Counter-Cultural Perspectives of an Organic Intellectual: Selected Works of Rudolf C. Heredia

Volume IX

Gandhiana:

Essays on A

Yuga Purush

Volume IX

GANDHIANA: ESSAYS ON A YUGA PURUSH

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LIST WITH ABSTRACTS

GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO COUNTER-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES OF AN ORGANIC INTELLECTUAL: THE SELECTED WORKS OF RUDOLF C. HEREDIA

This collection brings together essays and presentations that span some five decades of my work. These are in the overall discourse of the social sciences and though I have trained as a sociologist, my perspective is more interdisciplinary. This is really the only way contemporary social issues and questions can be approached if they are to have any relevance today.

A continuing thread that runs through this collection. It represents an on-going venture to bring a critical reflection on social issues that engage activists in the field. Thus, rather than indulge in 'ad hoc' responses, they can create a praxis of action-reflection-action in the tradition of Paulo Freire. Hopefully this interaction between the 'desk and the field' will enrich both, activists to more effective action on the ground and theorists to a more critical appreciation on the underpinning ideas.

The collection is divided by common overall themes into separate volumes to provide a coherent unifying perspective to each volume. While each essay has its own specific context and topic, yet given the time span they cover, some overlap and repetition across these volumes is inevitable. However, we have tried to exclude this within the volume itself, unless there is a different nuance in the presentation that justifies its inclusion despite the overlap.

Each volume has its own brief introduction putting the theme in focus and the sequencing of the essays contained is chronological. Wherever possible each article has a by-line way by of a reference indicating its source and date. This should help to particularise its context and occasion.

The following are the subdivisions of the collection.

I. Socio-Cultural Perspectives: Pluralism and Multiple Identities
II. Socio-Political Perspectives: Contradictions and Complementarities
III. The Development Debate: Growth and Equity
IV. Religion and Society: Secularism and Its Discontent
V. Ecological Concerns: Environmental Sustainability
VI. Hermeneutics of Dialogue: Discourses on The Self and The Other
VII. Education: The Dual System
VIII. The Tribal Question
IX. Gandhiana: Essays on A Yuga Purush
X. Globalisation And Its Discontents Globalisation
XI. Jesuitica: For the Jesuit Parivar
XII. Miscellaneous Articles
XIII. Book Reviews
XIV. Poems
XV. Homilies

INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME IX—GANDHIANA: ESSAYS ON A YUGA PURUSH

Gandhi is a *yuga purush* (man for an epoch) whose life is his message. The essays here rather than attempt an interrogation of the man, reverse the perspective and allow him to interrogate us: what questions does he pose to us in the cascading crises of our violence-ridden time?

What response can we make, and how must we contextualise this with a critical discernment without being escapist. To doubt his relevance is to do precisely this. Even his enemies have found it difficult to ignore him and it isn't for lack of trying.

It is a tragedy for India that the more recent and still relevant Gandhians have been not been from Gandhi's own country, while others have learnt his truth: Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, the Dalai Lama. Gandhi remains a national icon, but we pay mere lip service to his ideas and ideals as they are displaced by narrow religious and nationalist ideologies. These essays are meant to mainstream a critical understanding of Gandhi relevant to our times.

1.
RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS AND MASS MOVEMENTS: A COMPARISON BETWEEN AMBEDKAR AND GANDHI

Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection, Feb. 1988, Vol. 52, No. 2.

INTRODUCTION
THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
AMBEDKAR AND GANDHI
CONCLUSIONS: QUESTIONS FOR A DIALOGUE

Abstract

This paper attempts a comparison between Ambedkar and Gandhi—both of them with strong personal commitments which had crucial social expressions and distinctly religious as well as broadly social dimensions. Its purpose is to raise some soul-searching questions and initiate an honest dialogue in an area that is becoming increasingly strained and conflict-ridden in our society.

Introduction

Against the background of the religious revivalism and communal feeling that is gripping the country today, religious conversion has become a sensitive, even an explosive issue. Various 'Freedom of Religion' bills—colloquially called 'anti-conversion' bills—have already been passed in some states. These pretend to protect the individual's religious freedom from the 'force or fraud' of proselytizers. But such promoters seem to be less exercised to protect the political freedom of voters from the intimidation of horse trading, party politics, or to salvage the economic freedom of the unorganised worker from the threats and manipulations of vested interests.

Obviously, religious freedom is still a sensitive issue in our society. Indeed, it is the touchstone of a truly secular state. And the acid test of such freedom is not just the right to practice one's faith but more so to promote and even change one's religious allegiance.

This paper attempts a comparison between two men—both of them with strong personal commitments which had crucial social expressions and distinctly religious as well as broadly social dimensions. The paper does not pretend to be an exhaustive or a conclusive study. Rather its purpose is to raise some soul-searching questions and initiate an honest dialogue in an area that is becoming increasingly strained and conflict-ridden in our society.

Other religious conversions and mass movements could have been studied as well. These could well be the subject of later studies. The two persons chosen here provide a relevant starting point for our questioning and dialogue.

