal assembly, did not mention personalities like Lenin, Woodrow Wilson or Sun Yat-sen to cite as an example of greatness. He named Mohandas Gandhi, an Indian activist completely unknown to the crowd who assembled in the hall that day. Holmes, later acclaimed as the West's discoverer of Gandhi, described him as his "seer and saint."[1]

But Gandhi never appreciated a saintly image for himself. When enquired about his notion of an independent India, Gandhi replied, "I may be taunted with the retort that this is all Utopian and, therefore, not worth a single thought. If Euclid's line, though incapable of being drawn by human agency, has an imperishable value, my picture has its own for mankind to live. Let India live for this true picture, though never realizable in its completeness. We must have a proper picture of what we want, before we can have something approaching it."[2]

Gandhi's writings cover a hundred volumes. And still he once advised Nirmal Kumar Bose, his secretary in the mid-1940s, to keenly watch his activities instead of his writings because he believed the real man could be found there, not in what he wrote.[3] In 1920 Gandhi said in a prayer meeting: "I deny being a visionary. I do not accept the claim of saintliness. I am of the earth … I am prone to as many weaknesses as you are. But I have seen the world. I have lived in the world with my eyes open ... I perceive the world in its grim reality every moment."[4]

How did he perceive and what were his contributions that have an abiding relevance in our time? I would like to privilege 4 major areas of Gandhi's global relevance today:

1. Leadership
2. Peace education
3. Political thought & democracy
4. Religion and social justice

My discussion of leadership highlights a major perspective on Gandhi — the political movements. James Burns in his study of leadership distinguishes between two types of leaders, the

"transactional" and the "transforming." The transactional leader is a kind of power broker found in all political situations at the national or local levels. But the transforming leader is seldom seen — a leader who is committed to create elemental change in politics through a transformation of public attitudes and values. Burns concentrates on defining and explaining the idea of transforming leadership, citing the example of Gandhi in particular. The theory applies both to the ideas of satyagraha and of swaraj. Burns writes: "Transforming leadership ultimately becomes *moral* in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both. Perhaps the best modern example is Gandhi, who aroused and elevated the hopes and demands of millions of Indians and whose life and personality were enhanced in the process."[5]

The real dynamic leadership involves transcending leadership because the transcending leaders build up an intimate relationship with followers who will feel "elevated" and become more active themselves, thus creating new cadres of leaders. Fully sharing leaders perceive their roles as shaping the future to the advantage of groups with which they identify, an advantage they define in terms of the broadest possible goals and the highest possible levels of morality.

Leaders are taskmasters and goal setters, but they and their followers share a particular space and time, a particular set of impetus and values. If they are to be effective in helping to organize and lift up their constituencies, leaders must be whole persons, persons with fully functioning capacities for thinking and feeling. The followers of a true leader must have the conviction that "the grand goal of all leadership" is "to help create or maintain the social harbours for these personal islands."[6]

Gandhi singularly represented this. As a transforming leader he raised the aspirations of innumerable Indians and mobilized their potential. Transforming leadership is elevating. It is moral but not moralistic. Leaders engage with followers, but from higher levels of morality. Leaders most effectively "connect with" followers from a

level of morality only one stage higher than that of the followers, but moral leaders who act at much higher levels—Gandhi, for example—relate to followers at all levels either heroically or through the founding of mass movements that provide linkages between persons at various levels of morality and sharply increase the moral impact of the transforming leader. Much of this kind of elevating leadership asks sacrifices from followers rather than merely promising them goods.[7]

For Gandhi the task of leadership was educative. For, satyagraha must be used to gain the empowerment of those who had never been politicized. Rajagopalachari observed that the purpose of the Dandi march was to manufacture not salt but civil disobedience. Gandhi responded that more precisely: it was to use satyagraha to produce swaraj.[8] The function of a leader, in this case, was to educate the masses in the art of nonviolent action for the purpose of personal and political autonomy "by demonstrating that real swaraj will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when abused. In other words, swaraj is to be attained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority. Gandhi's message to millions, in one form or another, was that 'You will be all right if you are fully yourself.'"[9] As Gandhi's most celebrated biographer Judith Brown writes: "As Gandhi matured into middle age, it was clear he had become a singular type of 'politician', one prompted by ideals and beliefs more than the pursuit of power, and that he had moulded his life to match his message."[10] Brown aptly sums it up: "Post-independence India is certainly not Gandhian in its values and practices. However, the Satyagraha movements and Gandhi's incessant pedagogical role have left their mark. He remains, as an individual, a worldwide icon and inspiration, a profoundly creative thinker and activist. But his actual historical experience in the context of British rule in India illustrates many of the ambiguities of that experience, as well as the sorts of circumstances in which civil resistance can be a creative form of public endeavour."[11]

Gandhi himself thought that he failed by the standards he set for himself. Some of his severest critics appraise him unkindly as one who "far from being infallible, committed serious blunders, one after another, in pursuit of some utopian ideals and methods which had no basis in reality."[12] Compare with this the work of Judith Brown whose three volumes on Gandhi constitute perhaps the most scrupulous and fair study of his life and leadership available. Brown concludes her latest biography with this judgment: "Gandhi was no plaster saint. Nor did he find lasting and real solutions to many of the problems he encountered …. He was also deeply human, capable of heights and depths of sensation and vision, of great enlightenment and dire doubt…. But fundamentally he was a man of vision and action, who asked many of the profoundest questions that face humankind as it struggles to live in community."[13]

In Gandhi's vision, independence of India was to begin at the bottom i.e. at the village level. Every village must be a republic or *panchayat*. It should enjoy full powers. There would be neither aggressiveness nor arrogance on anybody's part. To refer to Rajat Kanta Ray, here was a humanism that far surpassed nationalism and moved well past modernity. This emphasis on village instead of modern nation-state is also discernible in the writing of Rabindranath Tagore. In his *Swadeshi samaj* address at the Minerva and Curzon theatres of Calcutta in 1904, the poet urged the people of India to turn away from old-style politics. As he said, instead of trying ineffectively to please the British, volunteers should rush to the villages and enlighten the masses socially and politically in the village fairs through 'magic-lantern lectures'. More importantly, they should revive our traditional Samaj, directing all constructive work through it once again.[14] "Mr. Gandhi", remarked a critic in an article entitled 'Gandhism and After', published in *The Hindustan Review*, "is a sworn enemy of all civilization…"[15] Gandhi used the term *Swaraj* not in a political sense, but in a moral sense. As he wrote, "It is *Swaraj* when we rule ourselves."[16] "And yet", writes Ray, " this moral concept has profound, and highly disturbing implications for politics … Politics is

about power, power for the nation so far as Congress is concerned. Gandhi proposes to abolish power altogether from the centre, in an implicitly anti-national design. No longer will power be available for national reconstruction through national planning. On the contrary, national (anti-national?) reconstruction will be achieved by the abolition of the state. … Power would then revert to the community ruled by custom, especially the village community of his dream."[17] As Gandhi himself put it, "Would there be State power in an ideal society or would such a society be Stateless? I think the question is futile. … We might remember though that a Stateless society does not exist anywhere in the world. If such a society is possible it can be established first only in India. For attempts have been made in India towards bringing about such a society … The only way is for those who believe in it to set the example."[18]

Citing numerous examples from Gandhi's writings, Partha Chatterjee has focused on the difference of his nationalist ideology from that of other Congress leaders. Gandhi's way of looking at the state and forms of rule had been no doubt highly original. He made a serious attempt to mobilize people against the colonial regime in his own terms of non-violence and *satyagraha*. An unarmed people became familiar with the effective techniques of non-violent protest against the institutions of state aggression. In fact, the most celebrated concept in the Gandhian ideology was the concept of *ahimsa*. "In its application to politics" — writes Partha Chatterjee – "*ahimsa* was also about 'intense political activity' by large masses of people. … *Ahimsa* was the necessary complement to the concept of *satyagraha…* It was the organizing principle for a 'science' of politics – a science wholly different from all current conceptions of politics … It was the moral framework for solving every practical problem of the organized political movement."[19]

Some historians object that an appropriate evaluation of Gandhi's significance must relate not to his role and relevance "for all times and all places," but to what he did in a specific time and place, that is, India in the twentieth century, and that the extent of his contribution

there was much less than claimed. This is because the Raj would certainly have left India anyway regardless of Gandhi, perhaps even sooner without him. In any case, the key factors behind the end of the British Empire in India were the two world wars, especially the second and its immediate aftermath, which rapidly convinced the Labour government in England to transfer power. This is a forceful argument but it hardly does justice to the role of the Indian nationalist movement. It misses the point that the movement's achievement was not merely the accomplishment of an independent government, but more than that, the technique that was developed and consistently applied of a nonviolent struggle unparalleled in the global perspective. Susanne Rudolph is right that the question of "whether Gandhi did or did not speed Britain's exit from India" is a "distraction". It fails to notice the significant fact that the movement managed to translate ideas like *swaraj* and *satyagraha* into action: "Gandhi's leadership, regardless of its objective success or failure, had important subjective consequences, repairing wounds in self-esteem, inflicted by generations of imperial subjection, restoring courage and potency, recruiting and mobilizing new constituencies and leaders, helping India to acquire national coherence."[20] Harold Laski, the English political theorist observed in 1941: "No living man has, either by precept or example, influenced so vast a number of people in so direct and profound a way."[21]

Nonviolence and Peace Education

Gandhi's outlook about violent struggle was reshaped in reaction to the Indian activists who had supported a terrorist attack on a British official. The incident occurred in London in 1909, shortly before Gandhi landed there to negotiate with the British Parliament on behalf of South African Indian immigrants. He was provoked to debate this issue of violence with several of London's emigrant Indian nationalists. His major challenger was Vinayak Savarkar. Afterwards, on his way back to Durban, Gandhi hurriedly wrote the initial draft of *Hind Swaraj*. He agreed with the Indian radicals in London that

Britain should have no place in ruling India and exploiting its economy. Moreover, he forcefully held that India must not copy the material attributes of Western civilization, which he explained as a sort of "sickness". The thrust of the book, however, was to counter terrorism. Gandhi outlined a nonviolent approach, beginning with an investigation of the nature of conflict. For him it was more important to look beyond a particular conflict between individuals to the broader issues for which they were fighting. Every clash, Gandhi argued, was a contest on two levels - between persons and between principles. Behind every fight lay the question for which the fighter was fighting. Every fight, Gandhi clarified in a later essay, was at some point an encounter between differing "angles of vision" manifesting the same truth.[22]

It was this difference in positions – at times even in worldviews - that needed to be solved to end up a clash and pacify the fighter. In that sense Gandhi's techniques were more than a way of confronting an enemy; they were a way of handling conflict itself. For this reason he grew unhappy with the sticky label, 'passive resistance,' that had been affixed on the methods used by his protest movement in South Africa. There was nothing passive about it - in fact, Gandhi had led the movement into stormy confrontations with government authorities - and it was more than just resistance. It was a quest for the right cause and speaking truth to power. In his own words: "...you have to pay a very heavy price when your resistance is passive, in the sense of the weakness of the resister. Europe mistook the bold and brave resistance, full of wisdom, by Jesus of Nazareth for passive resistance, as if it was of the weak. As I read the New Testament for the first time, I detected no passivity, no weakness about Jesus as depicted in the four gospels ..."[23]

True, time comes when violence appears to be the only response available. Gandhi provided some examples. One was the mad dog. On confronting a dog with rabies, one must stop it by any means possible, including maiming or killing it.[24] Another case that Gandhi offered was a brutal rapist caught in the act. To do nothing in that

situation, Gandhi said, makes the observer "a partner in violence." Hence violence could be used to counter it. Gandhi thus concluded, "Heroic violence is less sinful than cowardly nonviolence."[25] Responding to terrorism, however, is quite a different matter. Gandhi argued in *Hind Swaraj* that violence never works as a response to violence. It usually generates more violence as a result, and hastens a seemingly endless repetition of retaliations and militant engagements. Gandhi was vehemently opposed to the political positions that justified terrorism, but he was remarkably lenient toward the terrorists themselves. As for the assassination that occurred in London in 1909, Gandhi did not blame Madan Lal Dhingra, the assassin of Curzon-Wyllie. For him Dhingra as a person was not the main problem. Rather, he was like a drunkard, in the grip of "a mad idea."[26]

A Gandhian technique for contesting terrorism, therefore, would comprise the following:

(i) Violence must be halted in its tracks. The effort to do so should be nonviolent but forceful. (ii) The issues behind the terrorism need to be addressed properly. To focus solely on acts of terrorism, Gandhi argued, would be like being concerned with weapons in an effort to stop the spread of racial hatred. (iii) The high moral ground should be maintained at any cost. An aggressive attitude would debase those who adopted it. These are valuable principles, but do they work? This question is often raised about nonviolent methods as a response to terrorism — as if the violent ones have been so effective. Militant responses to terrorism do not possess a particularly good record of success.[27]

As Douglas Allen rightly points out, it is true that at first reading, Mohandas Gandhi's writings on nonviolence and peace education seem disturbingly immature and simplistic. Those familiar with philosophical literature may be amazed by his ostensibly oversimplified, uncritical, and insufficient treatments of complex, metaphysical, ethical, cultural, and other philosophical concerns relevant to Gandhian views on peace education. With regard to

violence, nonviolence, peace, and education, Gandhi does not have all the answers. Gandhi serves as a worthy catalyst, allowing us to rethink our positions on violence, nonviolence, and peace education.[28]

It will not be irrelevant to note here that in hermeneutical reading, there is not one inert or absolutely true Mahatma Gandhi view of peace education. In fact, there is not one static view of the "real" Mahatma Gandhi. What we single out, privilege, interpret, and write about Gandhi and his views of nonviolence, truth, and peace education is formed by our own perspective and our interpretative prospects of meaning. This eventuality in our interpretations means that we are presented with multiple Gandhis and multiple Gandhian views of peace education. Every reading of Gandhi is a rereading, every interpretation is a reinterpretation, and every formulation is a reformulation that is fundamental to discourse.[29]

There are overriding essentialist and anti-essentialist approaches to Gandhi's writings and interpretations of meaning. The debate is over the real Gandhi and his exact philosophy. In some essentialist interpretations, Gandhi appears as an extremely inflexible, traditionalist, diehard leader, too keen to romanticise premodern societies and apply complete ethical and spiritual standards. This Gandhi discards "alcohol consumption, meat eating, materialism, consumerism, modern medicine, technology, industrialization, globalization, and other features of a violent modern West." According to some other essentialist interpretations, Gandhi was an extraordinarily progressive leader occupied in a revolutionary mission to direct human relations into the trajectory of nonviolence, empathy, love, harmony and truth. A more subtle and satisfactory appraisal of Gandhi and his writings locates him as a one endlessly engaged in "experiments with truth." Such experiments lead to reformulations of Gandhi's views on peace education.[30]

As one becomes engrossed in Gandhi's writings, it becomes increasingly clear that Gandhi is often very subtle, flexible, and complex. For Gandhi, nonviolence is more than the absence of explicit

violence; peace is more than the absence of open war; and most human beings who affirm their commitment to peace and nonviolence are in fact very violent. Gandhi's non-violence must not be understood in the straitjacket of spirituality and religion for a smooth judgment of his legacy. Gandhi's notion of disciplinary rule should be seen in the context of just laws of a constitutional democratic state, and not as a variant of spiritual "tapas" and self-control.[31] As he writes: "The true meaning of non-resistance has often been misunderstood or even distorted. It never implies that a non-violent man should bend before the violence of an aggressor. While not returning the latter's violence by violence, he should refuse to submit to the latter's illegitimate demand even to the point of death. That is the true meaning of non-resistance.... He is not to return violence by violence, but neutralize it by withholding one's hand and, at the same time, refusing to submit to the demand ... Peace through superior violence inevitably leads to the atom bomb and all that it stands for. It is complete negation of non-violence and of democracy which is not possible without the former."[32]

Unlike most philosophers and others who adopt ethical and spiritual approaches, Gandhi places a primary emphasis on basic material needs and the "normal" state of economic violence. Repeatedly, he uses "violence" as synonymous with exploitation. He is attentive to unequal, asymmetrical, violent power relations in which some, who possess wealth, capital, and other material resources, are able to exploit and dominate those lacking such economic power. Gandhi identifies with the plight of starving and impoverished human beings and with the plight of peasants, workers, and others who are disempowered and dominated. He emphasizes that such economic violence is not the result of supernatural design or a law of nature. It involves human-caused oppression, exploitation, domination, injustice, and suffering, and, hence, we as human beings are responsible. Obviously, incorporating such concerns of economic violence broadens and radically changes the nature of peace education.

One of the most valuable contributions of Gandhi's approach to violence is to broaden our focus so that we are able to situate our peace-education concerns in terms of the larger dominant structures of the violence of the status quo. For example, we uncritically accept the existence of a permanent war economy as just the way things are. We do not critique how the permanent war economy was created, is maintained, and flourishes best under conditions of insecurity, terror, violence, and war. We do not critique how it removes resources that could be provided to meet vital human needs and to provide alternative nonviolent ways of relating. Instead we accept a view of jobs and economic security dependent on a permanent war economy of insecurity, and we train students to become functionaries and contributors to a more effective war economy based on the perpetuation and domination of structural violence. [33]

Political Thought & the Notion of Democracy

Post-colonial India has emerged as a democracy — the world's largest democracy. Gandhi dreamt of a democratic India. Today's India surely differs from Gandhi's vision. Still India survives, unlike most other nations of similar economic development or colonial legacy, as a country with effective democratic institutions that have remained intact since its independence. Gandhi's theory of democracy remained one of the major ideas that he endeavoured to articulate in action. "Democracy," he wrote in 1939, "must in essence mean the art and science of mobilizing the entire physical, economic and spiritual resources of all the various sections of the people in the service of the common good of all."[34] When he was asked in 1940 about the practice of democracy in America, he replied: "My notion of democracy is that under it the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest. That can never happen except through non-violence. No country in the world today shows any but patronizing regard for the weak. The weakest, you say, go to the wall. Take your own case. Your land is owned by a few capitalist owners. The same is true of South Africa. These large holdings cannot be sustained except by violence, veiled if

not open…. The way you have treated the Negro presents a discreditable record…Your wars will never ensure safety for democracy."[35]

Gandhi's critique of his contemporary democratic systems has relevance today. His central argument was that exploitation of the weak or poor is a form of "veiled violence," that this and any other form of violence is incompatible with the democratic ideal. Democracy must guarantee freedom with equality which means freedom from fear and insecurity. "I value individual freedom", Gandhi remarked, "but you must not forget that man is essentially a social being", and "unrestricted individualism" must be curtailed by social conscience "to strike the mean between individual freedom and social restraint." The task in any democracy is to realize the value of swaraj, "social restraint for the sake of the well-being of the whole society [that] enriches both the individual and the society of which one is a member."[36]

This was the vision of swaraj and also of *Sarvodaya* or social equality that Gandhi sought to express in action. This ideal asked for inclusivity against exclusivity and argued that inclusivity places humanity above all such categories as caste, class, race or religion. By contrast, exclusivity inevitably gives rise to attitudes of domination or dehumanization: "A variety of incidents in my life", Gandhi wrote in his Autobiography, "have conspired to bring me in close contact with people of many creeds and many communities, and my experience with all of them warrants the statement that I have known no distinction between relatives and strangers, countrymen and foreigners, white and coloured, Hindus and Indians of other faiths, whether Muslims, Parsis, Christians or Jews. I may say that my heart has been incapable of making any such distinctions."[37] This is the vision that other inclusivists like Albert Einstein would recognize as Gandhi's gift to posterity because, as he would remark shortly after Gandhi's assassination, "in our age of moral decay he was the only statesman who represented that higher conception of human relations in the political sphere."[38]

We find a very different reading of Gandhi in the writings of Anthony Parel and Bhikhu Parekh. They focus on the cross-cultural

aspects of his political thought. Parekh considers Gandhi a hybrid political thinker. He argues that "Gandhi's political theory cuts across several moral, religious and philosophical traditions and rests on an unusually broad philosophical foundation, showing . . . the rich harvest that can be garnered from . . . cross-cultural dialogue." In his view, in an increasingly interdependent world, a global political theory can be constructed on the basis of Gandhi's political ideas. At the same time, Parekh claims that Gandhi "was one of the first non-Western thinkers of the modern age to develop a political theory grounded in the unique experiences and articulated in terms of the indigenous philosophical vocabulary of his country."[39] This is definitely a powerful argument. But the question remains: Does Parekh have it both ways? Does developing a political theory that uses the "indigenous philosophical vocabulary" of one's country also means that one is employing or relying upon indigenous philosophical categories and concepts? Are we problematising sheer terminology or ideational foundation? According to Stuart Gray and Thomas M. Hughes, Parekh does not address this question. They think that Gandhi's cross-culturally hybrid thought is deeply novel in its synthesis of ideas from various traditions. Hence it cannot be fully understood in terms of Parekh's interpretation.[40]

Similarly, Anthony Parel offers two valuable investigative frameworks through which we can approach Gandhi's political thought. In the first framework Parel's argument draws upon the Indian theory of the *purusharthas*, also known as the four comprehensive objectives of human life. To quote Parel, "[the] Indian theory of the purusharthas (the aims of life) . . . opens the vast storehouse of Gandhian ideas [and] enables us to enter a truly Indian intellectual edifice." In tune with K.J. Shah's analysis, Parel holds that Gandhi's political thought reconstituted and clarified the reciprocally harmonious relationship between the purusharthas in an original way.[41] In a subsequent work Parel reinvents Gandhi's political canons by situating them within the broader historical framework of

ancient Indian political thought. Accordingly, he argues that a traditional standard of Indian political thinking can be located at least since the time of Kautilya's *Arthashastra* (fourth century BCE to fourth century CE) and that Gandhi "updated [this] old Indian canon and made the innovated version suitable for a recognizably Indian way of thinking about modern politics."[42]

Religion and Social Justice

The relevance of Gandhi is gradually mounting. Even with all the weapons of mass annihilation and the technological knowledge to reach the outer planets, peace on the earth is deluding. Under the shadow of global terrorism and religious fanaticism people slowly realise that mastery of deadly weapons do not guarantee peace in the world. What really matters is the ability to build relationship with others. Contrary to the expectation, violence and massive force of the modern nations cannot contain the dogged community of fanatics. Hence the time has come to think in terms of an alternative to violence. In this context, it is Gandhi and his methods that come to the fore.