The Conceptual Framework

While religious commitment is necessarily a matter of personal conscience, in no way can it be abstracted from its social dimension. For every religious faith will have a community of believers that may live in a greater or lesser solidarity among themselves. And thus the personal commitment will have a social expression. It is strictly speaking, possible for the commitment to be so individualised that it ceases to express itself socially or, vice versa, for the social expression to become so objectified that it is quite devoid of a truly personal

commitment. But these are exceptional instances. Generally, the two go together.

Now conversion implies some change in one's religious commitment. The more radical the conversion the more drastic the change. At times the change may be within the tradition from the lesser to a greater degree of commitment. Religious revivalists often see themselves in this light. But this is outside the problematic consideration of this paper. Our focus rather is on the change of commitment across religious faiths.

Given the social dimension of a religious commitment, obviously, such a change will have more than just personal consequences. And the more the community of believers expresses its solidarity socially, in political, economic and other terms, the more will the consequences of such a conversion affect these other areas of interaction between two religious communities. This is especially true when religious conversion becomes a mass movement. Further, we may observe that while one may have ethical questions about mass movements, we must still try to understand the social dynamics underlying them, which in fact are not necessarily different from other mass movements about which we seem to have fewer moral scruples.

At the personal level, a conversion implies a break with the old allegiance and an acceptance of the new one. This negation and affirmation will pertain both to one's personal commitment as well as its social expression. This gives us distinct categories that should help analysis and allow insightful comparisons: two dimensions of a religious conversion, personal and social, each with a content implying both affirmation and negation. This is summed up schematically below:

Dimensions of Religious Alliance	Two Aspects of their Content	
	a) Affirmation	(b) Negation
(a) Personal commitment		
(b) Social expression		

Conversion on a mass scale is essentially a religious movement but its expression will not be merely religious but more broadly social as well, i.e., in varying degrees, social, political and economic. Moreover, the content of a religious movement will have an affirmative and a

negating aspect in both the religious and the social dimensions. Thus, once again, we have four analytical categories at this mass level, analogous to those at the personal level:

Two Dimensions of a Religious Movement	Two Aspects of their Content	
	a) Affirmation	(b) Negation
a) Strictly religious		
b) Broadly social		

Ambedkar and Gandhi

At the level of his own personal commitment, Ambedkar‘s conversion is really an. affirmation of deep human values and a rejection of the religious beliefs that negate them. Thus his strong and tenacious commitment to human equality and freedom becomes an uncompromising rejection of ritual purity and caste hierarchy to the point where he can no longer accommodate his value commitment within even a reformed Hinduism. And so his conversion to Buddhism is both an affirmation and a negation, a quest for the human dignity and freedom denied to the outcastes by Brahminic Hinduism.

The affirmative social expression of this commitment begins with his own personal education but goes on to his efforts to uplift the Dalits, his attempts to establish socialist equality and to stabilise parliamentary democracy. The negative expression of this is his despair over Hindu reformism and his final condemnation of Hinduism.

At the level of the mass movement that Ambedkar initiated, the affirmative religious expression is first in terms of satyagrahas and conferences which focus on specific issues, like the outcaste’s right to temple entry. Later a new myth is created about the origins of the outcastes to give them a new identity and an enhanced dignity with them embracing Buddhism *en masse*. The non-religious social expression of this mass movement has several phases: the National Labour Party, later the Republican Party and more recently the Dalit organisations. None of these have a strictly religious orientation but

range from the economic to the political and the broadly cultural areas of social life.

In their rejection of Hinduism, this mass movement refuses to accept, even implicitly, the religious hierarchy of caste and the depressed status of the Dalits within it even. to the point of surrendering the constitutional privileges of Scheduled Castes, as their conversion to Buddhism implies.

Using the same analytical categories on Gandhi provides us with a comparison between him and Ambedkar, even though Gandhi's was not a case of religious conversion to another faith.

With regard to his personal religious allegiance, Gandhi's commitment is to equality and freedom, but he further accepts the varnashrama dharma, the caste division of labour even though he tries to reinterpret it. What he does reject is 'untouchability' as the crudest and most hateful expression of the caste reality. Gandhi then rejects ritual pollution though he accepts caste. Towards the end of his life, when he will attend only inter-caste marriages, he seems to have somewhat changed his mind on caste.

The social expression of Gandhi's religious commitment is his reform of Hinduism, an effort to reinterpret and vitalise it. But he rejects the aggressive religious communalism of some Hindu reformists.

The mass movement Gandhi initiated finds on the affirmative side its religious expression in his teaching of ahimsa—non-violence, and the seva marg which is his distinctive interpretation of Hinduism. The non-religious social expression of this is not just swarajya but sarvodaya as well. What is rejected, in the religious area is conversion, certainly any kind of mass conversion; and in social life, any kind of violence is to be eschewed.

Gandhi's reformism is from the beginning on a broad-based religious, political and economic front. But towards the end of his life, he seemed to see in the partition of India the failure of his political dreams. Perhaps his attending only inter-caste marriages was to an extent an admission of his failure to reform the varnashrama dharma, If he had lived to see the massive industrialisation of the Five Year plans, he might have found his hopes for a self-sufficient village and India being inexorably betrayed, too. But this would take us beyond the scope of this paper.

Ambedkar begins his efforts at reform with his attempts to change the religious attitudes of his own people and the caste Hindus as well. But he feels the inadequacy of this and moves on to include economic and political strategies. In the end, he realised the limitations of these

as well and came back to religion no longer as a reformist Hindu but as a convert Buddhist.

In the final analysis, as a religious reformer, Gandhi remains a Hindu, no matter how radical the reform he wants to achieve. And he still would claim the Depressed Castes for Hinduism. Ambedkar is from the beginning an outcaste who never belongs and who finally leads his people outside the bonds of caste Hinduism.

In comparing the two one cannot help but feel that Gandhi for all his concern and care still remains somewhat of an outsider to the outcastes. It is men like Ambedkar who have borne the heat and burden of caste oppression who can give us an insider's insight,

Conclusions: Questions for a Dialogue

Our analysis should now help to pose some incisive questions about religious conversion. For it has led us to see how such conversions are always an affirmation and a negation, something specifically religious as well as more broadly social. And so in studying such conversions, we must ask at both the personal as well as the mass level: what is being affirmed and what negated? How far is this reality really religious, and how more broadly social?

Religious conversions out of one's faith often make the believers left behind insecure and hostile. Somehow they sense that something they hold precious is being negated. But the issue to face is: how valid is the negation? Often enough, the negation will pertain to something more decidedly social, political or economic than merely religious. In our society, an appropriate response must be along the lines of religious reform and remain within the limits of religious freedom. Unfortunately, too often, there is a backlash of conservative fundamentalism and communal intolerance. The neo-Buddhists certainly experienced this.

When religious conversions develop into a mass movement, then the political and economic interests they touch may arouse considerable protest. But the movement itself is often, a protest against the prevailing political and economic situation of the converting group. And so the real issue is whether such a protest is legitimate within the rights and liberties constitutionally guaranteed to our citizens. More responsive politics and a more even distribution of economic benefits will be a more constructive approach than the struggle to maintain the old status quo in the name of religion, or to

manipulate communal forces till they run out of control. Once again, the opposition and violence against the neo-Buddhist is illustrative of this.

But there is another side to this coin of religious conversions which concerns the proselytisers. While the Constitution guarantees religious freedom which includes the right to propagate one's faith, it may well happen that this propagation is not motivated religiously, but rather done for the advantage of the proselytising community. The issue here is this: what would such religious conversions be affirming? If it is not a religious commitment or a commitment to certain human values, but rather a political game of numbers, or an economic one in quantities, then this is no longer a truly religious matter, but a political act. It might still be a legitimate one, provided it is within the political and civil liberties established by law, but it can hardly claim to be religious. Such proselytising only exacerbates communal tensions and excites religious zealots. However, an appropriate response would be, not to curtail civil liberties, for this could have even more dangerous political consequences, but rather to work towards better inter-religious understanding and dialogue. There is surely scope for this between neo-Buddhists and Hindus.

This study has compared Ambedkar and Gandhi and the movements they initiated precisely because they can offer an opportunity for raising larger issues in a more defined context. We would like now to conclude by extending somewhat the context with a few questions that could well be the subject matter of a further study.

Those opposed to religious conversions need to ask themselves:

Why is it that the oppressed only attract attention when they convert? Often, they convert because their basic human dignity and freedom have been denied and abused. But it is not their oppression or wretchedness that merits attention: only the event of their changing religious allegiance. Indeed, this change may not be a religious act but rather a political protest. Yet it is surely within the legitimate limits of the political freedom of a secular society such as we claim to be. Moreover, if the concern is only over their religious conversions and not about the wretchedness of their situation, can such opposition to their conversion be justified on religious grounds? What kind of religious community would be indifferent to the misery of its poorer members and yet be opposed to their wanting to leave it?

To the proselytizer who can be another brand of religious zealot, we have this to ask: why is it that the religious allegiance of the convert motivates them more than the need to alleviate the misery of his situation? What kind of religious community could want to count

converts even before it can help to restore their violated dignity and freedom?

In both these instances there is some need for an honest introspection: what are our religious concerns affirming? What are they negating? Perhaps a large part of the answer may be less religious than political and economic. Hopefully, such soul-searching questions will help initiate a fruitful dialogue.

	Dimensions	Content	
Gandhi's Personal Conversion	(a) Personal commitment	a) Affirmation equality, freedom Varnashrama dharma	(b) Negation "Untouchability"
	(b) Social expression	Reform of caste Hinduism	Rejection of ritual purity
Gandhi's Mass Movement		ASPECTS	
		(a) Affirmation	(b) Negation
	a) Strictly Religious	Ahimsa, non-violence, Seva marg	Rejects conversion
	b) Broadly Social	Swarajya Sarvodaya	Rejects violence

	Dimensions	Content	
Ambedkar's Personal Conversion	(a) Personal commitment _____	a) Affirmation Human equality and freedom	(b) Negation Rejection of ritual purity and caste hierarchy
	(b)Social expression	Education, reform of outcastes, socialist equality, parliamentary democracy	Despair over reform of Hinduism and final condemnation of it
Ambedkar's Mass Movement		Aspects	
		(a) Affirmation	(b) Negation
	a) Strictly Religious	Satyagraha & conferences on temple entry. Conversion and a new myth of origins of outcastes for a new identity	Rejection of an opposition to Brahminic Hinduism
	b)Broadly Social	National Labour Party, Republic Party, Dalit Organisations	Surrendering of Scheduled Caste constitutional privileges