Gandhi struggled to build a secular society free from religious intervention in the affairs of the state. He regarded religion as a personal matter not to be forced on others. When India was divided on the religious ground and Pakistan was born as a theocratic state, the term secularism received greater attention. Later developments in Pakistan and the birth of Bangladesh on the basis of language proved in unambiguous terms that the creation of a state on religious grounds was flawed. Even after the creation of Pakistan, vast majority of the Muslims preferred to remain in India. Numerous developments in the international arena have revealed that peace is possible only through dialogue, negotiations and mutual trust.

As a seeker of truth, he did not hesitate to change his views. He progressed from "God is Truth" to "Truth is God." Nationalism for him was a theory of political community. The nation was to take the place of caste. Though a Western ideology, it had its cultural antecedents in Indian history. Already the *Arthasastra* had spoken of

India as a sphere of imperial expansion (a *chakravartin* sphere) stretching from the Himalayas in the north to seas to the south. In *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi vigorously defended the view that Indians constituted a nation, arguing that all Indians — Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Jainas, Christians, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, Jews, and others — had a shared sense of history and culture. [43]

Nationalism, however, did not imply a monolithic idea as Gandhi was soon to learn. The separatist Muslims wanted a nationalism based on religion; a minority of Hindus wanted a nationalism based on hindutva (Hinduness); and the vast majority of Indians, under the banner of the Indian National Congress, wanted civic nationalism. The political history of modern India was a struggle for supremacy by these three forms of nationalism – Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1875-1948) taking the leadership of religious nationalism, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1882-1966) taking that of hindutva, and Gandhi taking that of civic nationalism.

Turning now to fundamental human rights we see that Gandhi made a major addition to the modern Indian canon. The fundamental human rights had their historical origin in Western thought. Yet when transferred to Indian conditions, Gandhi managed to give human rights a recognizably Indian face - that of *satyagraha*. As he famously defined it, *satyagraha* was "a method of securing rights by personal suffering: it is the reverse of resistance by arms." [44] The Gandhian method of civil disobedience is different from the Western method, even from that made famous by Henry David Thoreau in the mid-nineteenth century. The Western method was open to the use of violence in defence of human rights even in internal politics. Gandhi's method, by contrast, made "personal suffering" a means of defence. As Joan Bondurant has pointed out, of all the elements that constitute Satyagraha, Self-suffering is "the least acceptable to a Western mind."[45] Western mind had accepted violence - such as the violence involved in street riots or in political revolutions, such as the French means of asserting human rights. Gandhi's method marks an advance on the Western method. Accepting "self-suffering" does not mean seeking it

in a pathological manner. It simply means accepting peacefully "the consequences of disobedience". This practice, he pointed out, was "what Daniel did when he disobeyed the laws of the Medes and the Persians." What makes civil disobedience "civil"- not violent - is precisely the peaceful acceptance of the penalty attached to civil disobedience. As Gandhi writes: "My love for non-violence is superior to every other thing mundane or supramundane. It is equalled only by my love for Truth, which is to me synonymous with non-violence through which and which alone I can see and reach Truth."[46]

Apart from transforming the Western mode of civil disobedience into satyagraha, Gandhi made an additional contribution to Indian political thought – he formally introduced fundamental human rights into the political discourse of modern India. This introduction was accomplished in 1931 by means of the famous resolution on "Fundamental Rights and Economic Changes". The resolution was jointly drafted by Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru and Gandhi personally presented it at the annual meeting of the Indian National Congress. As Granville Austin has rightly pointed out, this resolution happens to be the "spiritual antecedent" of the Directive Principles of the new Indian Constitution.[47]

Gandhi was an icon in the nation. Gandhi was a 'back number' in the nation-state. In a prayer meeting of 26th September 1947 he says: "There was a time when India listened to me. Today I am a back number. I have been told I have no place in the new order, where we want machines, navy, air force and what not. I can never be a party to that. If you can have the courage to say that you will retain freedom with the help of the same force with which you have won it, I am your man. My physical incapacity and my depression will vanish in a moment."[48] Let me conclude with an observation of Lloyd Rudolph and Susanne Rudolph: "Gandhi's greatest contribution to political modernization was helping India to acquire national coherence and identity, to become a nation, by showing Indians a way to courage, self-respect, and political potency ... Gandhi's more mundane

contributions to political modernization include introducing in the conduct of politics a work ethic and economizing behaviour with respect to time and resources, and making India's political structures more rational, democratic, and professional."[49]

Notes

[1] Charles Chatfield, ed., *The Americanization of Gandhi: Images of the Mahatma,* New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1976; John Haynes Holmes, *My Gandhi*, New York: 1953.

[2] *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi,* Delhi: Government of India, printed version, 1982, Vol. 85, p. 33.

[3] Nirmal Kumar Bose, *My Days with Gandhi,* New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1974.

[4] *Young India*, August 1920, p. 3.

[5] James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership,* New York: Harper, 1978, p. 20

[6] Ibid. p. 448.

[7] Ibid. p. 455.

[8] Dennis Dalton's interview with C. Rajagopalachari in Madras, May 24, 1967, Dalton, *Mahatma Gandhi: Non-violent Power in Action*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2012, p.243.

[9] Gandhi, *Collected Works*, 1967, Vol - 26, p. 52. Also, 'Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place', pamphlet written by Gandhi in 1941.

[10] Judith Brown and Anthony Parel, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 4.

[11] Judith Brown, "Gandhi and Civil Resistance in India, 1917–47: Key Issues", in *Civil Resistance and Power Politics*, eds., Adam Roberts and Timothy Carton Ash, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 57.

[12] Nirad C Chaudhuri, *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*: Part II [*Thy Hand, Great Anarch!*], (Bombay: Jaico Publishing House, 2008), Chapter – 3 , 'Character of the Indian Nationalist Movement under Gandhi's Leadership'

[13] Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope,* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989, p. 394.

[14] Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908*, New Delhi : People's Publishing House, 1973, pp. 54-55.

[15] See Rajat Kanta Ray, 'Nationalism, Modernity and Civil Society: The Subalternist Critique and After', Presidential Address, Modern India Section, Indian History Congress, Sixty-seventh Session, 2007, published by School of Historical Studies: Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, West Bengal, p. 20.

[16] M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings,* ed., Anthony J. Parel, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 73.

[17] Rajat Kanta Ray, op. cit. pp. 20-21.

[18] M. K. Gandhi, 'Congress Ministries and Ahimsa', *Collected Works*, Vol. 85, pp. 266-7.

[19] Partha Chatterjee, 'Gandhi and the Critique of Civil society', in Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies III*: *Writings on South Asian History and Society,* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984, p.107.
[20] Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph, *Postmodern Gandhi and Other Essays*, University of Chicago Press, 2006, p. 3.
[21] Harold Laski in *Daily Herald,* September 11, 1931.
[22] *Hind Swaraj,* 1909; *Young India,* September 23, 1926.
[23] *Harijan,* 7 December 1947, p. 453.
[24] *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 14 (1965), p. 505
[25] Ibid. Vol. 51, p. 17.
[26] James D Hunt, *Gandhi in London,* New Delhi: Promilla, 1978, p. 134.
[27] Mark Juergensmeyer, "Gandhi vs. Terrorism", *Daedalus*, Vol. 136, No. 1, pp. 35-37.
[28] Douglas Allen, "Mahatma Gandhi on Violence and Peace Education", *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 57, No. 3, 2007, p. 290.
[29] Ibid. pp. 292-94.
[30] Ibid. p. 292. See *Harijan*, October 1936, p. 268.
[31] Dipankar Gupta, "Gandhi before Habermas: the Democratic Consequences of Ahimsa", *Economic and Political Weekly,* Vol. 44, No. 10 (Mar. 7 - 13, 2009), p. 29. David Hardiman, *Gandhi : In His Time and Ours,* New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2005, p. 26.
[32] *Harijan,* March 30, 1947, pp. 85-86.
[33] Douglas Allen, op. Cit., pp. 292-294.
[34] *Harijan,* May 27, 1939.
[35] Ibid. May 18, 1940.
[36] Ibid. May 27, 1939.
[37] *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi,* Vol. 34, 1969, p. 221.
[38] Albert Einstein's statement for the memorial service in Washington on February 11, 1948, quoted in *Einstein on Peace,* edited by Otto Nathan and Heinz Norden, New York: Avenel Books, 1981, pp. 467–468.
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[40] Stuart Gray and Thomas M. Hughes, "Gandhi's Devotional Political Thought", *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (April 2015), pp. 376-77.
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[42] Parel, "Gandhi and the Emergence of the Modern Indian Political Canon", *The Review of Politics,* Vol. 70, No. 1, Special Issue on Comparative Political Theory (Winter, 2008), pp. 40-63.
[43] *Hind Swaraj,* pp. 51-57.

[44] Ibid. p. 79.

[45] Joan V. Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965, p. 29.

[46] *Young India*, February 1930, p. 61.

[47] G. Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1966, 56-57.

[48] *The Penguin Gandhi Reader*, ed., Rudrangshu Mukherjee, New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 1993, Excerpts from 'Gandhi's Prayer Speeches'.

[49] Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph, *Postmodern Gandhi and Other Essays: Gandhi in the World and at Home*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006, p. 232.

Gandhi, Cinema and the Masses : A Complex Narrative

Urvi Mukhopadhyay

Introduction

Since the last quarter of the nineteenth century, with the advent of an awareness for responsive government for the citizens, politically active masses attained an important role in politics. French Revolution, was perhaps the first political movement that conveyed the central role of the masses in determining the course of politics. Following Stefan Jonsson this time can be described as when, 'History turns from a world in which political decisions were made by an exclusive elite behind the closed doors to a world in which political participation is open to all… History also turns towards a more abstract form of power: whereas the sovereign formerly manifested himself in regal symbols and lavish ornamented ceremonies, the new sovereign is a phantom whose qualities could be discerned only through the bare fact of numbers.'[1]Along with the awareness of the immense potential of the masses, the necessity to 'tame' the popular upsurge was soon accepted as an important role of the leaders.[2]In India, the twentieth century is often seen as the century of the popular politics when the masses made their presence felt in deciding the course of political processes. This era almost coincided with Gandhi's rise to power which became instrumental not only in ousting the mighty colonial rule from the land but also founding the basis of the largest democracy. While discussing the legacy of Gandhi, historian David Hardiman describes his inspiring image as a 'template' for modern moral activism, that attracted and led a

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huge number of 'people' who, with their sheer numerical strength and integrity of moral convictions confronted the British colonial imperialism founded on their hegemonic control over military and financial establishments.[3] Gandhi's image as the mass-puller had mesmerized even his harshest critics like E. M. S Namboodiripad, who described him as the most successful leader who could feel the pulse of the people.[4]The techniques of his communications to the masses by adapting a series of symbols already circulated through the traditional value system in the Indian society like *Charka*, *Khadi*, *Ram-Rajya*, *Ahimsa* have been featured in many academic as well as popular investigations to explore the unmatched charisma of Gandhi as the mass leader. In his selections of his idioms Gandhi refuted modern components of civilizations, particularly those relating to modern technology and industrialism, as 'degenerative western' or 'un-Indian' and thus 'anti-people'.[5] Despite his resistance towards these modern technological means, in his campaigns he often used the cutting-edge technologies of the time including railways, microphones and of course, the print media and press to reach out to the masses. His resistance towards using the cinematic medium, the most powerful mass medium of the time, however remained unaltered. In 1937 when the Cinematograph Committee approached him for his opinion about the state of the Indian films along with a questionnaire, Gandhi expressed his disdain about the medium by calling cinema as a 'sinful technology'.[6]In his reply to T. Rangachariar, Chairman of the Cinematograph Committee, Gandhi stated that he was unable to fill up the questionnaire as he had never been to cinema, which he rather avoided as he considered it like 'any other social vices', such as betting or horse-racing.[7]

This article attempts to bring together two diametrically opposite phenomena Gandhism and the cinematic medium through a common thread of the masses. While Gandhi represented one of the most successful mass leaders, his rise coincided with the emergence of one of the largest mass-based entertainment media - the Indian film industry. In the first section the article would pull these two

phenomena together to understand the interlinked nature of an evolving public sphere during the era which is marked in history for mass participation that determined the dominant political culture of the time. In the second section, this engagement looks beyond the life time of Gandhi and would like to explore how the image and ideologies of 'Mahatma' were appropriated and represented in cinematic medium, particularly in India, that remained a democracy though not always following the blue-print of the Gandhian ideals of democratic society.

Gandhian Ideals and Mass Entertainment

Despite the unprecedented success as the mass leader, modern historians are at the opinion that Gandhi should not be seen as the proponent of the mass movements in India. According to these historians, the origin of mass participation in politics that played a significant role could be dated back as early as the pre-colonial times as recorded in the numerous peasant movements during the waning of the Mughal rule.[8] Even the emphasis on morality as the guiding principle of the mass movement could hardly be regarded as the sole contribution of Gandhi as recent historians have put forward many instances of pre-Gandhian popular movements that invoked the ideals or *imaan* or righteousness to build up the resistance.[9]David Hardiman however credited Gandhi for using multi-stranded notion of morality to mobilize divergent groups, which actually paved the way for a larger, all-embracing mass mobilization in a terrain as diverse as of India.[10] To achieve this goal, Gandhi shifted focus from a single symbol or a definitive form of the Truth and invoked a range of symbols and a dialogic nature of truth (always in lower case), which according to him, could appeal to the disparate sections of the society.[11] Mentioning the uniqueness of the Indian nationalism in his *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi categorically denounced the western model of nationalism where the idea of nation thrives around a monolithic imagery of nationhood. He apprehended that following this model of nationalism similar follies of the western society would be repeated in India.To rectify this ingrained problem, he advocated for an

alternative model from which a society could select a series of ideals in accordance with its history and traditions.[12] While discussing Gandhi's usage of the terms such as *Satyagraha*, *Ahimsa*, or *Nishkama Karma*, Bhikhu Parekh argues that these symbolic phrases,

> '.. appealed to both the head and heart, interests and cultural memories, the past and the present and were designed to reach out to the 'whole being' of his countrymen and mobilize their moral energy. In their own way they created a new aesthetics and a kind of public-private world into which the colonial government had no access.'[13]

These terms or phrases were taken either from *Ramcharitmanas* or the *Gita*, which fall into the popular genre of moral literature than that of the canonical texts like *Vedas* and *Puranas*. These texts, particularly *Ramcharitmanas* could be categorized as the text reflecting medieval Bhakti ideas which, being written in Hindi in comprehensible simple language and metaphors, had wider acceptability amongst the masses, than of any Sanskrit canonical texts. The Gandhian emphasis on the tradition of Bhakti was not only restricted to his rhetoric, but also led him to mold his image after the lives of the medieval saints. The title Mahatma, attributed to Gandhi was framed with reference to the saintly images of the medieval *sants* of pre-modern India. The pre-colonial 'medieval' was perhaps the ideal timeframe and locale in Gandhian rhetoric which he often invoked as the 'real India', beyond the scope of the 'evils' of modern civilizations ushered in by the colonial intervention.[14]

While discussing the image of Gandhi, Shahid Amin has pointed out that it was 'not as he really was, but as they (the people) had thought him up' which allowed to myths circulate around him along with the real events.[15] This myth-making around the image of the leader was hardly unique in the medieval tradition of hagiographical literature around the saintly figures, but was also very much a reality of the contemporary period where personality cult of the modern mass leaders such as Hitler and Stalin dominated the political space.[16]

In a political terrain of contested ideals, Gandhi was able to articulate a unique image of self as well as of the people, as Partha Chatterjee has rightly pointed out, by completely inverting the colonial epistemology of knowledge/ power.[17] For example, the colonial depiction of an Orient steeped in religion and superstition was inverted to the statement of spiritual superiority of the Indian civilization, as opposed to the 'technology centric' and therefore 'inhuman' western civilization. Similarly, the problems of casteism which was often frowned upon under the colonial scrutiny, got a new dimension under Gandhi-dominated political culture, where *Sant* tradition was upheld as a plausible remedy or an already existent critique of the problem, coming from within the indigenous society. This emphasis on tradition in the dominant political culture thus touched the multitude of the Indian common people who almost lived at the edges of the modern western living, particularly in the vast rural areas in India. The urban sector, on the other hand, was experiencing the modern, technological advancement more directly, and was thus more in a dilemma about in completely succumbing to the Gandhian ideals of anti-modern, anti-technological solutions. The emerging film industry with its dependence on modern (and imported) technology was structurally opposed to the Gandhian ideal of *Swadeshi* production. Moreover, the market orientation of the production success of the film industry was linked to profit, unmistakably integral to capitalist economy, which was hated from the Gandhian perspective that hailed self-sufficiency as the goal of production.[18] Therefore, the emerging film industry, thriving on the socio-economic and cultural factors, were in the odds with the dominant political culture of the time. But the success of the cinematic medium was dependent on its ability to pull the masses, even if it had to project those ideals that openly despised the basic market orientation of the modern, technology-based mass media like films. In this situation, the cinematic space accommodated Gandhian ideals to reach out to the masses, though the relationship was multilayered if not complex.

Gandhi and Cinema

By the time when film-making started sporadically in the western coast of India, a clamour for a 'national public culture' was already in the scene.[19] It is observed by the film historians that cinema along with its paraphernalia of bio-scope-viewing tent theatres were perhaps one of the earliest instances where the public could gather in one place irrespective of caste and creed divisions, embodying 'the single nation' as opposed to numerous social categories.[20] Keeping an eye on the viewing public, the cinematic medium tried to pull a cohesive cord with the emerging trends of politics in its content too. Following the articulations proposed by Partha Chatterjee, Ashish Rajadhyaksha placed cinema in India in an intermediary domain mediated between the civil society and the state, which in this time was more akin to the commonly referred zone of politics.[21] Partha Chatterjee refers this zone as 'political society' which played a pivotal role in articulating nationalist ethos during the early decades of the twentieth century.[22] In the initial years, this national ethos essentially reflected the Hindu nationalist sentiments where historical figures like Shivaji and his militant resistance to the Mughal state was presented as parable of contemporary nationalist struggle against the colonial rulers.[23] Even after the arrival of Gandhi in nationalist politics, Maharashtra centric filmic enterprise continued to portray militaristic exploits of Shivaji in the name of portraying nationalism on screen. Perhaps Gandhi's aversion to use cinematic space was responsible for limited portrayal of Gandhian ideals on screen despite the huge popularity of Gandhi as the unquestioned leader of Non-Cooperation and Khilafat movements. However, a mythological silent film named *Bhakta Vidur* (1921) produced by Kohinoor Films, generated controversy when it portrayed the protagonist Vidur, an epic character representing *Dharma* from Mahabharata, clad in khadi shirt and Gandhi cap. This portrayal was viewed as a sign of sedition by the censorship board reporting it as 'a thinly veiled resume of political events in India' and the film was banned in Karachi and Madras.[24]It was also reported

that in most of the exhibition theatres, this film was accompanied by a live music score in praise of *Charka*, unmistakably a Gandhian symbol and was therefore banned immediately. The director of the film Kanjibhai Rathod was an ardent follower of Gandhi who also participated in Rowlatt Satyagraha and the owner of Kohinoor Films, Dwarakadas Sampat was also known for his Gandhian sympathies.[25]

Despite this instance, cinematic representation of Gandhian ideal was limited in the silent era. The nationalist leaders were hardly using this medium to transmit nationalist sentiments. As the report of the Indian Cinematograph Enquiry Committee of 1927-1928 reveals cinematic media remained an essentially entertainment media for the uneducated masses, which attracted them by featuring magical treats of camera where ideology played a marginal role.[26]

However, with the introduction of the sound technology, a shift in the composition of the addressed public could be noted as more and more people from the educated background came and join the theatres because the cinematic technology had been able to stretch the limits of the filmic language beyond the established visual signifiers by adapting sound technology. This technology had been able to transform the cinematic narration to a multi-stranded complex narrative infusing words as well as songs that were often picked up from literary texts.[27] Language thus played a pivotal role in the talkies which, on the other hand, generated a new concern for the industry. The language, along with the regional linguistic culture started to segregate the distribution and exhibition channels across India which ended the somewhat single, unified film market that existed during the silent era. Studios exploiting regional linguistic culture like Prabhat Studio and New Theatres scored commercial success in the respective regional markets. To sought similar success in pan-Indian market, however, they were compelled to fall back upon a pan-Indian nationalist culture accommodating regional elements provided by contemporary success of Gandhian political rhetoric overlooking the vital reservations against each other.