2.
TOLERANCE AND DIALOGUE AS RESPONSES TO PLURALISM AND ETHNICITY: THE RELEVANCE OF A GANDHIAN DISCOURSE

Social Action, Vol. 47, No.3, 1997, pp.346-364

I. Introducing the Problem
An Interrogating Critique
II. The Dominant Discourses
Gandhian Relevance
Pre- and Post- Modern Responses
III. The Context of Pluralism
'Self' and 'Other'
Individual and Collective Rights
The Limits of Repression
Diversity and Difference
IV. The Levels of Tolerance
Dimensions of Understanding
Complexity and Challenge
V. The Hermeneutics of Dialogue
Difference and Indifference
Dialogue and Dialectics
VI. The Dialectics of Ethnicity
Ethnic Identity and Social Dignity
Class Contradictions and Ethnic Conflicts
Nationalist Ideology and Ethnic Myth
VII. The Gandhian 'Civil-State'
Patriotism and Nationalism
VII. Concluding the Discussion
Some Searching Questions

Abstract

This study attempts to outline an area of concern and is a beginning rather than a conclusive statement. The inspiration for this venture has come from Gandhi, who by acting locally has challenged us to think globally, even when we think differently from him. This is not merely an intellectual 'search', but a spiritual 'quest' as well. The attempt here is to orient and focus our response to the increasing ethnification in our plural society.

.

I. Introducing the Problem

An Interrogating Critique

Romanticising our own traditions and isolating ourselves in them is an inadequate and defensive response. Gandhi's aspiration can provide us with our best starting point here:

'I do not want my house to be walled 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 of them.' (Young India, June 1921, 170)

This will demand a double-edged response. For, just as a critical modernity must interrogate tradition to construct the present, so too must a renewed tradition challenge modern pathologies with an alternative understanding of normality and not just to glorify our past. What we need to do now is to creatively interrogate and constructively critique Gandhi, just as he did with our traditions and our colonised minds. This is the perspective in which this study is problematised.

Beginning, then, with the two dominant discourses of our freedom movement and after, we shall take a critical look at the multi-dimensional plurality of our present situation, in order to arrive at a more insightful understanding of tolerance, and dialogue. We shall conclude with some comments on ethnicity and class in the South Asian context, and their implications, politico-economic and socio-cultural, for our polity and society.

II. The Dominant Discourses

Gandhian Relevance

The relevance of Gandhi for any discourse on tolerance whether in this country or abroad, cannot be gainsaid. His concern with tolerance was primarily focused on the religious dimension, sarva-dharma-samabhava, but exclusively so. In the context of his understanding of ahimsa and satya, and his strategy of satyagraha, Gandhi has important political and social consequences for any understanding of tolerance.

To begin, Gandhi rejected an elite-mass dichotomy. He 'alone understood the meaning of religiosity of the masses as an attachment to the moral order, to moral economy, moral society and moral polity,' [Joshi 1987:226] in other words, of dharma over adharma. The 'old religious symbolism harnessed to a new secular purpose had an electrifying effect in releasing mass energy and removing fear and generating fearlessness.'[*ibid*.] In Gandhi's swaraj (*Young India,* 29 January 1925) through ahimsa (*Harijan*, 5 Sep. 1936) and satyagraha, (*ibid*., 27 July 1940) there was no separation of religion and politics. Rather he attempted to make religion more tolerant and politics more moral.

However, Gandhi's reformist Hinduism has its own inherent limitations, particularly on the issue of caste. Here his attempt to establish a basic social equality within the varnashrama-dharma was doomed to be rejected by the more radical and militant movements on the right and on the left. More recently his rediscovery by counter-cultural groups has called for a critical rethinking, not just an undiscerning repetition of his reformist programme. For we believe that there is still is a radical relevance to his message today for our destructive and violent age.

Gandhi's sarva-dharma-samabhav, equality to all religions and the essential tolerance and the openness it implies is much closer to the reality of the deep and multi-faceted religiosity of our people. It is also more in tune with our Constitutional protection to the rights of minorities, which has been reaffirmed in numerous judgements interpreting and applying legal principles to concrete cases. The present review of minorities by an eleven-judge bench of the Supreme Court is evidence of how seriously such rights are taken, to protect them from abuse by curtailment or misuse.

Nehruvian Rationalism

Nehru's understanding of tolerance, whether this be religious, social or political, derived less from a reform or revival of the Indian tradition than it was inspired by the modernist Enlightenment. Hence Nehruvian rationalism remained an imposition from the outside even though it claimed Constitutional legitimation for itself.

However, while political institutionalisation may be legally constituted, it requires the appropriate social conditions to survive. And so while our Constitution itself draws on the Enlightenment, it could not inspire mass support for many of its most basic principles. Hence such 'statuary tolerance' became particularly vulnerable to the attack of religious nationalists and fundamentalists, and others who would homogenise communities and people, in the interests of some narrow chauvinism.

An activation of a national consensus cannot be done in abstraction from the social processes in which it must be grounded. It cannot be imposed as part of a dominant hegemony, as middle-class rationalists are wont to urge, if it is to be liberating for the masses. Thus, grounding tolerance in middle-class sensibilities truncates it by excluding the mass of our people. This was the decisive difference between the Gandhian discourse and the Nehruvian one.

Unfortunately, the Gandhian discourse, which had dominated our freedom struggle, was eventually decisively upstaged by the Nehruvian one in the post-independence period. The intrinsic weakness of this project in the Indian context has gradually led to its collapse from within. For in the cascade of crises overtaking our society, it has become increasingly apparent that an adequate response now needs must go beyond the conceptual constraints of that discourse.

Pre- and Post-Modern Responses

For some the Nehruvian framework was as much, if not more, a cause of, than a cure for our ills. Such post-modernist responses, however, still remain largely an exogenous discourse, rooted in concerns that are not crucial but rather alien to us, except when we 'ventriloquise' for the West. Unfortunately, the more traditionally rooted responses have not been of much help either. Some of these are really obscurantist and pre-modern, such as the religious

fundamentalism, which denies the rationality of the modern Enlightenment in a futile attempt to recapture a supposedly lost innocence; while others would press into the future with a 'cultural nationalism' that selectively misinterprets our history from ethnocentric and chauvinist perspectives.

But these responses have only deepened our crises, and divided our peoples; they have precipitated a violence and cynicism that can only add up to a negation of whatever has been left of the Gandhian legacy. Yet Gandhi, I believe, today represents a counter-cultural response for alternative community building in our society. To my mind Gandhi provides us not just with a utopian critique, rather he opens out constructive possibilities for us to work with. For Gandhi creatively re-interpreted our tradition just as incisively as he critiqued the West. His struggle for our freedom, implied a de-colonisation of our mind, an exorcising of the intimate enemy, internalised from own our past, as well as from our encounter with the West.

III. The Context of Pluralism

'Self' and 'Other'

All pluralism in society is eventually founded on the polarity between the 'self' and the 'other' among different persons and diverse groups. The 'other' cannot simply be wished away, but always poses a question to the 'self', one that will not just go away. One can ignore the question only for a while, but the questioning cannot be so easily negated, unless one destroys the questioner. History bears witness to how dominant persons and groups have eliminated subordinate ones in massacres and genocides, or forcibly assimilated them in miscegenation or ethnocide.

But where such brutal solutions cannot be attempted, either because of the realities on the ground or the ethical ideals of a people, then, tolerance can be our only viable human response. Obviously, an understanding of tolerance, especially in a pluralist society, must elaborate its many dimensions and distinct levels. Hence the need for a dialogue between the 'self' and the 'other', one that moves through these dimensions and across these levels of tolerance to a fulfilling and enriching encounter of the 'self' and the 'other'.

Moreover, it is important that this encounter between groups, between the self and the other, ego and alter, be mediated by a third. Hence the need to extend the dyad to a triad. Whether this third party be a more specific agency, like 'the nation-state, or simply the government, [Gupta 1996:11] or a more general frame of reference, like 'Chomsky's grammar, Levi-Strauss's 'structure', Marx's 'mode of production', and Lacan's 'Other' (the big 'O'),' [*ibid* 183] it is this triadic approach that makes for 'contextualising human agency and culture in a dynamic holistic framework.' [*ibid*.139]

For us, in the Indian scenario, the most significant third in the triad is of course the state for the Constitution of India recognises 'the principle of equality between groups qua group.' [Sheth 1989:8] This is the foundation for collective rights with special consideration for the more vulnerable sections of our society, such as linguistic and religious minorities and socially and economically backward classes. And yet today there are powerful movements for homogenisation within the same body-politic.

Individual and Collective Rights

Now an individual's identity is never formed in a walled-in consciousness. Such solipsism can only be dangerously pathological and asocial. So too a group's identity is never constructed entirely from within the group but always in an engagement/relationship with its environment, both natural and social. Thus the importance of dialogue with other groups and communities that makes group identity a dynamic rather than a static process. Indeed, because group identity is always in process, it can be reinvented, reshaped, reconstructed anew by each generation. [Fischer 1990:195]

Yet there is always the danger, the possibility, and, depending on the power relationship involved, the probability of a group being engulfed and assimilated into its social environment to the point that it loses its distinctiveness, its identity. Only when difference becomes a positive value in a society is there a defence against such encompassment specially for the weaker, more vulnerable groups, such as tribals and Dalits, various minorities and other marginalised groups are in our society. Only a sustained commitment to tolerance guarantees equal treatment and dignity for such groups, very much as it does for similarly vulnerable individuals/persons.

This is the Gandhian insight and he effectively based his praxis of ahimsa and satyagraha on such an ethics. Indeed. for him: 'If we want to cultivate a true spirit of democracy, we cannot afford to be intolerant. Intolerance betrays want of faith in one's own cause.' (*Young India* 2 Feb 1921)

And as individual rights protect individuals so too must cultural rights protect and promote group identity and dignity. 'Cultural rights', argues Veena Das, 'express the concern of groups to be given a sign of their radical acceptance in the world.' [Das 1994:156] This is why they are contested with such political passion. However, conceding these de jure is not as yet affirming them de facto. Affirmative action is often needed but negated in the name of a formal justice that has lost its substance.