Unlike his predecessors like Tilak, Gandhi chose to evoke a set of icons rather than a single image to appeal to the divergent categories

across the pan-Indian space. Gandhi opted for *Khadi* and *Charka* as iconic image of traditionalism, Indianness as well as self-sufficiency. *Ram Rajya* as a utopian notion of good governance invoked along with the medieval *sant*figures like Eknath and Narsigh Bhakt to transgress the perils of caste boundaries. Significantly, his projection of the medieval saint tradition enabled him to accommodate series of regional cultural trends into the nationalist fold. This made the way for regional saintly figures like Tukaram and Chandidas to be interpreted and accommodated within the nationalist pantheon by a process of integration and assimilation. Modern art historians like Geeta Kapur have interpreted *sant* films as a subgenre of historicals with special significance. She categorically contextualizes these films within a specific historical regime dominated by spiritual hegemony of Mahatma Gandhi. Despite Gandhi's reservation towards the cinematic medium, she interprets the timely success of this genre was due to the unique understanding of the ideals of nationalism under Gandhian political culture which led the film makers to produce the theme to capture the wider national market and convince the masses of their contribution towards the making of a 'national popular culture'.[28]

One of the major instances in this direction was seen in New Theatre's *Chandidas* (1932) which infused the issue of caste/ untouchability in the love affairs between the protagonist Chandidas and widow Rami from low-caste background. In the filmic narrative Chandidas, the Brahmin priest, sympathising with the oppressed, rejects institutionalised religion in favour of more democratic, humanitarian Vaishnavite god and leaves the village with his beloved Rami. The director Debaki Bose was involved in Non-Cooperation movement and worked as an editor of the nationalist aligned journal named *Shakti.* In the contemporary review the film was hailed for 'beautifully touching the vital question of today' highlighting 'the arduous work of our great reformer who is still pertinent till the date'.[29] Bombay-based Sagar Movietone's Gujarati film *Narsinh Mehta* (1932) drew more heavily from the Gandhian invocation of the saintly

figure by focussing on his work on Harijan. The director Nanubhai Vakil was an admirer of Gandhi who consciously traced back the origin of Gandhian epithet of 'Harijan' to Narsinh Mehta while referring to the low-caste people in the film. By featuring Narsinh Mehta's *prabhatiya*s or morning hymn like '*Vaishnava Jana To*' in this film which was sung in the morning prayers at Sabarmati Ashram, he attempted to popularise Gandhian invocation of medieval saintly tradition through cinematic medium.[30]Cinematically speaking, Prabhat's *Sant Tukaram* (1936) could be mentioned as the best acclaimed film in this genre. Based on the life of the 17th century Marathi saint Tukaram, the film narrates the humiliations faced by the protagonist for being born in the low-caste in the Brahmin-dominated society. In the filmic narrative the brahmin named Toraman is shown as the villain who clamours for exclusive control over language and religion by making it more incomprehensible to the common people. Tukaram, on the other hand represented as the messiah of the common people whose simplicity in articulation of religion made him the champion of the masses. But despite his growing popularity, his refusal for any worldly power was portrayed in the film in an interesting episode where Tukaram refused to lead the people even on the insistence by the Marathi leader Shivaji. Invoking the figure of Shivaji, the filmic narrative not only situates Tukaram in the 'glorious' period of Maratha history, but also legitimised the role of the Bhakti cult centred around Tukaram in Maratha revivalism, countering the sole militarism as emblematic portrayal of the Maratha past, as propounded since Tilak.[31] Thus the film also pronounced a victory of Gandhian ideology over the Marathi militarism in contemporary political culture where Tukaram rose even above Shivaji with his philosophy of inclusivity. In 1939, at the Indian Motion Picture Congress, K. M. Munshi, the Congress leader and then Home Minister of Bombay provincial government, praised the film for its message that 'allied with national tendencies'.[32]

The unprecedented success of the Sant films with traditional music scores and socio-political messages relevant in the contemporary

society proved to be a huge success. However, the political mascaraed of these Sant films also attracted censorship's attention. A film made by Prabhat celebrating the life of another Marathi saint Eknath kindled controversy when it was advertised being released with the title of '*Mahatma*'. Role of Eknath regarding his attempt to eradicate the issue of untouchability was already in circulation through Gandhian rhetoric when the title Mahatma further identified it with the image of Gandhi. The censor board compelled the studio to change the name, and the film was released with a changed title of *Dharmatma* in 1935.[33]The reflection of Gandhian dominance in growing popularity of this genre was also acknowledged by the contemporary film critics. K. A. Abbas pointed out that this *sant* genre 'could preach equality of mankind in defiance of the mighty orthodoxy, only Gandhi can give message of peace and non-violence to the world torn by war and fratricide.'[34]This comment proves that not only Gandhi's philosophy linked with the legacy of the medieval saints, but his vision of an Indian nation and his public persona were also exploited to establish the required connectivity with the masses steeped in the Gandhian political culture.

Despite the attempt on the part of the emerging film industry to accommodate Gandhian metaphors to reach out to the masses, Gandhi as a person continued to show his disgust and distrust towards the cinematic medium publicly. When Gandhi was approached in 1938 on the occasion of the silver jubilee celebration of the Indian film industry to present a congratulatory message, he not only refused to give any but also repeated his moral stand against the filmic medium which he considered to have dubious morality.[35] Gandhi reiterated his staunch position against cinema in an interview published in *Harijan*, where he commented that if he did support the filmic medium, he apprehended that he would lose his caste as well as *Mahatmaship*.[36]

These strong words against the film industry however was met with a sensitive open letter written by K.A. Abbas that was published in *Filmindia*. In this letter Abbas advocated in favour of the cinematic

medium which he described as a 'wholesome tool of mass communication' that could have both positive and negative effects depending on the people who were using it. Addressing Gandhi as 'My Dear Bapu', he accepted that cinema as the 'new toy' was often used to portray lewd eroticism by unscrupulous persons to amass money, but he proposed that with proper guidance this medium could be used for educative purposes which would benefit the future of the nation. Though this letter went unanswered, it is recorded that within next two years Gandhi not only participated in film screening, but also asked film-makers to make films that could elevate the moral character of the nation.[37]

The film director Vijay Bhatt not only acknowledged Gandhi as his inspiration but also did mention that he made the Gujarati film *Narsi Bhagat* (1940) following the insistence of Mahatma, who said to have advised Bhatt to make a film celebrating the life of the great *sant* poet.[38] A close follower of Gandhi, Vijay Bhatt chose to portray Gandhian ideals in his films such as *Lanka Dahan* (1942), *Bharat Milap* (1942) and *Ram Rajya* (1943) narrating episodes from Ramayana, much quoted in Gandhian rhetoric. At the backdrop of the Quit India movement of 1942, these films had a different appeal of projecting the idealised vision of Ram Rajya as promised through Gandhian rhetoric. Thus it can be said that the song *Aya Ram Rajya* in *Lanka Dahan* that enthralled the masses had a different connotation other than a sheer divine appeal of a mythological storyline.[39] Being close to the Congress party and the national leadership, Bhatt's films were inaugurated and viewed by nationalist leaders including Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, Madan Mohan Malavya, K.M Munshi and B. C Roy.[40] Gandhi was recorded to be present for the screening of *Ram Rajya* in 1943 in a theatre in Juhu. Although his plan was to be there briefly to bless his disciple Bhatt, Gandhi is said to have sat for the whole screening and congratulated the director with a pat at his back as a gesture of appreciation as it was his *moun* day.[41] The film narrated the reign of King Ram after he returned Ayodhya where the focus was on the third and final trial of Sita to prove her chastity

to satisfy the King's subjects. While discussing the idealised reign of King Ram in this film, Freek L. Bakker has emphasised the role of the political cultural context that led to highlight the importance of the subjects in *Ramrajya* in conducting the rule and justice that could bring even Sita under their purview of question. He thus describes the message of this film as 'a clear appeal for democracy, but at the same time it warns against the danger of injustice', which perhaps fits into the ideal notion of pro-people governance prescribed by Gandhi.[42] During the next fortnight after his first experience of watching the film, Gandhi is said to have watched another film named *Mission to Moscow*(1943), on the insistence of the Morarjee family as recorded by Rajmohan Gandhi.[43] This Hollywood film was directed by Michael Curtiz and based on the personal memory of the American ambassador to the Soviet Union Joseph E Davies that portrayed the close ties between United States and Soviet Union during the war years. Though Gandhi never spoke about this film in public, the film was advertised in American media emphatically mentioning this as an 'ideal peace mission', as it had been watched by Mahatma.[44]

Gandhi personally had never been to cinema excepting these two occasions. But during his lifetime, the ideals of Gandhi were tangible in the themes of the films. Not only the Sant films but also some social films adapted Gandhian phrases particularly on social issues to reach out to the masses. Amongst these Bombay Talkies-produced *AcchyutKanya* (1936) and Ranjit Movietone's *Achhut* (1940) were the greatest hits. The word '*acchyut'* or untouchable reminded of the social 'sin' which according to Gandhi, would have to be eradicated to achieve the ideal society. Thus the image, as well as phrases were circulated through the cinematic medium in a way that could be put, to borrow Noel Burch's idiom, in 'reading competence' of the masses.[45]Gandhi, being the leader of the mass movement, not only 'used' the symbols and phrases already circulated in the political and cultural discourses, but also was able to educate the masses to enhance their reading competence by putting series of new meanings to the traditional signifiers such as *charkas*,*khadis*, *sants* and

untouchability. Cinematic media, being rooted to the same popular mass base, exploited these resources to curve out its own 'public'.

Gandhi On Screen

Being revered as the 'father of the Nation' Gandhi's persona especially after 1942, was put up on a pedestal beyond the nitty-gritty of the everyday politics that were shaping the future course of making of the independent nation state/s.[46]Gandhi's role was gradually transforming into an emblematic image which defined the final decades of Congress-led nationalist movement that confronted the colonial rule with a unique anti-colonial form of resistance. The Gandhian ideals of *Ahimsa*, *Satyagraha* clad in *Khadi* and with the tool of *Charka* was becoming a template that was revered and inspired the political discourses of the future generations. David Hardiman thus comments his image of mass-leadership became a 'template' that stimulated struggles against hegemonic powers in many parts of the world.[47]In fact, this transformation of his image can be located even before the independence and his untimely death further helped to transcend his image to a cult of martyrdom. Although a series of initiatives were taken to record the role of Gandhi in the nationalist struggle just after his death that occurred within a year of national independence, the Nehruvian state remained reluctant to make a cinematic documentary celebrating the life of Gandhi.

In this vacuum, the first initiative was taken by Edith Martin of United States who collaborated for researches with American Institute of Asian Studies, San Francisco titled Mahatma Gandhi: 20th Century Prophet in 1953.[48] Through the disclaimer in the beginning the documentary states that the film is made with numerous footages and documents to give an impression of the life of Gandhi, although 'no great portraits or footages can do any justice to this great man'. In the film Gandhi has been described as 'common man' with no property, position or army to his command but the most powerful man who could fight the imperialist regime with the moto of non-violence.

The enigmatic personality of Gandhi and his ultimate death in the hand of a Hindu fanatic was perhaps seen as a catastrophic event that had its world-wide audience for whom a feature film based on Stanley Wolpert's book named *Nine Hours to Rama* was made by Mark Robson in 1963. The film however, turned out to be a sympathetic narrative on Nathuram Godse, who killed Gandhi. Naturally enough, this film created a huge uproar and the government intervened by officially banning the screening of the film in India.[49]However, the film critic like K.A Abbas lamented that Mahatma is getting killed second time through this commercially driven depiction of his assassination, for whose shooting, the government had given permission without verifying the film-script.[50]

This film certainly brought huge embarrassment to the Indian government and was blamed for its callous handling of such a sensitive issue as cinematic representation of Gandhi's assassination. In connection to this representation, new queries were made about the government's lack of initiative in making biopics on Mahatma. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was summoned in the upper house of the parliament for not making any authentic biopic on Gandhi. Responding to this question Nehru opined that idealistically this kind of films should be made by individual Indians rather than the Government. Despite the presence of towering film personalities in the national scene, like Satyajit Ray who already made his documentary on Rabindranath Tagore, Nehru regretted that none of the contemporary film makers were competent enough to carry out the task of making a film celebrating the life of Mahatma.[51]However, on the centenary year of Gandhi in 1969, a documentary on his life and times was made by The Gandhi Memorial Fund and Film Division of the Government of India which was shown in official functions and occasions.

Outside the government domain, Gandhi as a national template had an independent life in popular cinema. The film *Azadi ki Rahpar*(1948) produced by Bharat Kalamandir was advertised as 'the gripping story of nation's fight for freedom' during the Gandhian

Era, which was specifically mentioned as '1921-46' where the thematic guidance was provided by nationalist leaders from Gandhian fold like Pattavi Sitaramaiya. In the film the focus was on the unique ideals of Gandhi as the guiding light who consolidated the mass resistance against the foreign rule to attain the independence. Although not many films were made during the following years celebrating the historical role of Gandhi in the nationalist movement, but his godly image was often celebrated in numerous social films, particularly in the sequence of a school or educational gatherings where ideals of nation-state and the long struggle to achieve independence are generally celebrated by garlanding his images or/ and by singing songs about his saintly roles in political as well as social spheres.

By the time Richard Attenborough made the film *Gandhi* (1982), the historical figure of Gandhi was already overwhelmed by a prophetic image that made him larger than his real self. Anand Patwardhan has pointed out that the huge popularity of this film amongst the western public was perhaps caused as the focus shifted away from its colonial historical context to a spiritual solution to the catastrophic outburst of greed, violence and power that dominated the first half of the twentieth century where Gandhi emerged as the saintly figure who ultimately embraced death to defend his moral position. The biographical narrative thus attained a spiritual dimension that invokes the ultimate martyrdom of Jesus Christ for salvation of the multitude. Patwardhan thus analyses this filmic narrative as theological rather than historical where the tone of the biopic drives away the historical context and makes the ideals preached by him more pertinent to avenge the misery of the everyday life.[52]

During the next twenty years or so, the contemporary politics changed radically that witnessed the collapse of the Soviet model as an alternative to the modern, western capitalism that paved the way for a globalised, unipolar world where indigenous technological alternatives hardly survived in the face of ever-developing technological progress that could even imitate human intelligence.

In India too, modern capitalist aspirations were increasingly accepted as goal for survival leaving Gandhian alternatives as utopian ideology. In this context two films were made where Gandhi as a template rather than a real historical figure is represented to highlight the moral crisis of the changing times. The film *Maine Gandhi ko Nehin Mara* (2005) was directed by Jahnu Barua that narrates a psychological trauma and guilt of an ailing professor who perceives that he had killed Gandhi.The narrative focuses on how the image of Gandhi has been elevated to a position of divinity that generates guilt even in showing slightest disrespect to the image. The targeted criticism on the complex practice of mythification around the image of Gandhi was however not appreciated by Indian audiences and the film flopped in the box office. The other film, *Lage Raho Munnabhai* (2006)however scored a major success in the box office. Made in a form of social comedy this film was made in a context when Gandhi was no more seen as a historical figure but a conscience personified. Gandhi here is a ghostly figure or an alter-ego who brings out the 'positive' 'humane' nature of a small-scale gangster Munnabhai. The phantom image of Gandhi guides him to object the attraction for wealth, lust and power to conduct a moral way of life. In other words, Gandhi's non-violence and other historical methods in the anti-colonial struggle were pulled out of the context and was put in use as a set of idealistic tools to avenge the contemporary form of social bullying or *Dadagiri*. While reviewing the film thus S. Ganesh describes the narrative as a struggle between *Gandhigiri* and *Dadagiri* where Gandhi as an emblematic figure of superior moral values rescues Munnabhai from the ultimate moral degradation.[53]

Conclusion

In conclusion it could be said that Gandhi and Gandhian ideals had a 'larger than reality' presence on screen. Initially the process started when the film makers plunged into the omnipresent collections of the communicative images present in Gandhian rhetoric to reach out to the widest possible masses. With the passage of time,

the image of Gandhi was gradually taken out of the historical context. Even his ideas which were originally articulated through a historical process and thus rooted to certain temporal frames, were also pulled out of their respective contexts erasing the wholistic image of the historical character of Gandhi. This dislocation transforms the original figure as well as idealistic core to numbers of segregated images which separately went well with isolated ideas such as indigenous, simple and non-violent. Discussing the recent appropriation of the Gandhian ideals in post-globalised market William Mazzarella is on the opinion that this particular usage had actually turned the image of Gandhi into 'Brand'. By branding Gandhi as a marketable commodity, all the characteristics of his image along with his ideas have been successfully appropriated in a form of a cult through constant usages by media including films.[54]In the process, not only the historical figure of Gandhi was taken out of context but also his works, life and ideals were all segregated and taken out of their respective contexts. This segregation or dislocation of his image as well as his ideas has actually helped to fashion brand Mahatma by which, to quote Umberto Eco, 'one can remember only parts of it, irrespective of their original relationship with the whole'.[55]

Notes

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[5] E.F. Schumacher and Bill McKibben, *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered*, London: Blond and Briggs, 1973.p.128.

[6] Indian Cinematograph Committee Papers, 1928, vol.IV, p.56.

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[23] Urvi Mukhopadhyay, *The 'Medieval' in Film*, pp. 72-82.

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[25] See the interview with Seth Dwarakadas Sampat, *Screen*, 28 November 1958, pp.14-16.

[26] Oral evidence of the Senior Superintendent of Police Mr. F. W. Toms, Lahore, file no. v/26/970/3, *Indian Cinematograph Committee Evidence*, vol.2, 369.

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In Search of 'Gandhian Economics'

Achin Chakraborty

1. Self-proclaimed ignorance

On economics as a discipline or a body of knowledge, Gandhi repeatedly tells us about his 'ignorance of the matter'. His self-proclaimed ignorance has a touch of veiled sarcasm which is hard to miss, as his 'ignorance' is followed by statements of very fundamental kind questioning the moral premises which the idea of material progress is supposedly based on. One could see such statements as expressions of certain attitude toward the matters economic, backed by a vision, and seeped in ethics and moral principles. In his address titled "Does economic progress clash with real progress?"[1]delivered in 1916 at the Muir Central College Economic Society, Allahabad, Gandhi remarked,

> Frankly and truly, I know very little of economics, as you naturally understand them. Only the other day, sitting at an evening meal, a civilian friend deluged me with a series of questions on my crankisms. As he proceeded in his cross-examination, I being a willing victim, he found no difficulty in discovering my gross ignorance of the matter. I appeared to him to be handling with a cocksureness worthy only of a man who knows not that he knows not. To his horror and even indignation, I suppose, he found that I had not even read books on economics by such well-known authorities as Mill, Marshall, Adam Smith and a host of such other

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> authors. In despair, he ended by advising me to read these works before experimenting in matters economic at the expense of the public. He little knew that I was a sinner past redemption. My experiments continue at the expense of trusting friends. For, there come to us moments in life when about some things we need no proof from without. A little voice within us tells us, 'You are on the right track, move neither to your left nor right, but keep to the straight and narrow way.' With such help we march forward slowly indeed, but surely and steadily. That is my position (CWMG, vol 13, p 310).

The apparently playful tone of the lecture reminds us of the critics with ostensible authority proclaiming ignorance about the subject of her criticism, about which Roland Barthes wrote in his very witty piece 'Blind and Dumb Criticism'. "[O]ne believes oneself to have such sureness of intelligence that acknowledging an inability to understand calls in question the clarity of the author and not that of one's own mind. One mimics silliness in order to make the public protest in one's favour"(Barthes, 1957 [1972], p 34).When it comes to commenting on economic matters, Gandhi frequently uses this rhetorical strategy – by proclaiming his ignorance he seems to question the logical basis of mainstream economic ideas.

When Gandhi's social or political philosophy is discussed, often there is an implicit assumption that his ideas would form a coherent 'system', whatever it means. Naturally, while some commentators do find a systematic and coherent body of ideas, others do not. When his philosophy is claimed to have formed a system, it is usually contrasted with Western philosophies, and in the process, the ideas which are furthest from the Western ones elicit the maximum interest. The most well-known in the Western world among the epithets that are attributed to Gandhi is "Westerncivilisation is a good *idea*", and those who have been critical about the self-righteousness of the Western powers have found solace in this quote. Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* is read as evidence that he completely rejected all aspects of Western

civilisation. There are, however, problems in reading Gandhi in terms of the supposed dichotomy between Western civilization and Gandhi's alternative morality, as Hardiman (2003) rightly points out. On which we come back later.