The basic foundation for all this must be a radical acceptance of plurality in all the multi-faceted dimensions of a plural society's religious culture and of its political economy. This can then become the point of departure for a committed response. For acceptance cannot be creative or constructive if it is merely uncritical and passive. In the final analysis, the trajectory of our response to pluralism must begin with accepting differences and respecting other identities, and reach out to live and celebrate diversity as parts of a larger organic whole.

The Limits of Repression

However, we cannot avoid the grim reality of the divisions that mark our societies and our neighbourhoods. For if common human concerns bring us together differing social interests set us apart. We cannot of course wish away such differences, nor can we impose a uniformity over them, or enforce a consensus on them. In an earlier less pluri-form world, most unfortunately, the accepted way of settling such differences was by confrontation and controversy, wherein each party tried not only to establish its own position, but at the same time to demolish the one of the other.

However, this age of controversy settled nothing and neither did the religious wars it precipitated. For particularly in matters of conscience, human beings cannot be forced, or imposed upon for an indefinite length of time. Yet there remains the temptation to fall back

on such inhuman and 'final solutions'! History witnesses to numerous such instances even into our own era. Vested interests are being sorted out through ethnic cleansing regardless of the human cost; communal violence is used as strategy to mobilise support and redraw the political map in blood. Today in a globalising world, conflicting economic interests are being interpreted as the 'clash of civilisations' with irreconcilable religious worldviews. In a unipolar world, such an understanding only invites the dominant cultures to suppress or assimilate the subaltern ones.

But repression and force only make for unstable and potentially violent situations. In our world today pluralism is an inescapable necessity, whether ideological, religious, or otherwise. We have, moreover, evolved a whole doctrine of human freedom and the dignity of the human person. But we have still a long way to go in making these a reality in the lives of our people.

Diversity and Difference

But differences are not only between the individual and the group, they are also between groups and peoples. Such differences at the level of the group can be even more intractable and uncompromising than those at the individual level. Religion is certainly one of the most primordial of these and fraught with a huge potential for explosive conflict. We are still coming to terms with the implications of religious freedom and cultural rights for different groups within a single society. We are beginning to realise that uniformity is not the only or the most creative response to difference. It often forces differences underground and when divisions disappear at one level, they reappear at another, often in even more divisive and volatile expressions. Nor is mere co-existence a viable answer in an ever-shrinking world.

Hence, we are coming to value diversity as something potentially enriching and even uniting at a higher level of union. This is certainly true of the rich religious traditions of this land, when they are not manipulated for narrow political gain or subversive communal interests. It is such an enriching union which must inspire us as neighbours to reach out to each other in a common concern and in a shared faith, a union that brings us together with our differences into a unity in diversity, one that does not negate our peculiarities, but rather one that accepts and respects, yes, even celebrates them.

In other words, the necessity of pluralism today is not to be isolated as an unnecessary evil to be repressed, before it engulfs us further; or tolerated as a necessary one to be distanced, since it cannot be dismissed. Rather it is a challenge which will not go away. It must be constructively and creatively met or it will exhaust, if not destroy us.

For we cannot any more settle conflicting differences between groups and peoples through violence. Too much blood and tears have been shed on this already. The only way open for us now is that of tolerance and dialogue. Indeed, even with the intolerant and the violent we must still exercise tolerance and attempt dialogue. But lest what we are urging seems naive and simplistic we must clarify our understanding of these concepts so that the limits of tolerance and the conditions for dialogue can be addressed at some depth in their complexity.

IV. The Levels of Tolerance

In our understanding tolerance cannot have merely a negative or passive meaning. Rather it must also imply an active and positive response to coping with our differences. Thus, we can distinguish levels of tolerance from reluctant forbearance to joyful acceptance. Here we are not considering the ethical constraints on tolerance in a negative sense, i.e., the boundaries beyond which tolerance would be unethical. This would require another discussion. Rather we focus more positively on the limits to which tolerance can be constructively extended.

Following Raimundo Panikkar, [Panikkar 1983: pp.20-36], we can distinguish four levels of tolerance. The first is tolerance as a practical necessity, i.e., bearing with a lesser evil for the sake of a greater good. This amounts to passively accepting necessary evils and is little more than political pragmatism.

The second level is based on the realisation that the human grasp of any truth is always partial and never complete. Certainly, this is true of religious or revealed truth. Such a philosophical realisation makes us cautious in absolutising our own ‘truths’, and even more so in rejecting those of others we disagree with, and from such philosophically founded tolerance will come respect.

At the third level, ethical or religious tolerance derives from the moral imperative to love others, especially those different from us, even our enemies. This is far more demanding than the acceptance and respect at the earlier levels of tolerance. Yet the different ‘other’

here is still the 'object' of one's love. Such love can even make us celebrate our own differences, but it cannot overcome or transcend them completely in a higher unity.

Overcoming this objectification of the other is 'a mystical experience of tolerance.' Panikkar explains that here tolerance 'is the way one being exists in another and expresses the radical interdependence of all that exists'. (*ibid*.23) In the final analysis it is only this kind of mystical tolerance that can overcome and transcend the contradictions and conflicts between religious traditions, bringing them into a higher communion.

Dimensions of Understanding

At each of these levels, the political, the philosophical, the religious, the mystical, following Panikkar again, we can distinguish two dimensions of understanding, or rather pre-understanding.[*ibid*.25-34] Thus our comprehension can be in terms of a more or less explicit meaning that is conceptually grasped; or in the context of our pre-understanding, of implicit pre-judgments and presumptions, in terms of a meaningfulness that can be only symbolically represented. These are the levels of 'ideology' and 'myth', respectively.

Myth as defined by Panikkar, set 'the horizon of intelligibility' for us, 'over against which any hermeneutic is possible.' [*ibid*.101] It is taken for granted, unquestioned, a part of our pre-understanding, something we accept in 'faith'.

Once it is rationally articulated, myth is demythicised and so is our faith, in a 'passage from mythos to logos', from myth to reason, as the articulated conscious word. This then develops into an 'ideology', which in this context Panikkar describes as:

'the more or less coherent ensemble of ideas that make up critical awareness, i.e., the doctrinal system that enables you to locate yourself rationally… a spacio-temporal system constructed by the logos as a function of its concrete historical moment.' [*ibid* 21]

These distinctions have crucial implications for our understanding and practice of tolerance.

For the more coherent and cogent the articulation of an ideology is, the more likely it is to reduce other understandings to its own terms, or reject them, if they cannot be fitted into its own horizons. We do of course, need ideologies for we need to articulate and rationalise our understanding in the various dimensions of human experience. But ideologies must be able to accept such alternative

understandings, and open themselves out into broader and deeper perspectives. This will depend on the myth, the pre-understanding, from which it derives. For the more extensive and intensive the myth's meaningfulness, the richer and denser its symbolism, the more open and accommodating the ideology that can be built on it.

Hence we can conclude with Panikkar: *'the tolerance you have is directly proportional to the myth you live and inversely proportional to the ideology you follow.'* [*ibid*. p.20, emphasis in original text] What we need, then, is a metanoia of our myths to escape and be liberated from the paranoia of our ideologies, whether religious, political or otherwise. Both myth and ideology are found in all the dimensions of tolerance indicated earlier, though there is obviously a greater affinity for ideology in political and philosophical tolerance, as there is for 'myth' in the religious and mystical one.

Complexity and Challenge

With reference to our socio-cultural traditions, then, we can, and indeed we must distinguish between the mythic and the ideological. This makes for a greater complexity and challenge in our praxis, as an action-reflection-action process, a dialectical interaction between theory and practice. It is our conviction that the constructive potential of such a dialectic can be fully realised only in a creative dialogue for both myth and ideology. For it is only in the mutual encounter of myths that they are deepened and enriched, and in the reciprocal exchange among ideologies that these become more open and refined.

Now in this country, plurality is so deeply and intricately woven into our society that any attempt to homogenise it can only be suicidal. But ways of coping with it range from indifference and non-engagement, all the way to affirmation and celebration. Given the intricacies of our social interdependence, the first approach can only end with a nihilistic relativism if it does not collapse in annihilating chaos. The second must open into ever broader dimensions and deeper levels of tolerance. Only then can we experience a metanoia in ourself that will free us from the paranoia we have of each other.

V. The Hermeneutics of Dialogue

Difference and Indifference

It is this second that must be the basis of a dialogue in which my 'self' and the 'other' are both discovered and enriched. And as we unveil our 'self' in the 'other', and the 'other' in our 'self', we will find that our deepest identity and bonding transcends all differences in an immanent I-thou communion. Indeed, dialogue is the most constructive and creative practice of tolerance, and the only viable way to cope with the bewildering diversity and difference that both challenges and confounds us, it is both a precious treasure and dangerous legacy!

Now there is always a danger of celebrating difference in seclusion and not in dialogical encounter with the other. The assertion of such isolated alterity, as in fact with some post-modernists, easily 'shades over into the celebration of indifference, non-engagement and indecision.' [Dallmayr 1989:90] Such incommunicable uniqueness cannot but collapse into a nihilistic relativism, which is very far from the radical relativity on which a creative pluralism and a respectful tolerance must be premised.

Dialogue and Dialectics

For Panikkar 'dialogue' is a most fundamental condition of existence. It is our way of being.

'Dialogue is, fundamentally, opening myself to another so that he might speak and reveal my myth.... Dialogue is a way of knowing myself and of disentangling my own point of view from other viewpoints and from me.' [Panikkar, 1983 :242]

Dialogue, then, goes beyond dialectics. For 'dialectics is the optimism of reason. Dialogue is the optimism of the heart.' [*ibid.* :243] Thus we can speak of a 'dialectical dialogue' which would pertain to the encounter of ideologies, while a 'dialogical dialogue' would be more pertinent to the meeting of myths.