Curiously, this is not so with his 'economic' ideas. His economic ideas were far less respected than his social philosophy. It seems that further an idea is from the dominant economic paradigm of the time higher is the lack of interest. Gandhi was clearly much farther off the mainstream of economics than other Indian nationalist economists, such as Ranade and Dadabhai Naoroji.There are many statements made by Gandhi which even a sympathetic reader would hesitate to take seriously. For him, "the law of supply and demand is a devilish law", machinery is a "grand yet awful invention", and so on. Added to this is his characteristic style. As Gopal krishna Gandhi writes in his introduction to *The Oxford India Gandhi: Essential Writings* –'An essentiality about Gandhi's narrative style is its leanness'. His written pieces are short but numerous, running into 99 volumes of collected writings! Sadly, he has not left behind any sizeable treatise on his economic ideas for posterity. Most of his writings appeared in daily newspapers or weekly journals, *Young India* (in English), *Navajivan* (in Gujrati), and *Harijan* (in Hindi), and were addressed often to a large audience whose attention hetried to capture by making his points short and sharp. As a journalist he exercised considerable influence, especially during the 1920s and 1930s.

However, the overall lack of interest in Gandhi's economic ideas seems to have changed later, concomitant with the growing popularity of certain critique of the modernist development paradigm. There is now a growing body of literature that focuses on Gandhi's economic ideas. The most comprehensive among them, firmly rooted in the history of economic ideas in the realm of normative economics is *Gandhi's Economic Thought* by Ajit K Dasgupta, published in 1996[2].Since the overall aim of Dasgupta's book is to tease out ideas from Gandhi's writings, as much as one can, and place them vis-à-vis the familiar

territory of concepts and theories of normative economics, Gandhi does not come out as a radical critic of mainstream economic thinking. Rather, for Dasgupta, Gandhi's insistence on assigning central importance to ethics could be seen as the precursor of the later developments in the sub-branch of welfare economics that deals with 'ethics and economics', particularly in the light of the contributions of Amartya Sen. On the other hand, most other interpretations tend to dwell on Gandhi's radical departure from – almost to the point of dismissing – anything mainstream. The centrality of ethics in his idea of progress itself implies a fundamental departure. While moral philosophic notions form an integral part of normative economics, positive economics by and large claims to be 'value free'. Gandhi showed little sympathy for mainstream positive economics, and this position underscores the crucial difference between Gandhi and later-day welfare economists who advocate the need for bringing ethics back in mainstream economics.

Thus, looking for 'economics' in Gandhi's writings – in the conventional sense of the term– is a rather challenging job. There is no way that one can connect his scattered statements in the numerous writings he left behind to the so-called 'basic economic problems' that the students of economics are familiar with. Direct statements of conventional economic kind are few and far between.What we come across instead are of a more fundamental nature – statements that could be used to question the very premises which the 'economic science' of the twentieth century was built on. Surely, he was deeply concerned with and disturbed by what we call today technology-driven development and modernization, or the rise to dominance of the modernist paradigm in development thinking. Therefore, in a narrower sense of providing an alternative *system*, coherent or otherwise, the search for a 'Gandhian economics' is rather futile. However, if we unpack the writings of some of the mavericks among the economists who have worried about the 'violent' implications of the modernist development paradigm that binds almost all varieties of economics, we could find the echo of the concerns and the strong

moral and ethical tilt typically characteristic of Gandhi's writings. If not the mainstream economists, or not even the heterodox economists, Gandhi would continue to provoke the critics of the modernist paradigm in economics.

2. The essential aspects

Two essential aspects of Gandhi's economic ideas could be identified as follows[3]: 1) his overwhelming emphasis on the ethical aspect of economic behaviour, and 2) a critique of modernist development paradigm. In the same lecture we cited above, he says, "[b]ye economic progress, I take it, we mean material advancement without limit and by real progress we mean moral progress, which again is the same thing as progress of the permanent element in us". Even though most critiques of high modernism are usually driven by certain ethical and moral concerns, the ethical concerns per se do not necessarily lead to a critique of modernism as such. The two are independent of each other as neither follows from the other. Elsewhere Gandhi writes,

> True economics never militates against the highest ethical standard just as all true ethics, to be worth its name, must at the same time be also good economics . . . True economics stands for social justice; it promotes the good of all equally, including the weakest and is indispensable for decent life (CWMG, Vol 66).

Today, a good number of economists would agree with what Gandhi says here. Equity and social justice have come to take almost the centre stage in the recent years since the global economic crisis precipitated in 2008. Discussions on economic inequality by scholars, policy makers and others had never attained such visibility as they have in the recent years. "It's a golden age for studying inequality", commented *The Economist* (2016). Publication of a series of important well-researched books by reputed economists in the recent years has triggered further interest in the issue of inequality and its different aspects.

Gandhi articulated a vision of *swaraj* (self-government) which meant not just freedom from colonial rule but the achievement of self-reliance

and self-respect by the mass of people. His economics could be seen as a part of this vision. Interestingly, this is somewhat close to Amartya Sen's articulation of individual freedom as the foundational concept in welfare evaluation, which he calls 'capability' to function, i.e. capability to be or to do what an individual has reason to value. Sen's capability approach is systematically built upon a critique of both utilitarian and Rawlsian theories of justice.

Apart from emphasizing this broad foundational issue of individual freedom and justice, Gandhi occasionally provided specific economic arguments in specific contexts. For example, while defending boycotting of foreign goods – imported mill-weaved cloth in particular – against its critics, he argues why the Indian consumers, especially the poorer among them, would not necessarily be hurt by the boycott. His main argument was that there would not be any shortfall in availability as the campaign for hand-spun yearn (*charkha*) would lead to enough supply of cloth internally. The weakness of his argument is quite apparent. It is now well-known that Rabindranath Tagore was quite critical about Gandhi's forceful advocacy of spinning with *charkha* at home. Gandhi's biographer B. R. Nanda writes, "the spinning wheel gradually became the centre of rural uplift in the Gandhian scheme of Indian economics". On the Tagore-Gandhi debate on charkha, Amartya Sen observes "Tagore was probably right". However, Sen further adds,

> Gandhi's advocacy of the charka was not based only on economics. He wanted everyone to spin for 'thirty minutes every day as a sacrifice', seeing this as a way for people who are better off to identify themselves with the less fortunate (Sen, 2005).

Replying to Tagore's criticism, Gandhi himself wrote: "I must confess that I do not draw a sharp or any distinction between economics and ethics". He continues:

> The economics that disregard moral and sentimental considerations are like wax-works that being life-like still lack the life of the living flesh. At every crucial moment, these new-fangled economic laws

have broken down in practice. And nations or individuals who accept them as guiding maxims must perish.

Thus, his overall vision and a strong ethical tone are his distinctiveness as far as economic ideas are concerned. His prioritization of moral development over economic development may sound utopian, particularly since his focus was on individual's moral transformation as a normative goal. While 'utopian' can refer to something 'impractical' or even 'impossible', Gandhi's economic thought does not seem to be 'utopian' in that sense. Critical geographer David Harvey, arguing for taking back the right to the city by its citizens, writes, "[w]e cannot do without utopian plans and ideals of justice. They are indispensable for motivation and for action. Outrage at injustice and alternative ideas have long animated the quest for social change. We cannot cynically dismiss either. But we can and must contextualize them." (Harvey 2003: 940).

What is the ethical position that he put forward and articulated in regard to progress or human welfare? The basis of his idea of moral progress is clearly individual and the individual is ideally seen as embodiment of ethical life. The idea of human welfare debated and discussed in welfare economics is almost entirely drawn on the debates in moral philosophy. From moral philosophic point of view two distinct positions in this regard are consequentialist and deontological. Consequentialism essentially means human affairs are to be judged or assessed in terms of the consequences of human actions, while a deontological position would judge the states of affairs by the rightness of actions. In other words, for consequentialists the 'Good' is prior to the 'Right' and for deontologists it is just the other way around. Utilitarianism, for example, is a consequentialist philosophy. Gandhi rejected utilitarianism. Does it mean that he was not a consequentialist? It seems that he rejected utilitarianism on some other ground, not because he was in favour of a deontological moral position. That there is more to human welfare than pleasure or happiness or preference-satisfaction is a recurrent theme in Gandhi's economic writings. Even though he frankly admitted that he had not read books

by the well-known authorities, elsewhere he made remarks on Bentham's utilitarianism. Like utilitarians, he accepts the promotion of happiness as the test of social policy. Gandhi refers to utilitarianism as the 'doctrine of the greatest happiness of the greatest number', a phrase first used by Jeremy Bentham.

People in the west generally hold that it is man's duty to promote the happiness-prosperity that is of the greatest number. Happiness is taken to mean material happiness exclusively,that is economic prosperity. If in the pursuit of this happiness, moral laws are violated, it does not matter much. Again, as the object is the happiness of the greatest number, people in the west do not believe it to be wrong if it is secured, at the cost of the minority. The consequences of this attitude are inevidence in all western countries.

On the other hand, moral consequences of actions mattered a great deal for him. He viewed ethical norms as shaping economic behaviour. His pronouncements on the central importance of personal autonomy, human dignity and respect for the individual have a distinctly Kantian flavour (Dasgupta, 1995). For these reasons he is commonly seen as a deontologist. But the differences between the Gandhian and the deontological view on freedom of choice are more basic than their similarities, as we know that the libertarian philosophy is quintessentially deontological in the sense that any action that would curtail individual's freedom of choice would be considered unacceptable no matter what the consequences of that action would be, as advocated by libertarian philosophers like Robert Nozick[4]. Gandhi's position is far from this kind of libertarian position. A libertarian would surely reject the following as outright paternalistic:

> We have got to be ideal villagers, not these villagers with their queer ideas, or absence of ideas, about sanitation and giving no thought to how they eat and what they eat. Let us not, like most of them, cook anyhow, eat anyhow, live anyhow. Let us show them the ideal diet. Let us not go by mere likes and dislikes but get at the root of those likes and dislikes. Don't rest content with simply saying 'The food disagrees with me.'Find out the reasons why it

disagrees…We have to teach them[villagers] how to economise in time, health and money (CWMG, vol 60).

Furthermore, Gandhi did not accept the central tenet of deontological moral theory, which says that certain actions are right in themselves, irrespective of their consequences. Gandhi clearly extolled the virtues of some kinds of action – keeping promises, honouring vows, helping neighbours and friends, doing one's job conscientiously, treating people as equals, fighting for the oppressed and so on. Such actions were considered to be an individual's 'duty'. But it is not clear if he thought that they were right simply by virtue of being the kinds of actions they were.

3. Individual as the basis of judgement and ethical preference

As we have noted earlier, Gandhi's focus was on individual as the basis of ethical judgement. On this his position is no different from the mainstream welfare economics. Considerations relating to individuals' preferences and welfare were in Gandhi's view of crucial importance not only in determining consumers' choices of goods and services but also for making judgements about social and economic institutions and policies. This is more or less in line with standard economics.There is, however, another element in Gandhi's world view where he departs significantly from standard economics. This is his conviction that one's behaviour as an economic agent cannot be isolated from one's behaviour as an autonomous moral agent. Economic analysis that seeks either to promote understanding of behaviour or provide guidance for policy must therefore find a place for ethical considerations. From this point of view the concept of preference that is most relevant for economic analysis is not individual preference as such but rather individual preference modified by reflection, corrected by knowledge and experience and regulated by ethical principles. It is this normative concept of preference, which can be called 'ethical preference' and lies at the heart of the Gandhian approach to economic theory (Dasgupta, 1995).

In a somewhat different vein but displaying an affinity to this line of thinking, Amartya Sen systematically builds up a case for a more inclusive conceptualisation of individual rationality, clearly departing the narrowly conceptualised instrumental rationality that's the key axiom in mainstream economic theories. Sen defines rationality as "the discipline of subjecting one's choice – of actions as well as of objectives, values and priorities – to reasoned scrutiny". The demand for 'reasoned scrutiny' is what links rationality with the concept of freedom, as the latter must depend on reasoned assessment of having different options. This is the core idea that runs through most of the essays in his book *Rationality and Freedom*.The most direct use of rationality, according to Sen, must be normative. In its everyday usage too, rationality has a some what normative connotation: A 'rational' act is commonly judged to be normatively superior to any 'irrational'act. Why does Sen choose to dwell on this common sense? The importance of Sen's very careful attempt to reinstate the normative meaning of rationality might not be apparent to those who have not had them is fortune of growing up in the mainstream economists' club. The club members generally share the conviction that the assumption of an instrumentally rational individual bereft of all the complexity of behavioural traits does the job of prediction well.

The process of formation of ethical preference then turns out to be significant in Gandhi's scheme of things. In 1938 when asked to respond to Pandit Nehru's support for the economics of abundance, Gandhi says:

> […] What is abundance? Not the capacities to destroy the millions of ton of wheat as you do in America? [...] If by abundance you mean having plenty to eat and drink and to clothe himself with, enough to keep his mind trained and educated, I should be satisfied. But I should not like to pack more stuff in my belly than I can ever usefully use. But neither do I want poverty, penury, misery, dirt and dust in India[5].

We find that Gandhi was deeply concerned with the issue of acquisitiveness and over-consumption. But at the same time he was conscious of the fact that he might be challenged on this by pointing out that the vast majority of the Indians had never experienced abundance and therefore growth in material means of livelihood was absolutely necessary for the uplift of the people from penury. He therefore encouraged a way of life that minimized wants instead of maximizing them and urged people to be content with what material possessions they had. Gandhi summarizes the motivation for *aparigraha* thus in "Hind Swaraj": "We notice that the mind is a restless bird; the more it gets the more it wants, and still remains unsatisfied. The more we indulge our passions the more unbridled they become".

In his Muir College speech, Gandhi said explicitly that the price of industrialism in non-economic terms was too high. For him, however, the choice involved was never difficult. He did not regard large scale enterprise as the means to India's economic salvation; when it was needed, he wanted it owned or controlled by the state.

Ahimsa translated as non-violence is usually seen as a unique social philosophy and *Satyagraha* as a political strategy that has the potential to be effective in protesting against an insensitive state power. As a philosophical doctrine it indicates avoidance of violent means. Critics have pointed out the limited effectiveness of Gandhian non-violence. Nelson Mandela, for example, who was otherwise a great admirer of Gandhi, felt that non-violence could not succeed in South Africa against a white regime which was not prepared to accept the morality of the struggle for democratic rights, and which was prepared to use the most violent and murderous means to suppress it. If we move away from the narrow interpretation of non-violence as a technique of civil resistance we can see it as a positive idea that stands for a way of life that emphasizes simple living without doing undue violence to the earth and its creatures. In modern parlance, it probably means living with the least possible damage to the natural resource base and

the environment. The environmental activists around the world have drawn inspiration from this positive interpretation of non-violence.

Thus the centrality of ethics in economic thinking took Gandhi to several major concerns – restriction of wants, self-reliance, economic equality, restriction on machinery, and others. These ideas could be traced back to the writings of two intellectuals who influenced him the most – Tolstoy and John Ruskin. It was the second book of Ruskin's, *Unto This Last* (1860), that had the more profound impact on Gandhi. The following is the account of what he learnt from that book:

> (1) That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all. (2) That a lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's, inasmuch as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work. (3) That a life of labour, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman, is the life worth living. The first of these I knew. The second I had dimly realised. The third had never occurred to me ... I rose with the dawn, ready to reduce these principles into practice ... (CWMG, vol 39).

4. Economics is modernist: An alternative non-modern perspective?

Most economists remain firmly committed to the modernist premises of their enterprise – to the unified rationality of the intentional economic subject or agent, to determinism in causal explanations, to a notion of economic knowledge that treats cognition as a mirror of nature. Unlike in other disciplines, modernism holds a firm grip on economic discourse (Amariglio and Ruccio, 1995). This characterization is not only true of mainstream –neoclassical or Keynesian – economic theories, to different degrees it holds as well for most Marxian approaches, from orthodox and classical versions to the more recent analytical Marxism and others. While there may be some agreement (at least in heterodox circles) that the Enlightenment roots of Economics must be questioned, there is much room for disagreement with regard to the nature of the critique. To explicate, postmodern, postcolonial, feminist, and Marxist perspectives

can all be counted as part of economic heterodoxy today. But traditional Marxist theory is as "modernist" as the neo-classical school, subscribing with the same vigour to Enlightenment values. The question is: Can we find in Gandhi's apparent anti-modernist stance a space which could possibly avoid the violent anti-modernism of the religious fundamentalists on the one hand and the paralyzing moral and epistemic relativism of postmodernism?

Gandhi's constructive programme that follows from his economic ideas incorporated principles such as *swadeshi* (home-based production), in which a village, locality or nation would be as self-reliant as possible, *sarvodaya* (commitment to public welfare) and *aparigraha* (non-possessiveness) which I have discussed earlier. Although such activities go well with a broad concept of 'development' Gandhi carefully avoided this term presumably because of its underlying connotation of convergence towards an ideal model that originated in the West.

Swadeshi recognizes that the value of a good or service is not restricted to its immediate use-value (i.e. its usefulness to the consumer) or the exchange value it commands in the marketplace. Where the production is taking place matters in this view. To a mainstream economist trained in the theories of gains from trade this sounds absurd. Trade is supposed to expand consumption possibilities of people. Various movements in the West ostensibly motivated by the concern for neighbourhood challenge the mainstream view on gains from trade. We hear slogans such as "think globally, act locally" which emerges from the anti-globalization movement and experiments in local economy in various countries of the West. Distancing of the consumer from the producer is also recognized as an important factor to be considered in issues as diverse as fair trade, use of child or sweatshop labour and environmentally sounds practices (Basole, 2005).

Gandhi's critique of progress as implied by modern civilisation was forcefully articulated first in his *Hind Swaraj* in 1909 when the thought leaders were more or less convinced about the immense

possibilities of material progress to transform people's lives. Almost nobody was willing to accept Gandhi's prognosis about modern civilisation including Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Nehru. It is interesting to see a revival of interest among the Indian scholars in *Hind Swaraj* since the 1990s, perhaps as a reaction to the 'failure' or partial success of the modernist development paradigm in the country. There is, however, a possibility of an easy slide toward a traditionalism that would see modernism as destroyer of traditional culture, drawing inspiration from Gandhi. But it would be wrong to see Gandhi as someone championing the need for return to a romanticised past.

Concluding remarks

In this essay, I have not tried to present a 'comprehensive' account of Gandhi's economic ideas. For the sake completeness one must look at his ideas of 'trusteeship', 'bread labour', and so on, which I have not touched upon. Instead, I have focused on two essential aspects of his ideas – one is the centrality of the kind of ethics that he articulated through his writings and how it could be viewed in the light of the later-day developments in normative economics that have explicitly brought in ethics to the centre of welfare economic analysis. The other aspect that I find important to underscore is his fundamental critique of the modernist development paradigm that would later dominate the thinking of the national leaders in the developing world. In a sense Gandhi had anticipated the critique that has surfaced in the past three decades or so as a reaction to the mindless pursuit of growth.

Although Gandhi's economic ideas have never been a part of the official Indian development policy, there are signs that *in the realm of ideas and discourses* they frequently appear and reappear.J.C. Kumarappa, a contemporary and co-worker of Gandhi for many years, gave further shape to some of the ideas that are strewn around in Gandhi's numerous writings. In the growing concern in the West about the excessive reliance on material progress unmindful of the planet's future one can see traces of Gandhi and Kumarappa's

thoughts. Even though Kumarappa is little known and hardly discussed in India his *Economy of Permanence* clearly influenced the much celebrated book *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered* authored by E.F. Schumacher.

With a touch of irony, Amartya Sen writes, he was 'impressed' to find, on arriving at Harvard in the late 1980s, that all books on India in the bookshop of the famous 'Harvard Coop' were kept in the section called 'Religions'. In a somewhat similar manner, there is the commonplace view that the distinctive element in Gandhi's ideas about politics, society and economics all came from a religious worldview and therefore could be ignored as far as the economic questions go.This is no longer true, as it is evident from the growing interest in Gandhi as a critic of 'violent' modernist development paradigm.

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Notes

[1] This is increasingly being cited as a key statement of his economic philosophy. For most recent discussions see Parel (2006) and Weber (2011).

[2] One of the earliest analyses of Gandhi's economic thought is to be found in Rivett (1959). A more recent one is Weber (2011). Interestingly, the three analysts distinctly differ in their emphasis and therefore have been found to be very useful in developing the interpretation presented in the present essay.

[3] Diwan and Gidwani(1985) identified six key concepts in Gandhian economics, viz. *swadeshi*, bread labor, *aparigraha* (non-possession), trusteeship, non-exploitation and equality. These concepts are, in a sense, subsumed under the two broad aspects of Gandhi's ideas that I focus on.

[4] Nozicks' book *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (1974) is to date, the most sophisticated philosophical treatment of libertarian theory and espouses a form of minimal-state libertarianism.

[5] The report of the discussion between Gandhi and Dr John De Boer, compiled by Mahadev Desai was published in *Harijan* (CWMG, Vol 67).

The Challenges of Higher Education in India : The Gandhian Relevance.[1]

Suranjan Das

When I proposed to speak on 'The challenges of higher education in India: The Gandhian Relevance' at the Asiatic Society's Lecture Series on Mahatma Gandhi, many eyebrows were raised: 'Why Gandhi and Higher Education?' I, however, felt that this was the need of the hour. Although we have considerable literature on Gandhian philosophy, on Gandhi's contribution to the freedom movement and his idea of nation-building, and, of course, some excellent biographies on Gandhi (the latest being the outstanding two volume compendium by Ramchandra Guha[1]) none of these devote enough space to Gandhi's thoughts on the future of education in India. But I do feel that Gandhi's ideas on higher education have contemporary relevance, and I propose to highlight these in the context of my experience in university teaching and university administration over the last four decades.

I

We need to acknowledge that compared to other countries which won independence during the period of decolonization, higher education in India has made remarkable progress. Yet, our system faces some systemic challenges – the challenge of the four 'E's' - expansion, excellence, equity and employability.[2] I propose to indicate how Gandhian concepts of education can provide us with ways to meet these challenges.

India has experienced substantial expansion in higher education. While in 1950 there were only 25 universities, today we have about

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800 Universities, more than 39,000 colleges, and more than 11,000 stand-alone institutions with approximately 36 million students and more than 1 million faculty members. This makes India the second largest education system in the world after China. Yet, this tremendous expansion has not been in tune with the rising demands of the society. The Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education in India is still only about 25.8%[3] when the world average is about 35%. A continuous expansion of our higher education is thus imperative[4]. But ensuring that this process of expansion remains in consonance with the twin principles of equity and justice constitutes a major challenge, particularly in view of the widespread inequity in our existing system. The All India Higher Education Survey of 2017-18 shows the Scheduled Caste constituting 14.4%, the Scheduled Tribes 5.2%and Muslims about 5%of national student total enrolment.[5] The female enrolment, despite its rise in absolute figures, remains only 47.6% after 72 years of independence.[6]

Other dichotomies within the structure of the country's higher education have also worked against the principles of equity and access. The fact that while 33% of colleges are located in the southern part of the country, the north-eastern states account for only 3.5% of colleges demonstrates a severe geographical imbalance that plagues our higher education. Again, we have an uneven enrolment across disciplines — ranging at the undergraduate level from 36.4% in arts/humanities/social sciences,17.1% in science, 14.1% in engineering and technology and 14.1% in commerce[7], to 3.87% in medicine, 1.32% in management and only 0.82% in agriculture[8]. This has hampered the sound and equitable development of higher education. Remarkable differences in terms of excellence between universities across the country also stand in the way of equal access to quality education.

Expansion of equity and access in India's higher education has also been inhibited by the absence of adequate infrastructure. For instance, despite a two-fold rise in teaching strength, our student-teacher ratio in universities and colleges in regular mode is 30:1 compared roughly to 9.5:1 in Sweden and 13.6:1 in the United States,

16:8 in China, 17.4 in Canada, 18:1 in the UK, 18:1 in the Russian Federation and 16:3 in Argentina.[9] Significantly, the national allocation for education has come down from 3.69% of GDP in 2017-18 in revised estimates to 3.48 of GDP in 2018-2019 revised estimates, of which barely 1% is reserved for higher education,[10] at a time when Brazil spends 5% of its GDP on education, Russia 4.4%, China 4.3% and South Africa 6.9%.[11] The difference is even more glaring when we take into account the allocation for education in Western Europe, Japan, Australia and the USA. Deplorably, India's public spending per student in higher education is only US$400 when the USA spends $9,629, the UK $8502, Japan $4830, China $2,728, Russia $1,024 and Brazil $3,986. Investment in Research and Development is abysmally low, only 0.85% of GDP when that share for Japan is 3.14%, South Korea 4.29%, China 2.10%, the USA 2.74%, France 2.25%. Israel 4.3%, and Singapore 2.18%.[12]

The other point that needs to be mentioned in connection with equity and access is the implication of the recent significant growth of the private sector in the realm of higher education. The Government of India proposes to increase the GER to about 30% in the coming years as an absolute imperative for the development of a knowledge society in India, requiring an increase of student enrolment from 25.9 million to at least 35.9 million. Since the state alone is unable to push through this expansion drive, the private sector is being increasingly allowed entry in the higher education sector, evident from the fact that the private sector accounts for more than 60% of educational institutions and 59% of total student enrolment. Between 2007and 2012 – for which firm statistics are available — private higher education institutions grew by 11.3% compared to the 7% growth of public institutions. I am certainly not against private-public partnership in higher education. If there can be private-public partnership in health, transport or construction sectors, education perhaps cannot be excluded. But we need to ensure that the entry of private capital does not lead to the commercialization of higher education, which will certainly militate against the principles of equity and access.

Unfortunately, we are being threatened with this outcome.

Sustaining the pursuit of excellence is, as I have mentioned, the third challenge for India's higher education. Despite attaining breakthroughs in teaching-learning processes, none of the Indian universities feature in the first hundred slots in world ranking. It is also pertinent to note that our global share in science research is only roughly 4%, far behind China which contributes more than 10% to the world's research output in science, second only to the USA, which provides above 29% of the scientific research knowledge. The rate of growth in the number of Ph.D. awardees in China is much higher than in India; India's international contribution to patent registration has hardly crossed the 1% mark in world average.

Many recent discourses support the opening of our doors to foreign universities as a way of generating academic excellence in our higher education. India must certainly be a participant in trans-national education, but in a meaningful and creative manner so that she is not made to play a subordinate role in the global knowledge economic order. But whether the establishment of branches of foreign universities, especially those not of the top rank in their own countries, will have the desired and envisaged impact on our education system remains doubtful.

Contradictions in our education system — like the dichotomies between central and state universities and the lack of convergence between central research institutes and universities — are also hampering the overall excellence of our education. In recent years the notion of 'centres of excellence' has made its way into the discourse on Indian higher education. Of course we should have centres of excellence, but unfortunately these centres tend to operate in isolation. Instead, a country like India which is in a period of transition should promote Partnership in Excellence to ensure a multiplier effect of exercises in the quest for excellence.

The other challenge of our higher education is the issue of employability. This matter assumed significance when a Confederation of Indian Industries Report revealed that only 25% of technical

graduates and 10-15% of other graduates were employable, while 62% of candidates need additional training to render them fit for employment. To meet this challenge of employability a greater synergy between academics and industry is being fostered, a more industry-friendly engineering teaching-learning process is being attempted and National Vocational Education within the Skill Development Mission has been developed to provide opportunities of flexibility and mobility between mainstream and vocational education. The desired expectation from such measures are yet to fructify.

II

Interestingly, Gandhian thoughts on education can offer some direction to help address the pressing concerns of our higher education system. Writing in the midst of the nationalist struggle against the British Raj, Gandhi's main concern was to offer a national alternative to the system of education introduced by the British Raj, which, he felt, was converting his countrymen into 'colonial slaves'. Gandhi envisioned an education that would contribute to 'all round development, drawing out the best in child – man, body, mind and spirit'[13]; that would not produce clerks to serve the alien regime, but would generate a spiritual and communal life conducive to the creation of holistic individuals. Moulded by the two basic thrusts of the nationalist struggle – *swaraj* (independence) and *swadeshi* (self-reliance) – some of the tenets of Gandhi's concept of 'basic education' or *naitalim* have considerable relevance for contemporary India. I propose to outline such features of the *naitalim* through his own words.

Gandhi correctly realised that expansion of higher education should not merely mean establishment of new institutions. These were required to be connected to a simultaneous expansion of school education. He thus proposed free and compulsory school education for children between seven and fourteen years, during which period they would be taught the basics of mathematics, science, astronomy, public health, physical education, drawing, music and social sciences (which would include history, geography, economics and civics). Gandhi wanted to relate education to the contemporary environment.

In his speech at a reception in Surat on 3 January 1916 he noted:

> If, therefore, you desire to work for the good of India, give primary education to its three hundred million people, not the kind of education that goes by that name at present but such education as will impart to them the knowledge that is required in these times. Teach them why it is that India is growing more and more abject.[14]

He stressed, too, upon the maintenance of a connection between the mode of teaching and the social environment of the taught, an idea underlined by Rabindranath Tagore himself. To quote Gandhi:

> Not less than eighty-five per cent of India's population are engaged in agriculture. Ten per cent are engaged in various other crafts and a majority of them are weavers. The remaining five per cent belong to the various professions. If these latter really desire to serve the people, they must acquire some knowledge at least about the occupations of the ninety-five per cent of the people. And it should be the duty of the ninety-five per cent to acquire a proper knowledge of their traditional occupations. If this view be correct, our schools must provide for the teaching of these two occupations – agriculture and weaving – to the pupils from childhood onwards. In order to create the right conditions for imparting a good knowledge of agriculture and weaving, all our schools should be located, not in the densely populated parts of towns and cities, but in places where big farms may be developed and where classes may be conducted in open air.[15]

Gandhi stressed physical education for school children. But we learn from Ramchandra Guha about his disapproval for organized and competitive sports. In his words:

> A sound body means one which bends itself to the spirit and is always a ready instrument in its service. Such bodies are not made in my opinion on the football field. They are made in cornfields and farms.[16]

Surely this prescription will not go down well in the present world of IPL when the world of games has become a part of a consumerist and commercial world. It is indeed a matter of deep regret that it took

the independent Indian state 62 long years to enact (in 2007) the Right to Education Act to implement Gandhi's suggestion of free and compulsory school education.

Significantly also, decades after Gandhi stressed the link between school and higher education, current pedagogical discourses in the developed world are envisaging the following structural linkage between school and higher education:

A) Primary schools should concentrate on teaching vernacular, one other language, arithmetic and environment to equip the children with the basic knowledge to live in society;

B) Secondary and higher secondary students are to be imparted a broad understanding about human society through history, geography, social sciences, basic sciences and literature;

C) At the undergraduate level the students need to be exposed to specialized knowledge, especially at the honours level;

D) The post-graduate level should see this specialization gaining a sharper edge;

E) At the doctoral level the student is expected to be concerned with the pursuit of exclusive knowledge.

But for India this intersection between school and higher education is far from a reality, although Gandhi had anticipated the value of this link for a holistic growth of higher education in our country.

Gandhi strongly advocated the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction. Even before his return from South Africa Gandhi wrote in the *Indian Opinion* on 7 December 1912:

> … without a knowledge of one's own mother tongue, it is impossible to be a patriot; one's ideas became warped and hearts estranged from the motherland. The religions and literature of India can never be appreciated from the medium of a foreign language.

Later he lamented in *Young India* on 1 September 1921:

The foreign medium has made our children practically foreigners in their own land.

He regretted:

> We begin there to grow indifferent to our own language. Many of us even develop a feeling of contempt towards the mother tongue. We communicate with one another in English, full of errors in pronunciation and grammar. We have not yet coined in our own languages correct technical terms for various sciences, and we do not fully understand the English terms. By the time we have done our college education, our intelligence loses all vigour and our bodies their strength. And yet the people think, and we too, that we are their ornament, their guardians and the makers of their future…[17]

He was convinced that if education was imparted in a foreign language the children would neither learn to think on their own nor be able to take the knowledge they would gain to the general public. He felt that if taught in their mother tongue they would become creative, develop a pride in national culture and tradition, and be motivated to be guided by basic moral values. He wrote:

> Our language is the reflection of ourselves, and if you tell me that our languages are too poor to express the best thought, then I say that the sooner we are wiped out of existence the better for us.[18]

At the same time Gandhi remained aware of the need for Indians to be exposed to the best developments in foreign languages in literature, science and technology, for which he suggested the adoption of a massive translation project by independent India. On 9 July 1938 he wrote in *Harijan*:

> I want the nation to have the treasures contained in that language, and for that matter the other languages of the world through its own vernaculars. I do not need to learn Bengali in order to know the beauties of Rabindranath's matchless productions. I get them through good translations. Gujarati boys and girls do not need to learn Russian to appreciate Tolstoy's short stories … They learn them through good translations … Why need I learn English to get at the best of what Shakespeare and Milton thought and wrote?

However, Gandhi accepted the relevance of the English language

in the realms of international diplomacy and trade, and in order to understand the attainments of modern science and technology. He thus proposed the imparting of knowledge of English, as a second language at the school level, but held that the 'highest development of the Indian mind must be possible without a knowledge of English.'[19]

Gandhi's ideas, too, have a bearing on our endeavours to bring the expansion of higher education in our country in tune with principles of equity and access. In order to make education accessible to a broader section of the society however, Gandhi was reluctant to rely on institutional measures. On the other hand, he advocated the novel method of mainstreaming vocational education, by which he sought to strike at the roots of the caste-based education system of India, which had traditionally excluded those subordinate social groups associated with essential economic activities like spinning, weaving, leather work, pottery, metal work and book-binding. By thus challenging through vocational education the entrenched 'sociology of education' of our country he also imparted the importance of the dignity of work, and established for the students a connection between thinking capacity and physical training. On 11 July 1929 he wrote in *Young India*:

> … so-called knowledge of the three Rs that is at present given in Government schools is of little use to the boys and girls in after-life. Most of it is forgotten inside of one year, if only for want of use … But if a vocational training in keeping with their surroundings was given to the children, they would not only repay the expenses incurred in the schools but would turn that training to use in after-life … They would learn manners, have object-lessons in practical sanitation and hygiene, all of which they would take to their homes in which they would become silent revolutionists.

Unfortunately, today's discourse on vocational education is hardly ever related to Gandhi's concept of using vocational education for combating the evils of the caste-system.

As we seek to address the third 'e' of the challenge of higher education, the `e' of excellence, Gandhian reflections continue to be relevant. The Mahatma understood that the search for excellence by our educational institutions would not yield fruit unless they emerged as national institutions, capable of inculcating ideas of communal harmony, pluralism, non-violence and anti-casteism. At the same time, Gandhi wanted such institutions to be self-supporting to avoid reliance on the government. But the Gandhian notion of self-reliance does not tally with the present idea of self-financing courses where students are made to pay more than the standard fees. In his view:

> … any institution will be considered self-supporting if the people for whose benefit it is run provide its expenses. For instance, if the money for Indian Christian institutions comes from America, then the Indian Christians will have proved their incapacity. Those institutions must be supported by the local Christians.[20]

Gandhi also wanted the teachers to have complete freedom in the teaching-learning process. Today, when we strive to sustain the academic autonomy of our educational institutions Gandhi's prescription is of great significance. He also reiterated the greater value of the 'living' over the 'printed' word, urging the teachers not to remain dependent on prescribed text-books. He wrote:

> A teacher who teaches from text books does not impart originality to his pupils. He himself becomes a slave of text books and has no opportunity or occasion to be original. It therefore seems that the less text books there are the better it is for the teacher and his pupils.[21]

The current trend to substitute direct teaching with the virtual classroom may draw a lesson from this warning by the Father of the Nation.

Gandhi correctly grasped the necessity for our national educational institutions to replace the western with a nationalist mode of teaching, which he thought was essential to generate a nationalist consciousness against colonialism. Acknowledging the importance of working knowledge of English, Gandhi advocated in favour of developing

Indian perspective in different walks of academic disciplines, namely Language, Economics, History or Arithmetic. According to him, Indianness in thought-process is paramount to encounter the prevailing colonial dominance in the realm of knowledge. It will not be out of place to explore how Gandhi's thinking marked a strong convergence with Kaviguru Rabindranath Tagore's displeasure at the blind imitation of the West when he noted:

> We, in India, must make up our minds that we cannot borrow other people's history, and that if we stifle our own we are committing suicide. When you borrow things that do not belong to your life, they only serve to crush your life.[22]

Gandhi accorded no place to religious education in his *naitalim*. He made a qualitative distinction between religion (dharma) and basic morality, and looked at a fundamental equality of all religions while discussing the question of morality. On 21 February 1947 he wrote to E.W. Aruanayakam:

> I do not believe that the State can concern itself or cope with religious education. I believe that religious education must be the sole concern of religious associations. Do not mix up religion and ethics. I believe that fundamental ethics is common to all religions. Teaching of fundamental ethics is undoubtedly a function by the State. By religion I have not in mind fundamental ethics but what goes by the name of denominationism. We have suffered enough from State-aided religions and State Church. A society or group, which depends partly or wholly on State aid for the existence of religion, does not deserve, or better still, does not have any religion worth the name.[23]

At a time when the secular, democratic and value neutral education system faces constant threats, Gandhi's strong disapproval of religious education provides a ray of hope. That's why he remarked in *Harijan* 1932.

> I hold that a true education of the intellect can only come through a proper exercise and training of the bodily organs, e.g., hands, feet,

eyes, ears, nose, etc…But unless the development of the mind and body goes hand in hand with a corresponding awakening of the soul, the former alone would prove to be a poor lop-sided affair. By spiritual training I mean education of the heart. A proper and all-round development of the mind, therefore, can take place only when it proceeds … with the education of the physical and spiritual facilities of the child.[24]

Gandhi also stressed the need for continuing adult education since he felt that basic education should be for 'everybody at every stage of life.'[25] But for him, adult education was not about imparting skill in the three Rs; rather, it was to 'teach good neighbourliness and cut at the very root of untouchability and communal problem.'[26] For this he wanted reliance less on books and more on oral lessons.[27]

There was also an element of novelty in Gandhi's perception of women's education. Acutely conscious of how 'an immemorial tradition' had unjustly branded the women in Indian society, he bemoaned:

> Man has converted her into a domestic drudge and an instrument of his pleasure, instead of regarding her as his helpmate and better half! The result is a semi-paralysis of our society…We owe it to her and to ourselves to undo the great wrong that we have done to her.[28]

He felt :

> The largest part of our effort in promoting the regeneration of women should be directed towards removing those blemishes which are represented in our shastras as the necessary and ingrained characteristics of women.[29]

At the same time, he reminded the woman that she will not … make her contribution to the world by mimicking or running a race with men. She can run the race, but she will not rise to the great heights she is capable of by mimicking man.[30]

Gandhi's condemnation of discrimination against women in Indian society and his prescription for the 'proper education of women' as an

essential requirement for her uplift is largely in consonance with the current protagonists of gender justice. But he remained unsure of

> … what should be the method of education for them (women), at what point education for a girl should end and for a woman should begin …[31]

This was perhaps because he was affected by the traditional notion that men and women had different functions to perform in society and hence it would probably be worthwhile to 'maintain a difference between the education of the two.'[32] Perhaps this will not be welcomed by the current protagonists of women's education.

As I come towards the end of my submission let me add a quote from Gandhi which I consider relevant for the present time:

> The real difficulty is that people have no idea of what education truly is. We assess the value of education in the same manner as we assess the value of land or of shares in the stock-exchange market. We want to provide only such education as would enable the student to earn more. We hardly give any thought to the improvement of the character of the educated. The girls, we say, do not have to earn; so why should they be educated? As long as such ideas persist there is no hope of our ever knowing the true value of education.[33]
>
> He further noted:
>
> The word 'education' is one everyone's lips these days. The schools – whether Government or private – are packed with students. There is not enough accommodation in colleges…. Despite this infatuation for education, hardly anyone pauses to consider what education really is, whether the education we have so far received has done us any good, or good commensurate with the effort we put in. We think as little about the meaning of education, as about its aims and objects! For most people the main aim seems to be to qualify for some kind of a job….[But education] is not an end in itself but only a means and that alone can be called education which makes us men of character.[34]

In today's India, when the triumph of the market economy and globalization are commodifying our education system, when we are increasingly becoming individualistic and commercialised, when we are rapidly becoming victims of blind competition, these words of Gandhi are extremely appropriate, if we want education to produce humane, creative and what Martha Nausbaum calls,'inclusive citizens', so that our country, and the world, can become a better place to live in.

Gandhi was certainly not opposed to the force of modernity, but he did not believe that tradition had to be completely discarded to embrace modernity. What he aspired for was a balance between the twin forces of tradition and modernity, or what modern philosophers call 'traditional modernity'. He perhaps foresaw the danger of the weakening of the ground on which we stand in the event of the unqualified craze for cultural interface across national boundaries. Gandhi thus wrote on 1 June 1921 in *Young India*:

> I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. I refuse to live in other people's houses as an interloper, a beggar or a slave.

We should certainly not be frogs in the well. Collaborations between Indian and foreign institutions of higher education should develop in a manner which could be mutually beneficial. But there is a danger. In the name of foreign collaboration the gates of our higher education are being opened in a way where foreign institutions are being granted privileges which will impede equal competition between them and their Indian counterparts. This will create conditions of academic colonialism, which Gandhi certainly never desired.

This brings me to the other challenge that the Indian education system faces – the challenge of employability. In this sphere, too, Gandhi's thoughts were novel. He admitted the responsibility of educational institutions to produce students who would be employable or self-employable. Gandhi felt that if we could make our students

self-reliant they would be able to 'find occupations for themselves.'[35] That's why he made it *naitalim's* primary goal to produce self-supporting and self-reliant students. However, he doubted if the goal of higher education should be to merely make the students active participants in a market economy. Rather, it should help them contribute to the development of a civil society that is questioning, constructive and tolerant. Stressing higher education as a 'public good'with a'liberating potential', Gandhi wanted the students to be taught to despise:

> Wealth without work, Pleasure without conscience, Science without humanity, Knowledge without character, Politics without principle, Commerce without morality, Worship without sacrifice.[36]

In the same way Swami Vivekananda asked:

> What is education? Is it book learning? No. Is it diverse knowledge? Not even that. The training by which the current expression of will ..... (is) brought under control and becomes fruitful is called education.[37]

Like Gandhi's stress on education as a 'liberating process', Noam Chomsky sees education as generating the idea that 'you care about somebody else,'[38] and Albert Einstein foresees education as a way of making people 'not to stop questioning'.[39]

By 2025 India will be the country with the largest young population in the world, with an estimated median age of 25 years. This demographic dividend has to be utilized to create, through the inculcation of holistic knowledge, a body of democratic and critical citizens, who are aware of such questions as: (a) whether the growth of Indian science and technology has led to a decline of infant mortality, hunger, malnourishment, and death caused by inadequate health care; (b) whether the fruits of our biotechnological research are benefiting the poor and underprivileged; (c) whether have we been able to strike a balance between technological progress and the preservation of ecological health; (d) ensuring that Information Technology does not create a digital divide in our society and (e) preserving the pluralism in our cultural tradition. And universities

and research institutions in India have a responsibility to create a space for open debates and deliberations, within constitutional limits, on such crucial issues, fulfilling our first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's hopes that our universities and educational institutions would

> … keep their lights burning and must not stray from the right path even when passion convulses the multitude and blinds many amongst those whose duty it is to set an example to others. We are not going to reach our goal through crookedness or flirting with evil in the hope that it may lead to good. The right end can never be fully achieved through wrong means.[40]

Unfortunately, in our enthusiasm at joining the bandwagon of globalization we have forgotten such dreams of Gandhi and other great minds of our country. Like many pioneering thinkers of his age Gandhi had realised that in a pluralist society like India, characterised by the spirit of unity in diversity, the content of education needs to be holistic and not fragmented. In his perception an Indian student's mind required to be shaped by the thoughts of both the East and West. Interestingly, as early as 1917 our noble laureate Rabindranath Tagore had realised:

> We must recognize that it is providential that the West has come to India. And yet some one must show the East to the West, and convince the West that the East has her contribution to make to the history of civilization. India is no beggar of the West.[41]

I would like to end my submission with Gandhi's thoughts on student politics in campuses, currently a contentious issue indeed. Gandhi certainly wanted the students to have an interest in politics. After all, it was under his leadership that the student community joined the mainstream nationalist politics in significant numbers. But he was not supportive of students pursuing politics in campuses along distinct political lines – the Congress, Socialist or Communist – and preferred the students to organize themselves inside institutions around student issues, rising above party politics. He believed that so long as one remains a student, he or she should be primarily occupied with the pursuit of knowledge which he or she could

subsequently utilise for the benefit of the society and the nation. On 18 January 1948 he wrote in *Harijan*:

> They should be students first and last, determined to gather as much knowledge as possible and that for the sake of the people.

He advised that if students wished to participate in party-politics they should disassociate themselves from educational institutions, as was the case during the Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience Movements. This prescription of Gandhi's will definitely not be acceptable to today's student activists. It needs, however, to be stressed that Gandhi was writing about student politics in the context of the nationalist movement, and perhaps he would have changed his stance if he had lived longer in post-independent India. Yet, I do feel that as our campuses get rattled by student unrest, when, in the name of upholding democratic rights, the same rights of others are trampled upon, Gandhi's views on student politics merit careful consideration. Especially when self-centeredness is mounting among students and the incidents of sexual assault are reported frequently in the campus, we may recall a quote from Gandhiji, as he wrote for the students:

> They will not hide anything, all of their behaviour will be transparent. They will lead a self-restrained, holy life, will abandon all the fear and will be always ready to save their weak classmates and they, even risking their lives, will come out of their institutions to subdue riot in non-violent way and will devote themselves for the independence of the nation …They will behave quite morally and courteously with their fellow female-classmates.[42]

Gandhi sincerely hoped for a national education which would instil among the students a capacity for independent thinking, in the same way that Gurudev Tagore thought of true education:

> The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence.[43]

Neither Gandhi nor Tagore felt that independence of thought would be antithetical to discipline. On 3 June 1926 Gandhi wrote in *Young India*:

> The highest form of freedom carries with it the greatest measure of discipline and humility. Freedom that comes from discipline and humility cannot be denied, unbridled license is a sign of vulgarity injurious alike to self and one's neighbours.

The essence of Indian culture and tradition has been tolerance and what the noble laurate Amartya Sen calls the 'Argumentative Tradition'. Today, when campus politics violates these basic norms of our Indian cultural tradition, Gandhi's thoughts are certainly relevant. One is also reminded of what Rabindranath reminded his audience of while delivering the Convocation Address at Calcutta University in 1937:

> We can only rouse the best in others by means of the best in ourselves, and in this best will be the welfare of both.

Even after being in academic administration for about 17 long years I still remain an optimist, drawing upon Tagore's advice not to lose faith in man. Certainly, I often feel disappointed by the pace and nature of politics and happenings on the campus, and seriously wish to be relieved of my administrative responsibilities. But then I think that even within the constraints of the circumstances,if I can contribute to the fostering of a democratic, nationalist, secularist and tolerant culture within the campus I may be furthering the cause of an effective nation-building process. In this I do draw solace by falling back on Mahatma Gandhi's vision of education 'which will enable everyone to express his thoughts with the utmost freedom.'[44]

Let me conclude by admitting that the general reaction to my submission that education should be viewed as a unifying project would be to consider it as an ideal doomed to remain an illusion in this globalised, consumerist and individualistic world. But, as Bertrand Russell succinctly reminds us:

> The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, but wiser people so full of doubts.[45]

While raising some doubts about received wisdom or what is conceived as self-evident truth, let me draw strength from this quote by Bertrand Russell.

Notes

[1] Ramachandra Guha, *Gandhi Before India* (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2014) and *Gandhi: the years that changed the world 1914-1948* (Penguin, Delhi, 2018)

[2] The figures cited have been collated from various Government Reports and the All India Higher Education Survey 2018. For lack of space specific references have been avoided.

[3] *All India Survey On Higher Education 2017-18* (Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Higher Education, New Delhi, 2018), p.ii.

[4] The ill-fated National Knowledge Commission had proposed the establishment of 1,500 new universities and 50 new national universities.

[5] *All India Survey On Higher Education 2017-18*, p.ii. In terms of urban-rural ratio among the enrolled students in higher education the balance is decisively in favour of the former. The ratio of students coming from Below Poverty Line is also abnormally low.

[6] Ibid. According to one estimate only about 10% of the research scientists in national laboratories are females.

[7] Ibid., p.ii.

[8] Ibid., Figure-7, p.12.

[9] Compiled from World Bank data, htpps://data.worldbank.org, accessed 18/09/19.

[10] *First Post*, Chennai, 25 August 2018

[11] Compiled from World Bank data, http://data.worldbank.org, accessed 18/09/19.

[12] *WIKIPEDIA*, List of countries by research and development spending, accessed 25/8/18.

[13] https://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/education_peace.htm accessed on 18/09/19; cited in also shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/73013/4/chapter%201.pdf, accessed on 18/09/19.

[14] *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Publications Division, Delhi, 1958-1994) /Hereafter CWMG/ Vol.13, p.297.

[15] *CWMG*, Vol.13, p.300.

[16] Cited in Ramachandra Guha, 'Naming the great game', *The Telegraph* (Kolkata), 31 October 2015.

[17] *CWMG*, Vol.13,, p.299.

[18] Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi, pp.318-320; 4/2/1916.

[19] *Young India*, 2 February 1921.

[20] *CWMG*, Vol.82, pp.329-330.

[21] Cited in Anil Sethi and Shalini Sikka eds. *School, Society, Nation: Popular Essays in Education* (Delhi: 2005) p.44.

[22] Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (Macmillan, London, 1917) p.107.

[23] *CWMG*, Vol.94, p.19.

[24] Cited in Mohit Chakrabarti, *Gandhian Dimensions of Education* (Daya Publishing House, Delhi, 1990), pp.68-69, http://books.goggle.co.in>books, accessed on 16/09/19.

[25] *CWMG*, Vol.78, p.237.
[26] *CWMG*, Vol. 78, p.238.
[27] Ibid.
[28] *CWMG*, Vol.68, p.341.
[29] CWMG, Vol.14, p.205.
[30] *CWMG*, Vol.64, p.119.
[31] Ibid., Vol.24, p.498.
[32] *CWMG*, Volume 14, p.31.
[33] M.K. Gandhi, *True Education*, cited in National Council of Teachers' Education Website; https//www.foradian.com/10-most-inspiring-views-of-gandhi-on-education/, accessed on 16/9/19.
[34] *CWMG*, Vol.13, p.297-98.
[35] Mahatma Gandhi's speech on NayeeTalim, November 1945, *CWMG*, 82, p.143.
[36] https://www.due.com/blog/gandhis-seven-deadly-sins accessed 16/09/19.
[37] *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol.4
[38] Noam Chomsky, 'Assaulting Solidarity –Privatising Education', *Magazine of Science and Special Criticism*, 12 May 2000.
[39] https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/albert_einstein_145949 , accessed on 18/09/19.
[40] Cited in Mushirul Hasan ed. *Nehru's India: Select Speeches*, Oxford University Press, Delhi) p.132.
[41] Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism*, p.109.
[42] This is a rough English translation of a Bengali version available in Sailesh kumarBandopadhyay tr. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Amar Dhyaner Bharat* (Bangiya Sarvodaya Sahitya O Samaj Kalyan Samiti, Kolkata, 2014) p.80.
[43] Rabindranath Tagore, "My School" (*Personality*) in Sisir Kumar Das (ed.) *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Vol II (Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1996) p 390.
[44] Gandhi's speech at Ahmedabad Function, 28 November 1915, *CWMG*, p.145.
[45] https://www.brainyquote.com>quotes>bertrand_russell_121392 , accessed on 17/09/19.

Rolland and Gandhi : A Quest for Light in Troubled Times

Chinmoy Guha

It is the Cause he represents, whose outcome, victorious or disastrous, may shape the destiny of Europe for a century or more:— Non-violence. – Romain Rolland to Albert Schweitzer (23 September 1932)[1]

The 'little man, bespectacled and toothless, wrapped in his white burnous, his legs, thin as a heron's stilts, head bare and tonsured with rough stubble'[2] answered questions which had great immediacy and showed the way towards a new humanity. Gandhi and his *Satyagraha*, he was convinced, had not only divinized history, but had also *humanized* it.

In 'a crumbling, old world'[3], where there was 'no refuge, no hope, no great light', Romain Rolland described Mahatma Gandhi as 'le dernier défenseur de l'humain' ('the last defender of the humane')[4] and 'le Christ des Indes' (the 'Christ of India')[5]. As the world is threatened by axenophobic nationalism, this article will try to take a fresh look at history to re-assess Gandhi in the light of the views of his first and best-known western biographer, the Nobel laureate French novelist, playwright, biographer, musicologist and thinker Romain Rolland (1866-1944).

Isaiah Berlin[6] called the twentieth century'the most terrible century in Western history'[7]. Disappointed by the 'monstrous abuse'[8]that Europe made of its power, and the shocking discovery of Nationalism in many of his compatriots in France, Rolland looked towards the East for nourishment and light. The East, especially India, which produced 'Gita— a volcano'.[9] Two giants called Rabindranath Tagore

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and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi seemed to be able to respond to his quest for an alternative discourse at that critical moment of history.

It is important to remember that Tagore, Rolland and Gandhi were all born in the 1860s. Tagore in Kolkata in 1861, Romain Rolland five years later in 1866 in Clamecy in Niévre, Burgandy in the central province of France, three years before the birth of Gandhi in Porbandor, Gujarat, four years before the Franco-Prussian War and five years before the Paris Commune. Rolland, the 1915 Nobel laureate and winner of the Grand Prix de littérature francaise, author of 5 novels—including the widely read *Jean-Christophe*— 17 plays, 10 biographies, 7 memoirs, 60 volumes of letters, had all of a sudden lost the faith of the French intelligentsia when he tore apart war-mongering Nationalism and xenophobia in a book called *Au-dessus de la Mélée* in 1915, much like Tagore's Nationalism lectures in 1916. Castigated in France as a traitor who refused to see the Nationalist interest[10], Rolland gradually earned the respect of friends like Tagore, Maxim Gorky, Hermann Hesse, Stefan Zweig, Freud, Schweitzer, and Einstein.

As 'Europe was falling like a stone'[11], he stretched out his hand towards India. His diary on India began with a call for a universal *Kulturkamph,* 'une guerre mondiale des coeurs et des esprits'[12] (a world war of hearts and minds) that can give birth to a new discourse of regeneration, without the mask of falsehood. This reminds us of the captivating last lines of *The New day*, in the last volume of *Jean-Christophe*:As St Christopher crossed the river, he asked the child he carried on his shoulders:

> 'We have arrived! Child, how heavy you were! Who are you?'
> The child replied:*'I am the day which is going to be born.'*[13]

Rolland's quest for this new dawn in the Indian space was triggered off by the *Declaration of the Independence of the Mind* (1919), drafted by the former and signed among others by Tagore. Despite their differences, like Rolland's displeasure about the latter's appreciation of Mussolini, the Rolland-Tagore friendship would continue till the latter's death in 1941.

Rolland was surprised by the closeness of Indian thought with the best minds of Greece or of eternal Europe which had nourished him.'Depth, magnitude and splendour are distinctive of the Indian genius. But we seem to have thought the same things; it was *our* thought.'[14] This was a major part of Rolland's project of a quest for a new human race. This new project superseded his earlier biographies of Tolstoy, Michelangelo,Beethoven, Handel, and the French impressionist painter Millet.

Rolland had first heard of Gandhi and his passive resistance, 'his extraordinary influence over the Indians', and 'magnetic effect'[15] from Dilip Kumar Roy, Bengali musician and Tripod scholar from Cambridge, who came to visit him in Paris on 23 August 1920. He noted down in his newly opened diary on India, 'He preaches passive resistance to them and turns them away from violence…He seems to have been influenced by Tolstoy's ideas.'[16]

In 1922, during Rolland's well-known debate on means and ends of activism with Henri Barbusse in *Clarté* and *L'Art libre*, he stressed pluralism and libertarian values, and voiced his support for non-violence as opposed to Bolshevic centralization and divisiveness. No wonder that he was drawn towards Gandhi's indigenous alternative model at a moment of crisis. However, when asked to write a preface to the French edition of Gandhi's *Young India*, he hesitated ('I profoundly admire Mahatma Gandhi, but I do not believe I can write the introduction which you ask of me. Truth to tell, with all due respect to the great man, my ideas differ somewhat from his on certain points…(H)e is less an internationalist [as I am] than an idealistic nationalist.'[17]), sought the advice of the young historian Kalidas Nag[18]and postponed it in order to delve deep into his philosophy and action. Rolland explored Gandhi's writings with the help of his English-knowing sister Madeleine and Nag, and this is what he wrote to his publisher Ganesan in 1922, 'Je vois en lui le type le plus haut, le plus pur du nationalisme spiritualisī…I see in Gandhi the highest and purest type of spiritual nationalism, a type which is unique today

and which could well be offered as a model to the egoistic and materialized nationalisms of present-day Europe.'[19]And he jotted down in his diary,'He is a nationalist, but of the greatest and loftiest kind, a kind which should be a model for all the petty, base, or even criminal nationalisms of Europe.' (17-20 August 1922)[20] He added on 21 December 1922:

> My sister and I are reading—or rather have just finished—the 700 or 800 pages Gandhi has published. Some of the things he says are immortal, others are highly perishable…[21]

He researched for six to eight months and composed the text in three weeks.

What Rolland attempts here, like in all his biographies, is a combination of identification with the subject of the biography, objective analysis and personal imagination.[22]When the book *Mahatma Gandhi* was finally published (Rolland called it a 'long essay'), it was dedicated 'To the land of glory and servitude./ Of one-day Empires and eternal thoughts./ To the people who defy Time./To India resurrected. /For the anniversary of the imprisonment of its Messiah.' The first section of this biography ended with the following lines:

> This is the man who has stirred three hundred million people to revolt, who has shaken the foundations of the British Empire, and who has introduced into human politics the strongest religious impetus of the last two thousand years.[23]

Rolland's book was widely circulated in Europe.[24] All the royalties for the Indian editions went in Rolland's name to Sabarmati Ashram.

There were striking similarities between the two. As already mentioned, both were born in the 1860s, both had interacted with Tolstoy, both emerged from the First World War with a similar disgust for blood and violence. If Gandhi returned to India in 1915, it was also the year of publication of Rolland's tour de force *Au-dessus de la mêlée* (Above the Melee). In a moment of unprecedented crisis in civilization, Rolland would gradually be drawn towards Gandhi's blend of

'individualism, activism and morality'[25] and 'his staunch opposition to oppression, and the way he pitted the spiritual East against the acquisitive West.'[26] He liked his humility and stubbornness. 'India had lost the faculty to say No', Rolland observed, 'Gandhi returned it to her.'

Referring to Tagore and Gandhi, Rolland wrote what very few acknowledged in the West:

> On ne sait qu'admirer le plus du saint et du sage genie. Bonheur unique pour l'Inde d'avoir possédé en meme temps ces deux grands hommes, qui sont, chacun, l'expression d'une des faces de la plus hautevérité!

(One cannot help admiring more and more the saint and the sage.Unique happiness for India for having possessed at the same time two great men, each expressing a facet of the highest Truth.)

> …Deux grands esprits qui ont l'un pour l'autre estime et admiration,mais qui sont aussi fatalement sīparīs que peut l'être un sage d'un apôtre, d'un saint Paul un Platon. D'un coté, le genie de la foi et de la charité, qui veut être le levain d'unenouvelle humanité. De l'autre, ceui de l'intelligence, libre, vaste, sereine, qui embrasse l'ensemble de toutes les existences.[27]

(…Two great minds, both moved by mutual admiration and esteem, but as fatally separated in their feeling as a philosopher can be from an apostle, a Saint Paul from a Plato. For on the one side we have the spirit of religious faith and charity seeking to found a new humanity. On the other, we have intelligence, free-born, vast, serene, which embraces the whole existence.)[28]

Then he focused on Gandhi more emphatically:

> Nulle ne mérite advantage une place dans cette galerie des hīros. Je n'en connais pas de plus pur, de plus simple et de plus vīridique. Vous pouvez être fier de possīder cette "grande ame". L'Europe n'en a aucune qui l'approche, —de bien loin! En dīpit des reserves qu'on peut faire sur certaines conceptions et sur leurs dangeureuses dīformations dans l'esprit des disciples, j'admire et je vénére Gandhi.

(There is hardly anyone who is worthier than Gandhi in this gallery of heroes. There is certainly no one in Europe— far from it! Despite the reservations one may have about certain ideas of Gandhi and their dangerous misinterpretations by their disciples, I admire and respect him.)[29]

He wondered why 'Gandhi's action of twenty years in South Africa has not had more reverberation in Europe' which is a proof of 'the incredible narrowness of view of our political men, historians and men of faith'; for his efforts 'constitute a soul's epic unequalled in our times, not only by the power and constancy of sacrifice, but by the final victory.'[30] It is evident that far from merely idealizing Gandhi, he was trying to assess him in the international context, despite his 'reservations' about some of his ideas, especially his medieval mistrust of modern science[31].

When Gandhi was released from prison in February 1924, Rolland and his sister Madeleine were overjoyed: 'We join together', he wrote to him in Sabarmati, 'to send you our message of love and admiration. There you are free again, after the glorious gloom of the prison, in the sunlight of the battlefield. May India be ready for you this time. May Europe hear your voice in the wilderness.'[32]

It is through Rolland that Madeleine Slade, daughter of a British admiral, and an ardent admirer of his *Beethoven*, landed in India in 1925 and became a close associate of the Mahatma, who renamed her Mira Behn. It must be noted that she remained a key part of the relationship, as much as C F Andrews.[33] Rolland would affectionately write to her as late as in the mid-30s:'I envy your return to India and Bapu.'[34]

As the years of economic depression wobbled by, Rolland discovered Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and completed their biographies (1929 and 1930). Although Tagore (who had earlier deplored his helpless inability to join hands with the Mahatma[35]) did not mention Gandhi even once during their meeting in Geneva in August 1930[36], Rolland sent a glowing text to Reginald Reynolds on Gandhi's birthday in the same year:

> 'Amidst the tempests in which the sinking ship of our civilization risks vanishing with all its cargo, he is the star that shows us the way—the only way still opens that leads to salvation.
>
> …This revolution does not breed opposition between races, classes, nations and religions; it brings them together. It awakens in every man the deep fire of the One Soul…It reminds the Christians of how to be Christians (which they no longer are except in form); it reminds the 'free spirits' how to be free (which they no longer are except in empty speeches which mask their servility); it reminds all men how to respect in each other equal sons of the same Father—the same *Dei Optimi Maximi*—the spirit of light and love, who, as on the first days, '*when darkness was upon the face of the deep*', (as it still is today) '*moved on the face of waters.*'[37]

And finally Gandhi came to visit Rolland with his entourage for five days from 6 (evening) to 11 December (afternoon) 1931 in Villeneuve, Switzerland during his trip to the Round Table Conference in London. Rolland's friend Edmond Privat, who received Gandhi at Marseilles, told him: 'I was expecting to meet an'homme de Dieu' (a God-man), an illuminated preacher, but ended up meeting a Socrates.' (*Inde*, September 1931)When he finally arrived in his village, there is a touching description in his diary: 'Waiting on the threshold of Villa Lionnette, in the dark, the rain and the poor light of our electric lamps, I finally see the little man arriving in his white burnous…'[38]

Only a few months earlier in May, Rolland had lamented to Edmond Privat about Gandhi's indifference to the Soviet experiment ('He knows nothing of the new phase'[39]), which was gradually becoming a principal model for him. However, it is important to note that Mira had informed Rolland immediately after Gandhi's historic visit: 'I wish we could have gone to Russia. Since a long while Bapu has been anxious to go there.'[40]

During their encounter in December 1931 Rolland was deeply impressed by Gandhi's great leadership qualities, self-control, impish insight and humour. On his arrival, 'he rested his cheek on my

shoulder, putting his right arm round me, and I felt his grey head against my cheek; the kiss of St. Dominic and St Francis!'[41]He would soon write to a friend, 'He's an unbreakable little man, though he looks frail; tiredness is a word he doesn't know.'[42] Gandhi's new maxim 'Truth is God' seemed exactly what Rolland was waiting for. Like Tagore's controversial visit to Mussolini's Italy in 1926, Gandhi's plan to travel to Rome rattled Rolland. He tried his best to dissuade him, ('I spent a long time putting him on his guard'[43]) but Gandhi appeared far too shrewd and pragmatic to be hoodwinked by the fascist ruler ('There is no political trick which can catch him out'[44]).Rolland highlighted the moral and social state of Europe, and especially of France. They inevitably discussed 'l'oktopus á l'Argent anonyme' ('the faceless octopus of Money'), Swami Vivekananda (whom he wanted to meet when he first returned from South Africa, but unfortunately he was not in his Ashram), Tolstoy, and the crying need of the hour to speak the unpleasant truth. On the last evening, Gandhi surprisingly asked Rolland to play Beethoven, whose biography by Rolland had once attracted Mira.Rolland played Beethoven's *Andante* from the Fifth Symphony and *Elysean Fields* from Gluck's *Orpheus*.[45] Gandhi was for him the *Rattenfānger* (the Pied Piper) in the legend.[46]

As for politics, Rolland would write to Stefan Zweiga few days later, 'He sided absolutely with labour, and he clearly declared that he drew no distinction in India between foreign and native capitalism; when the time comes he will march alongside Indian labour against Indian capitalism exploiting it. But very naturally he says he "doesn't want at the present moment to complicate the national struggle by bringing in these bones of contention straight away".'[47]

'It is not the man Gandhi that is at stake or even India,' Rolland would write to Albert Schweitzer on 23September 1932, during Gandhi's 21 day fast for the untouchables.'It is the Cause he represents, whose outcome, victorious or disastrous, may shape the destiny of Europe for a century or more:—Non-violence.'[48]

He wrote to Gandhi on 2 May 1933:

> At this tragic moment of history, when the whole world is exposed to the most atrocious violence, on the eve of the World War, surpassing in cruelty and extent all that have gone before,—a moment when the whole of humanity is divided between oppressors and oppressed, and when the latter, maddened by their sufferings and by injustice, as if drunk by the violence which rends them, see no other recourse in that very violence,—your self-immolation to that sacred Justice which is all love and no violence takes on a universal and holy value—like the Cross. Though alas! The Cross has not saved the world, it has shown the world the way to save itself, and its rays have cast light on the night of millions of unfortunate people.[49]
>
> And earlier on 22 October 1932:
>
> The whole of humanity has an interest in the results of the great experiment which you are directing, and no one, not even you, can know the results in advance. We can but wait for them and believe, as the 'great experiment" unfolds itself according to the strict laws of Truth—like science.[50]

'As far as I am concerned,' Rolland told Tagore's nephew Saumyendranath Tagore[51] in 1933, 'I do not like the word "non-violence". One should rather say "non-acceptation". The so-called "non-violence" of Gandhi is a paroxysm of tense energy, a heroism of non-acceptation, —the grandeur and necessity which is so important at this hour, because of the brutality which has been unleashed…'[52]

The vital question is: did he revise his opinion about Gandhi in the 30s, as several Western scholars (like Bernard Duchatelet, R. A.Francis, and David James Fisher) seem to believe? As fascism showed its fangs, Rolland gradually moved into the Soviet space for a solution to the world crisis. He wanted to unite Lenin and Gandhi, an experiment that no one else had dared to think of.[53] If Gandhi's inflexible scepticism and distrust of communism and the Soviet Union, and indifference to the world at large did not help Rolland's Cause, and if Gandhi ultimately 'failed' as a hero in the latter's eyes, he still remained steadfast in his faith in the Christ of India.

When Saumyendranath Tagore, the leftist rebel in the Tagore family, and a hostile critic of Gandhi, tried to convince him that the latter was 'not a mystic, he is simply primitive'[54] (16 November 1933), that he resembled Hitler[55], Rolland retorted with characteristic firmness:

> My judgement on Gandhi has not changed at all. Your sources of information know little about him. I have a profound esteem for Gandhi, to which, since my first book on him, personal affection has been added… The role I have assumed in today's battles, which you in your youthful intransigence will no doubt find hard to understand, is to try to be a link between the two revolutions, Gandhi's, and Lenin's, so that the two may come together at this hour to overthrow the old world and found a new order…
>
> *What nonsense ever to have confused this paroxysm of action with the sheep-like race of passive pacifists…Gandhi extends human energy to the utmost limits…*[56]
>
> I am always ready to join you in your struggles against Fascism and Imperialism. But I must remind you that you are not to use my name, or allow it to be used in any way against Gandhi. I remain firmly attached to his friendship, and co7vinced of the grandeur of his mission for India and the world.[58]

He turned down Subhas Chandra Bose's appeal to distance himself from Gandhi[58]. It is important to note that Rolland's reverence for Gandhi was gradually blended with a growing personal dilemma in the more polarized world of mid-1930s, privately whispered to Edmond Privat, and published in *Par la Rīvolution, la Paix* (1935). Were Gandhi's 'pure and lofty ideas'—which were 'appropriate in the Indian context'ineffective for the larger humanity 'moving towards new horizons?'[59]

He still worried about Gandhi's illness (December 1937). As the second World War lashed on Europe, he would re-evaluate Gandhi in the final phase of his long struggle against injustice and pain[60]:

> I thought I had found the answer in the revelation brought to me in 1922 by Gandhi, the little Indian St Francis. Did he bear, in the folds of his homespun robe, in his Ahimsa, the heroic Non-violence

which resists and does not flee, the key to our liberation from future massacres? I so needed to believe it that for several years I believed it passionately, and I generously worked to spread this faith. I was certain—and I retract nothing—that in this alone could be found the salvation of our world laden with crimes, past, present and future.

But to make this possible the world had to will it, and first of all it had to find the strength for it; for such a faith demanded the consenting self-sacrifice of a people of heroes, and the post-war climate was not of a kind to encourage such a breed in the West…With what anxiety did I follow the bold and patient Indian experiment!

I must admit, alas, that although my admiration, my respect and my love for Gandhi never ceased to grow, I soon formed all sorts of reservations about the effectiveness of his tactics, particularly in the West.

Was non-acceptance then only to be followed by the apostles? He summed it up to a friend: 'Yes, there is Gandhi's great 'experiment' in India. You know how passionately I have been following it; I was the first to make it known in Europe. But this 'experiment', still in progress, has been overtaken by the furious course of events. What is certain is that outside India, the world has done nothing to help it succeed—or worse still, even to allow it to be tried!'[61]

Wavering between two extreme poles, Rolland still adored Gandhi and 'his spirit which was in constant evolution'[62]in the dark days of the German Occupation in France. But he did admit in 1939 on the eve of the disaster of the Second World War:

Politics is a terrible business, with very little connecting it with ethics. Gandhi's efforts have been directed precisely at marrying the two. I fear that at the present moment this may prove a superhuman task…[63]

Rolland's last words were probably said as early as in 1926 in a letter to Madeleine Slade. He was neither a Christian nor a Gandhist, but a 'man of the West who, in all love and in all sincerity, searches for the truth.'[64]

II

It would be interesting to know Gandhi's views on Rolland and his endeavour to put him on the world map. He seemed slightly amused, and distanced himself from his 'self-chosen advertiser'[65], a curt comment to the Swiss publisher Emil Roniger, which, however, did not match his more polite letter to Rolland himself on 22 March 1924: 'It (the book on him) demonstrates once more the essential oneness of human nature though flourishing under different skies.' [66] On the eve of his proposed visit to Europe in 1928[67]anxiety is to meet Rolland. He appears to be the wisest man in Europe. It seems to me that it would be a tragedy if we do not meet. This is the cause which moves me above all else.'(19 March 1928)[68] He wrote in another letter on 28 March 1928 that although he had no heart in the proposed visit to Europe, an interview with Rolland still remained an attraction. 'All the reputation I enjoy in the West is borrowed from him and I feel that if I meet him face to face, there may be disillusionment on many points. It may be that we should come closer than we ever were.'[69] It must be recorded here that Gandhi referred to Rolland as 'Rishi'[70] in his letters to Madeleine Rolland.

Gandhi's reaction to Rolland's death (1944)is significant:

> For me as for many millions, Romain Rolland is not dead. He lives through his famous writings and perhaps more so through his many and nameless deeds. He lived for truth and non-violence as he saw and believed them from time to time. He responded to all sufferings. He revolted against the wanton human butchery called 'war'.[71]

On being requested to write a preface for Rolland's *LeVoyage interieur*, Gandhi replied with humility: 'Who am I to write a foreword for the autobiography of a celebrity like *Sage* Romain Rolland, who, alas, is no more among us? I consider myself unfit for the task.'[72]

Looking at Rodolphe Schlemmer's[73]celebrated black and white photograph of Rolland and Gandhi in Villeneuve, Switzerland,

sculpted in ether for eternity, we shall remember the former's reassuring whisper to Kalidas Nag:

We merely sketch the outline of the Great Work. Other humanities in other worlds will follow it up and complete it. I am not impatient.[74]

Notes

1 23 September 1932, quoted by Rolland in his diary, *Inde*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1960, p. 399.

2 Letter to Lucien Price, 25 December 1931, RGC, pp. 454. Also quoted by Ramchandra Guha, p. 415.

3 Romain Rolland, *Mahatma Gandhi*, Paris: Delamain et Boutelleau, 1924. Tr. Catherine D. Groth, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1924, p. 107. Also cited in Ramchandra Guha, *Gandhi: the Years that changed the World*, Gurgaon: Penguin Random House, 2018, p 230.

4 *Romain Rolland and Gandhi Correspondence*, New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, tr. Richard Francis, 1976, 1990, p. 286. Henceforth *RGC*.

5 Written by Rolland for an International India Day, organized in Geneva, 6 October 1932, *RGC*, p. 586-8.

6 Russian-born British social and political philosopher and historian (1909-1997).

7 Quoted in Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes 1914-1991*, London: Abacus, p. 2012, p. 1.

8 Romain Rolland to Tagore, 26 August 1919, *Bridging East and West: Rabindranath Tagore and Romain Rolland Correspondence 1919-1940*,Edited, introduced, annotated and French Letters Translated by Chinmoy Guha, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 5.

9 *Bridging East and West*, introduction, p. xxv.

10 Henri Massis, *Romain Rolland against France*, Paris: H. Floury, 1915.

11 Rolland to Kalidas Nag, 17 June 1922, *The Tower and the Sea: Romain Rolland and Kalidas Nag Correspondence 1922-1938*, 1996. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2010, 2015, p. 20.

12 *Inde*, p. 10.

13 Romain Rolland, *Jean-Christophe*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1966, p. 1594. My translation.

14 Rolland to Kalidas Nag, 17 June 1922. *The Tower and the Sea*, p. 19.

15 *RGC*, p 3.

16 Romain Rolland, *Inde*, p. 18.

17 *RGC*, p 6.

18 Rolland to Nag, 14 August 1922, *The Tower and the Sea*, p. 24: 'I seek your advice. Ganesan Publishers, Madras has requested me to write a short

introduction to a volume of articles by Gandhi, reassembled under the title *Young India.* I would gladly do it because I admire Gandhi; and the articles which my sister read to me are noble and sincere. But I would better not if my name in Gandhi's book jeopardizes my visit to India, which I intend to undertake sometime later. Do you believe that the British Government could refuse me entry into India for this sole reason? In which case, I shall abstain (with regret) from writing that introduction; because being in Santiniketan I could be more useful.' (My translation.)Nag initially discouraged him because 'Your visit to India and Santiniketan is, I believe, more important than all prefaces.' (18 August 1922, ibid, p. 25.) Rolland would soon write to Nag (21 December 1922, ibid. p. 46) : 'We are presently reading—we have just read, my sister and myself—the 700 or 800 pages of Gandhi which have been published. Some of the things are immortal…'

[19] *RGC*, p. 6.

[20] Ibid, p 5.

[21] *RGC*, p 7.

[22] 'In Search of Greatness', in Alex Aronson, *Romain Rolland: the Story of a Conscience*, New Delhi: Rupa and Co., 2003, pp. 30-51.

[23] Rolland, *Mahatma Gandhi*, tr. Catherine D. Groth, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1924, pp. 7-8.

[24] There were more than thirty prints in three months, and 100,000 copies were sold in the first year. The book was translated into Russian, German, English, Spanish, Portugese, Polish, and Japanese, not to speak of at least three Indian languages, by 1925. See Fisher, pp. 125-6.

[25] Fisher, p. 120.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Romain Rolland, *Mahatma Gandhi*, 1924, Paris: Stock, 1993, p. 84.

[28] Rolland, *Mahatma Gandhi*, Tr. Catherine D. Groth, p. 96.

[29] Rolland to Nag, 18 February 1923. *The Tower and the Sea*, p. 52.

[30] Romain Rolland, *Mahatma Gandhi*, 1924, Paris: Stock, 1993 ed, p 14.

[31] Rolland to Nag, 21 December 1922.*The Tower and the Sea*, p. 46. Rolland wrote to Stefan Zweig after Gandhi's visit to Villeneuve in December 1931, 'Gandhi—today's Gandhi—in no way condemns machinary or industrial techniques, in so far as they bring help and relief to humanity; his quarrel is merely with their murderous excesses and the morbid myth of economic overproduction.' 30 December 1931, *RGC*, p. 459.

[32] Rolland and Paul Richard to Gandhi, Ibid, p. 21-2.

[33] Charles Freer Andrews (called 'Dinabandhu', or friend of the poor), the principal link between Tagore and Gandhi, had known the latter from his days in South Africain 1903-1904. Rolland not only quoted Andrews in the first page of his biography of Gandhi, but acknowledged his debt to his testimony in his diary. (April 1923, *Inde*, p. 40, tr. *RGC*, p. 11) He held him in high esteem till his death.

[34] 8 November 1934,*RGC*, p. 314.

[35] Tagore to Rolland, 23 September 1925, *Bridging East and West*, p. 33: 'I wish it were possible for me to join hands with Mahatma Gandhi and thus at once surrender myself to the current of popular approbation, but I can no longer hide from myself that we are radically different in our apprehension and pursuit of truth.'

[36] *Inde*, p. 286.

[37] 1st October 1930, *RGC*, p 141.

[38] December 1931, *Inde*, translated in *RGC*, p. 165.

[39] See R. A. Francis, *Romain Rolland*, Oxford: Berg, 1999, p. 136.

[40] *RGC*, p 241.

[41] Letter to Lucien Price, 25 December 1931, *RGC*, p. 455.

[42] Ibid, p. 455.

[43] bid, p. 456.

[44] Ibid, p. 457.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Rolland to Gabriel Belot, 25 December 1931, Ibid, p. 458.

[47] 30 December 1931, Ibid, p. 460.

[48] Rolland quotes his own letter in *Inde*, p. 399. See note 1.

[49] 2 May 1933, *RGC*, p. 274.

[50] Ibid, p 266

[51] Saumyendranath Tagore (1901-1974): Grandson of Dwijendranath Tagore, Rabindranath's elder brother. After M.N. Roy, one of the most distinguished Indian Marxists in the international scene. For his tirade against Gandhi in his letters to Rolland, see *Bridging East and West*, pp. 128-141.

[52] Rolland, *Inde*, p. 591.

[53] Henri Barbusse too had said, in a rejoinder ("Eastern and Western Revolutionaries : Concerning Gandhi") to Rolland's 'magisterial and lyrical' portrait of Gandhi, the latter's activities as a popular leader and his defence of the working classes of India, was a form of class struggle; that if Lenin had been in India, 'he too would have spoken and acted as Gandhi did: the two are 'men of the same species, prodigious characters, who know how to measure for and against.' Their methods, he said, were similar: 'Lenin is for constraint—and Gandhi also.' See Fisher, p. 127. Fisher points out that Barbusse had 'blurred the antagonism between Gandhism and Bolshevism'. P. 126. Rolland tried to serve as a mediator in the 1930s, but failed to convince either camps.

[54] *Bridging East and West*, p 129.

[55] Ibid.

[56] 14 November 1933, *Bridging East and West*, p 131-2, Rolland's italics.

[57] Rolland's note to Saumyendranath Tagore , 28 November 1933,*RGC*, p 296.

[58] *Cahiers Romain Rolland 19*, Paris: Albin Michel, p 342-3.

[59] Ibid, p 421.
[60] "An Expression of Gratitude to Gandhi from a Man of the West",*RGC*, p 350
[61] Letter to Marcel Caster, 21 March 1934, *RGC*, p. 495.
[62] *Cahiers Romain Rolland 19*, p. 248.
[63] Letter to Victor Jourdain, 1st March 1939, *RGC*, p. 501.
[64] Rolland to Slade, 26 September 1926, *RGC*, p. 72.
[65] Gandhi to the Swiss publisher Emil Roniger, October 1926, *RGC*, p.77.
[66] *RGC*, p. 29.
[67] This tour was finally cancelled.
[68] *RGC*, p. 104.
[69] Ibid, p. 105.
[70] Gandhi's letter to Madeleine Rolland, 6 January 1933, Ibid, p. 270.
[71] 10 January 1945. Ibid, p. 352.
[72] Ibid, p. 352.
[73] Rodolphe Schlemmer (1878-1972) from Montreux, Switzerland, was a German photographer who took the famous photograph of Rolland and Gandhi at Villa Olga, Villeneuve, Switzerland on 9 December 1931. He had also taken the iconic photo of Rolland and Tagore in 1926.
[74] Rolland to Kalidas Nag, 17 June 1922, *The Tower and the Sea*, p. 20.

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Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

We have already given in these columns brief biographical sketches of a few good men and women of Europe. The purpose of these sketches is to enlighten our readers and to enable them to make their own lives fruitful by emulating these men and women.

The strong movement that is being carried on in Bengal to boycott British goods is of no mean significance. Such a movement has been possible there because education is more widespread and the people in Bengal are more alert than in other parts of India. Sir Henry Cotton has remarked that Bengal holds sway from Calcutta to Peshawar. It is necessary to know the reasons for this.

There is no gain saying the fact that a nation's rise or fall depends upon its great men. The people who produce good men cannot but be influenced by them. The main reason for the special distinction that we find in Bengal is that many great men were born there during the last century. Beginning with Rammohan Roy[1], one heroic figure after another has raised Bengal to a position higher than that of the other provinces. It can be said that Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar was the greatest among them. "Vidyasagar", which means an ocean of learning, was an honorific of Ishwarchandra, conferred on him by the pundits of Calcutta for his profound Sanskrit learning. But Ishwarchandra was not an ocean of learning only; he was an ocean of compassion, of generosity, as well as of many other virtues. He was a Hindu, and a Brahmin too. But to him, Brahmin and Sudra, Hindu and Muslim, were all alike. In any good deeds that he performed, he made no distinction between high and low. When his professor had an attack of cholera, he himself nursed

[1] (1774-1833), A great social and religious reformer, founder of the Brahmo Samaj, supported abolition of *Sati* and worked hard for the spread of education.

him. As the professor was poor, Ishwarchandra called in the doctors at his own cost and himself attended to the patient's toilet.

He used to buy *luchi*[2] and curds and feed the poor Muslims at his own cost, in Chandranagar[3], and helped with money those who needed it. If he saw a cripple or any one in distress by the roadside, he took him to his own house and nursed him personally. He felt grief at other people's sorrows and joy at their joys.

Himself he led a very simple life. His dress consisted of a coarse *dhoti*, a shawl of a similar kind to cover his body, and slippers. In that dress he, used to call on Governors, and in the same dress he greeted the poor. He was really a *fakir*, a *sannyasi* or a *yogi*. It behoves us all to reflect on his life.

Ishwarchandra was born of poor parents in a small village in the Midnapur *taluka*[4]. His mother was a very saintly woman, and many of her virtues were inherited by Ishwarchandra. Even in those days, his father knew some English, and decided to give his son a better education. Ishwarchandra began his schooling at the age of five. At the age of eight, he had to walk sixty miles to Calcutta to join a Sanskrit college. He had such a prodigious memory that he learnt the English numerals by looking at the figures on the milestones while walking along the road. At sixteen he became well versed in Sanskrit, and was appointed a Sanskrit teacher. Rising step by step, he at last became the Principal of the College where he had studied. The Government held him in great respect. But, being of an independent nature, he could not adjust himself to the Director of Public Instruction and resigned his post. Sir Frederick Halliday, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, sent for him and requested him to withdraw his resignation, but Ishwarchandra flatly declined.

His nobility and humanity had their true blossoming after he had given up his job. He saw that Bengali was a very good language, but appeared poor for want of fresh contributions. He, therefore, began writing books in Bengali. He produced very powerful books, and it is mainly due to Vidyasagar that the Bengali language is at present in full bloom and has spread throughout India.

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[2] A kind of unleavened and fried bread made from flour.

[3] In West Bengal, then a French possession

[4] In West Bengal

But he also realised that merely writing books was not enough; and so he founded schools. It was Vidyasagar who founded the Metropolitan College in Calcutta. It is staffed entirely by Indians.

Considering that elementary education was quite as necessary as higher education, he started primary schools for the poor. This was a stupendous task in which he needed government help. The Lieutenant-Governor assured him that the Government would bear the cost; but the Viceroy, Lord Ellenborough[5], was opposed to this and the bills preferred by Vidyasagar were not passed. The Lieutenant-Governor was very sorry and suggested that Ishwarchandra might file a suit against him. Brave Ishwarchandra replied: "Sir, I have never gone to a court of law to get justice for myself. How, then, is it possible for me to proceed against you?" At that time other European gentlemen who used to help Ishwarchandra in his work rendered him good financial aid. Not being very rich himself, he often ran into debt by helping others out of their difficulties; nevertheless, when a proposal was made to raise a public subscription for him, he turned it down.

He did not rest satisfied with thus putting higher and elementary education on a sound footing. He saw that, without the education of girls, the education of boys alone would not be enough. He found out a verse from Manu which said that the education of women was a duty. Pressing it into service, he wrote a book on the subject and, in collaboration with Mr. Bethune founded the Bethune College for imparting education to women. But it was more difficult to get women to go to college than to found it. As he lived a saintly life and was very learned, he was respected by all. So he met prominent people and persuaded them to send their women folk to the College; and thus, their daughters began to attend the College. Today there are in that College many well-known and talented women of sterling character, so much so that they can by themselves carry on its administration.

Still not satisfied, he started schools imparting elementary education to small girls. Here food, clothing and books were supplied free of charge. Consequently, one can see today thousands of educated women in Calcutta.

To meet the need for teachers he started a Teachers' Training College. Seeing the very pitiable condition of Hindu widows, he advocated the

[5] Governor-General of India, 1842-4.

remarriage of widows; he wrote books and made speeches on the subject. The Brahmins of Bengal opposed him, but he did not care. People threatened to kill him, but he went on undaunted. He got the Government to pass a law legalizing remarriage of widows. He persuaded many men and arranged the remarriage of daughters of prominent men widowed in childhood. He encouraged his own son to marry a poor widow.

The kulin or high-born Brahmins were given to taking a number of wives. They were not ashamed of marrying as many as twenty of them. Ishwarchandra wept to see the sufferings of such women; and he carried on his efforts till the end of his life to eradicate this wicked custom.

When he saw thousands of poor people in Burdwan suffering from malaria, he maintained a doctor at his own cost and personally distributed medicines among them. He went to the houses of the poor and gave them the necessary help. In this way he worked ceaselessly for two years, secured government help and called for more doctors.

In the course of this work, he saw the necessity of a knowledge of medicine. So he studied homoeopathy, attained proficiency in it, and began to prescribe medicines to the sick. He did not mind travelling long distances in order to help the poor.

He was equally a stalwart in helping big princes out of their difficulties. If any of them had injustice done to him or was reduced to poverty, Ishwarchandra used to help him with his influence, knowledge and money and mitigate his distress.

While he was engaged in these activities, Vidyasagar passed away in 1890 [sic], at the age of seventy. There have been few in this world like him. It is said that, had Ishwarchandra been born among a European people, an imposing column, like the one raised by the British for Nelson, would have been erected as a memorial to him. However, a column to honour Ishwarchandra already stands in the hearts of the great and the small, the rich and the poor of Bengal.

It will now be clear to us how Bengal provides an example for the other parts of India to follow.

[From Gujarati]

Indian Opinion, 16-9-1905

Claude Markovits, *The Un-Gandhian Gandhi : The Life and Afterlife of the Mahatma,* Delhi and Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2004, Paperback, 2006.

This book, published in 2004, is not just another book on Gandhi. This book presents Claude Markovits's honest and imaginative search for the myriad images of the life and ideas of Gandhi constructed during his life and after. He argues that 'had [Gandhi] not initiated and led one of the great political movements of the twentieth century, it is most unlikely that much attention would have been paid to his ideas, some of which were extremely idiosyncratic'. Gandhi's ideas and his movements continue to have an earnest audience and the relevance of his unique message to the world, in the perception of many, remains strong. In this small book, the author seeks to explore Gandhi's personality and his reception during his own times and after, by focusing on what he calls the 'Unknown Gandhi'.

Markovits suggests that to ' recapture the historical Gandhi behind the Gandhi of the legend, the man behind the icon, the leader behind the saint, a very down to earth perspective needs to be accepted, and much attention must be paid to the context.' He sets out to reconsider the various images of Gandhi during his lifetime as a 'Bolshevik, a fanatic, a trouble-maker, a hypocrite, an eccentric, a reactionary, a revolutionary, a saint, a renouncer, a messiah, an avatar'. In his afterlife most of these images were replaced by the image of the 'father of the nation' in India (newspapers recently reported that the name of a substitute has been suggested!) and as the 'apostle of non-violence' outside the country. The author tries to understand the legend through a closer scrutiny of the texts and images that helped in the creation of the legend both in India and the Western world.

Claude Markovits shows how Gandhi's legend has often obscured the facts of his public career. Gandhi's professional role in the public sphere, Markovits argues, was heavily influenced by his long and critical phase of maturation in South Africa, a period often dismissed as merely the precursor to his celebrated work in India. Gandhi constructed a notion of India through a process of 'partly imaginary

circulation between South Africa and India'. While he made a career eventually as a spokesman of the diverse Indian community in South Arica, he remained in touch with political developments in India. This 'inhabiting two spaces at the same time' by Gandhi offers a fascinating case study in 'long distance nationalism' and the way in which it was 'entwined with cosmopolitanism'. Markovits proposes that Gandhi's later Indian career, marked by his meteoric rise to prominence, was the result of his own radical self-reinvention as he negotiated his career to create his political manifesto which, it would appear, attracted worldwide attention. In re-evaluating critical stages of Gandhi's career, and his 'sometimes ambivalent ideological positions', the author confronts the discrepancies between his early and late careers, closely rereading the Mahatma's varying intellectual positions as described both within his own writings and in those by commentators and biographers. Rather than seeing Gandhi as an upholder of traditional Indian values, Markovits stresses 'the paradoxical modernity of Gandhi's anti-modernism'.

In the first part of the book, the author analyses perceptions of Gandhi, reviews some biographies, including Gandhi's Autobiography and explores his continuing reception in India and the world. The curious case of a school of Samba dance in Bahia in north east Brazil being named 'filhos do Gandhi' has been mined to suggest how far flung his reception had been. There was a dockers' strike in 1947 when the strikers decided to use Gandhi as an icon and inspiration and set up a school of Samba to popularize the strike movement. If this was a rare case, Gandhi's image was hardly free from the myth making that is often associated with great leaders. Christopher Hill and Ian Kershaw have tried to unravel this in the case of Lenin and Hitler respectively. Shahid Amin wrote that Gandhi stayed in Gorakhpur for only a day in February, 1921, 'but the "Mahatma" as an "idea" was thought out and reworked in popular imagination in subsequent months'. (*Subaltern Studies* Vol III,New Delhi, OUP, 1984, 11th Impression,2014 p 2). Markovits briefly traces the evolution of the images. The legend started growing from the 1920s. His first

biographer was probably Rev. Joseph Doke who wrote that an encounter with Gandhi was 'a spiritual experience'. Mark Jurgensmeyer thought that Pearson was the first to call him a saint. John Hayman Holmes in a sermon in New York in 1921 said that the greatest living man was neither Lenin nor Romain Rolland, but Gandhi; ' When I think of him, I think of Jesus Christ'. Romain Rolland in 1922 referred to him as the 'little St. Francis of India'. Markovits speculates, 'Gandhi's sartorial simplicity was one of the features which assimilated him to the Messiah in the eyes of an audience steeped in Biblical references'.

Though he understandably aroused most interest in England, opinion on him was divided. He had admirers among the Quakers and in Protestant circles, but did not have much impact in the literary circles. In political arena, he attracted the Labour supporters more than the Conservatives. This was but natural. Bur one Sagittarius wrote a rhyme published in The New Statesman and The Nation (circa 1935): ' De Valera and his Green shirts with their back to the wall/Hitler with his brown shirts riding for a fall/ Mussolini with his Black shirts lording over it all/ Three cheers for Gandhi with no shirts at all'. In a letter to Gopal Krishna Gandhi, Professor Hiren Mukerjee, the eminent Communist leader and parliamentarian, recalled from memory this rhyme. (The Hindu, August 2, 2004). In France, Henri Barbusse linked him to Lenin for having inspired the Indian masses to resistance, while Henri Massis, a member of Action Francaise denounced him in 1927. In France Louis Massignon and Jean Joseph Lanza del Vasto, the Frenchman of Italian origin, were his main propagators. During his only visit to France in 1931, he did not receive much warmth from the print media. L'Humanite, the communist newspaper, ranted against the 'traitor Gandhi'; Le Figaro or Le Temps from the right were hardly more charitable. Markovits finds the Press rather ill-informed about both Gandhi and India. Louise Guyiesse, however, got together an association of the 'Friends of Gandhi'. His death resulted in a resurrection of interest in him as martyr.

His biographers must have faced a difficult task to weave together the various phases in his life. The author feels that continuity between the child, and the youth and the mature Gandhi was particularly difficult to establish. (One is reminded of the excellent and incisive essays in Bengali written by Ashin Das Gupta in which he essayed to get to the essence of the man.) This, in his view, offers a limit to good biographies. Writings on Gandhi generally waver between hagiographies and critical condemnation. T.K.Mahadevan and Maureen Swan have critically interrogated Gandhi's role in South Africa. Swan, in particular has tried to recover the agency of the Indians in South Africa in the making of their own history. T.K.Mahadevan has found Gandhi's own account of South Africa to be full of inconsistencies. The author feels that Gandhi's role in South Africa needs to be examined more closely and impartially. Gandhi's autobiography in a way puts a limit to the possibilities of biographies of him. As Marokovits points out, ' by insisting that he did not write an account of his life, but only of his spiritual itinerary, Gandhi pre-empted criticism of factual aspects of his narrative'. This is an interesting point to consider.

Looking at what he calls 'Gandhi's posthumous life', he does begin, as one has to, with the apostle of non-violence succumbing to brutal violence in 1948. The questions raised by the assassination led to what Markovits called 'a disputed legacy'. The problem, as the author sees it, was also between two perceptions of the nature of the Indian state: those, led by the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS, wanted it to become a 'Hindu state' as Pakistan had become a 'Muslim state' and those, led by Nehru and others, wanted India to remain faithful to the secular ideals. A point that needs to be underlined is that Gandhi, religious though he was, considered all other religion to be as valid as his own. For him there was no 'us' or 'them' in terms of religious groups. Since this book was published in 2004, the author has not had the opportunity to look at India at the present moment when a temple has been dedicated to Godse, his killer and 'the other' is emphatically specified in no uncertain terms by leaders of the

dominant party. Das Gupta wrote that 'India remembers Gandhi, but has not accepted him'. One sees how true this is when the man is reduced to the emblems of the charka and a pair of glasses on all hoardings and advertisements loudly announcing the celebration of the 150 years of Gandhi. His images are used in the campaign for 'clean India', while public lynching of certain categories of citizens mock what remains of the true historical legacy of Gandhi. The cleavage, it has to be emphasized, has indeed become wider, deification of Gandhi notwithstanding.

However, 'Gandhi's shadow loomed large over the new Republic' several years after his death. The author traces the various ways the political, economic and social ideas of Gandhi were used and manipulated by the parties in power as well as those in the opposition. The 'Gandhians' still had a significant role to play; the author refers to men like Binoba Bhabe and the Bhoodan movement on one hand and socialists like Rammanohar Lohia on the other who followed entirely different methods. Understandably the role of Jayparaksh Narayan, particularly his movement during the imposition of emergency by Indira Gandhi is highlighted. Markovits shows incisive clarity in commenting that 'one of the outcomes of the JP phase was the political reemergence of the Hindu Right… Outwardly it rallied to "Gandhian socialism", which its ideological mentor Savarkar had always fought against. But these reversal of policies was more apparent than real.' What he does not examine in details is how much of the ideas of Gandhi were given the go-by almost from the beginning as far as social and economic regeneration was concerned. The point one wishes to make is whether 'Gandhian thought' was increasingly becoming marginal, if not irrelevant. This would appear to be a major question in the history of post-colonial India.

He takes the reader through a selection of the writings of those who were seeking to interpret Gandhi's thought. These included men like Philip Spratt, an English communist and Nirmal Bose who essayed the first attempt to systematize 'Gandhism ' or 'Gandhian thought'. Gandhism is presented not as 'formal doctrine, but a loose collection

of terms', with ahimsa, satyagraha, sarvodaya, swadeshi and swaraj being the most common. Richard Gregg, an American lawyer who knew Gandhi and lived in India for a while, coined the term 'moral jiu-jitsu' to define the ability of non-violent resistance to destabilize the adversary. What attracted the American authors most was his ideal of non-violence. Joan Bondurant in her *Conquest of Violence* examined Gandhi's position vis-á-vis labels like 'conservative' or 'anarchist' and thought that his methods transcended labels and were compatible with all of them. Gene Sharp (*The Politics of Non-violent Action)*, Mark Jurgensmeyer (*Fighting with Gandhi*) or Dennis Dalton (*Mahatma Gandhi: Non-violent Power in Action*) and others are briefly examined. The two movements where his influence is considered to be significant were the American Civil Rights Movement and the anti-apartheid and freedom struggle in South Africa. Albert Luthuli, Martin Luther King and Mandela consciously modeled themselves on Gandhi. There is a fair analysis of these movements and of the possible links that he finds in leaders like Kwame Nkrumah and Kenneth Kaunda in Africa. Interestingly, Markovits mentions that Danilo Dolci's fight against poverty and the Mafia in Sicily was influenced by Gandhi's methods. He himself explicitly referred to Gandhi. The anti-Nuclear movement in the 1960s also often invoked Gandhi as an inspiration.

Markovits tries to find a systematisation again of Gandhi's political philosophy through the writing of Raghavan Iyer, Bhiku Parekh, Ravinder Kumar and Ashis Nandy among others. The author feels that those caught between communism and capitalism sought an alternative system and that 'it is difficult to avoid the thought that the elevation of Gandhism into a system of thought had to do with attempts at finding a "third way"'. This may explain why over the last few decades Gandhi has become more relevant to ecology and alternative movements. From the late 1980s Gandhi was being accepted as an 'ecological thinker' as well. The well-known report of the Bruntlandt Commission on the future of mankind acknowledged inspiration from Gandhi. The *Chipko* movement in the Himalayas in

the 1970s also invoked Gandhi's name. Petra Kelly, a leader of the German Green Party, notes Markovits, had been directly influenced by Gandhi in thinking that 'a lifestyle and a method of production which rely on endless supply of raw materials …generates the motive for the violent appropriation of raw materials from other countries.'

Talking about Gandhi's continuing influence, the role of his espousal of non-violence is perhaps central. In seeking to situate Gandhi's contribution to the doctrine of 'passive resistance', Markovits notes that Gandhi, while acknowledging the debts to Thoreau and Tolstoy, took care to distinguish his idea of 'satyagraha' from it. Markovits scans the historiography of non-violent resistance to argue that many of the authors feel that Gandhi's role 'was not as central as is generally assumed'. He cites the 'O Le Mau' movement in Western Samoa in 1918 against the mandate given by the League of Nations to New Zealand. This was a mass movement which avoided violence. Gandhi's genius lay in his ability to achieve a pragmatic synthesis between diverse forms of struggle which included fasting, boycott and civil disobedience. It is the extension of this ability to harness these forms to the 'mass nationalist struggle' that credited Gandhi as the 'architect of a whole new kind of non-violent resistance'. Markovits detects ambiguity in Gandhi's own 'theoretical discourse on non-violence, articulated in *Hind Swaraj* and his narration on the "invention" of non-violence in his Satyagraha in South Africa. '

His non-violence was not, argues the author, predicated on 'metaphysical and religious considerations', but expressed in the 'language of pragmatic ethics.' Gandhi himself said that ideas of satyagraha came to him through revelations during his service as an ambulance worker in the military campaign against the Zulu uprising of 1906. On his return he became involved in the protest against the 'Black Act' (Transvaal Asiatic Amendments Act), started a campaign against it and forged the term 'satyagraha' as a substitute for 'passive resistance'. 'Satyagraha was not primarily from a refusal of violence, but rather from a positive statement of moral strength. ' Satyagraha was seen as a 'positive discourse' as the translation of moral force

into action, and a 'negative discourse' as an alternative to violence. Yet his advice was that every individual must search for the source of violence in himself, because when the source is identified, a remedy could be found.

Gandhi did concede there were limits to non-violence. He wrote 'I would prefer India to use arms to defend its honour rather than see it become cowardly or remain an impotent witness to its own dishonor.' Gandhi was not an extreme 'pacifist' like Rolland and Holmes. Gandhi condemned the violence at Chauri Chaura, but kept silent on many other occasions. He joined the protest against the execution of Bhagat Singh, and although he did not support his actions he did not condemn them either. Again, in another context, Gandhi in a recruitment speech at Ras on June 26,1918, said, 'Sisters, you should encourage your husbands and brothers and sons …If you want them to be true men, send them to the army with your blessings. Don't be anxious about what may happen to them on the battle-field. …and if they fall, console yourselves with the thought that they have fallen in the discharge of their duty and that they will be yours in your next generation'. Here, as Santanu Das has shown, Gandhi does not anticipate the future Mahatma, but 'sounds more like the finger-pointing Lord Kitchener of recruiting poster rather than a votary of the anti-war Wilfred Owen'. Yet, in his autobiography he wrote, 'All of us recognized the immorality of war'. As Santanu Das wonders, 'Do we treat them as exercises in argumentation, lurching between the twin poles of political instrumentality and moral philosophy, or should we consider them as examples of what David Hardiman has called "the Gandhian dialogic"- fraught "communions" between the self and others?' (Santanu Das, *India,Empire and First World War Culture*, Cambridge, CUP, 2018, p. 59). On the other hand Gandhi, argues Markovits, made every effort to avoid hampering the British war effort and in 1942 he allowed the 'quit India' resolution to have the clause, at Nehru's insistence that allied troops may remain in India. In his correspondence with some Jewish intellectuals, he advised them to follow the non-violent resistance. He even took the 'quixotic' gesture

of writing a letter to Hitler to ask him to abandon the path of violence. These ambiguities oblige Markovits to conclude that 'if Gandhi survives as a political figure,…it is because he addressed certain fundamental questions about the relationship between ethics and politics that are not limited to the idea of non-violence'. This is a perceptive observation, even though it is open to serious debate.

Markovits identifies three major areas where Gandhi had a great impact: he removed the fear from the minds of ordinary Indian men and women(as Nehru observed,'the black pall of fear was lifted from the people's shoulders') ; he transformed what was almost a 'club of lawyers' into a mass political organization and made this organization capable of sustaining mass agitation. Gandhi contributed to the 'delegitimizing the anti-untouchability discourse'. At least in 'speech and rhetoric, no Indian politician can now afford to be seen as favouring untouchability'. This last comment sounds hollow when one thinks of the mob lynching of Dalits in various parts of the country including the Mahatma's own state! In trying to understand Gandhi's political discourse, it may be pointed out the idea of India as a civilization is perhaps more pertinent to him than India as a nation in the accepted sense. Gandhi's relevance is not to be seen present in the current policies of the government or for that matter in the policies of the earlier post colonial governments. Whatever happened to *nai talim* or sarvoday or satyagraha or decentralized rural development?

The book, one feels, is still relevant because it does ask some pertinent questions about Gandhi's role in history, but is neither hagiographical nor fashionably critical. His is a very honest quest. He does not just look at the images, but also searches him in the realm of practical politics, for Gandhi was a pragmatic man. The author has brought out the ambiguities in Gandhi's ideas (understandable given the huge corpus of speeches and articles left behind by him). But attempts at systematizing Gandhi's ideas into a coherent political philosophy have possibly eluded his successors- politicians and academics both. Thus I find the observation reasonable that Gandhi's

legacy may be found in the emerging areas of ecology and alternative movements. Non-violence does not appear to be a viable option, with the presence of too much internal violence which is being fuelled everyday by ultra nationalists everywhere. His relevance may be found even now in the legitimacy that he had given to the notion of resistance. This is why his connection to alternative movements may be the most relevant in the present global situation. His methods of satyagraha are not easy to emulate. It was a weapon only he knew how to use effectively. Yet, there is hope when young Greta Thunberg throws a challenge to the high and mighty by asking them 'How dare you?' May be the world has now found someone with the courage that Gandhi would have heartily endorsed. His courage of conviction was always in evidence and this, at least, will not be disputed.

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Sir William Jones
on the publication of the Asiatic Society

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