'Difference', then, as Gadamer insists 'stands at the beginning of a conversation, not its end,' [Gadamer 1989a: 113] awaiting the moment of coherence, of fulfilment, of a 'fusion of horizon' that will complete

the hermeneutic circle and set it off again for us— 'we who are a conversation'. [*ibid*.: 110] For we are constructed and deconstructed in dialogue with ourselves and others. Indeed, 'the conversation that we are is one that never ends.' [Gadamer 1989a:95] For dialogue and conversation are intrinsic to the human condition, the very language of our existence, the essential hermeneutic of all our experience.

Gadamer explains how 'to be in conversation, however, means to be beyond oneself as if to another.' For, as he insisted in 1960 all genuine dialogue must be premised on an authentic hermeneutic:

'to recognise oneself (or one's own) in the other and find a home abroad— this is the basic movement of spirit whose being consists in this return to itself from otherness.' [Gadamer 1975:15]

But we would emphasise a further implication of such dialogical hermeneutics: 'the challenge to recognise otherness or the alien in oneself (or one's own).' [Dallmayr 1989:92]

VI. The Dialectics of Ethnicity

It should now be apparent how plurality without tolerance and dialogue can only lead to an intractable escalation of community and group conflicts and contradictions, as in this country and so many others, especially in South Asia, where the ethnic cauldron so easily boils over into violence. Indeed, we are witnessing an increasing ethnification among our peoples.

Now given a plurality of discourses, ethnicity is best problematised as a dialectic process in which a group produces and reproduces itself in the context of its material history. A political economy approach does well in identifying the necessary conditions in this, but it must be extended to integrate a socio-cultural one to deal with the sufficient conditions of its development. Moreover, it is important to distinguish between a hegemonic and a counter-hegemonic ethnicity by locating ethnic divisions within the class structure of a society.

In describing ethnicity three dimensions must be considered: objective, subjective and contextual, as critical to understanding the construction of its identity and the recognition of its dignity. The first provides the objective basis for defining an ethnic category, the second makes for the subjective construction of an ethnic identity, the third situates the social context for inter-group relations.

Ethnic Identity and Social Dignity

An individual's identity is formed in the intimate encounter with significant others. An ethnic identity, however, is socialized in a more public space. There is of course a relationship between the two in any ethnie, but the first is never a straightforward projection of the latter.

Inevitably there are those who can dominate such social spaces to their own advantage. Hence the importance of 'the politics of recognition' in shaping our identity, especially in a multi-cultural context. [Taylor 1992:25] Moreover, 'nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.' [*ibid*] i.e., a negative identity, a negated dignity. This is precisely what prejudice is all about.

The intimate relationship between identity and dignity must be considered in the context of the politics of universalism that founds equal dignity, and the politics of difference on which unique identities are premised. The first leads to similarity and homogeneity which is the quest of the nation-state. Second accepts particularity and heterogeneity which is the aspiration of a multi-cultural society.

It is possible for one to contradict and displace the other. The first quest may cancel out the second aspiration or vice versa. There is then a dilemma here, but if we concede a priority to the universally human over the culturally specific, then a constructive reconciliation is possible. This would mean that a homogenizing universalism cannot be allowed to be so absolute as to negate cultural and ethnic diversities, but rather made to respect and even celebrate them within the limits set by cultural rights. However, 'the right to culture' cannot be unconditional either. For cultural rights cannot contradict more fundamental human rights; rather they can only be legitimate in the context of 'a culture of rights.' [Bhargava 1991]

Class Contradictions and Ethnic Conflicts

A viable analysis of the multiple inter- and intra- ethnic and elite conflicts and contradictions, must consider the class factor if it is to do justice, or indeed have any relevance to the complexities involved. Thus where a big ethnic community is stratified by class, or a large social class is segmented in diverse ethnic groups, contradictions between ethnic identities and class interests can develop, that allow

group consciousness to be manipulated in favour of vested interests. Thus a dominant class can divide and rule subordinate ones by playing up its diverse ethnic identities just as an elite within an ethnic community can co-opt its people to alien interests by appealing to their common identity.

Hence ethnicity can be both mobilizing and divisive. It can be used to unite a group against discrimination; or to divide groups to exploit them. We must be sensitive to the delicate distinction between ethnicity as a uniting 'myth' and ethnicity as a dividing 'ideology'. Hopefully, such an analysis will help to reconstruct a more positive ethnicity, one that is neither exclusivist nor defensive, but respectful of and open to the other, as parts of a whole, in which each contributes and receives to the mutual enrichment of each group, and the overall advantage of society.

Nationalist Ideology and Ethnic Myth

The crucial question that must now be addressed is this: how do we ensure the necessary tolerance in order to promote a dialogue between the plurality of the 'self', the 'other' and the 'state' (the Other with the capitalised 'O')?

Nationalism has certainly been one of the five most powerful ideologies for mobilizing people in the modern world. [Ward 1959] Yet the very ideology that has been used to unite people in a common cause, has also been imposed on subordinate groups by dominant ones to assimilate them into their vested interests.

Here too as with ethnicity we must make a decisive distinction between the dual characteristics of nationalism. For 'nationalism' signifies both an ideological doctrine and a wider symbolic universe and fund of sentiments.' [Smith 1994: 725] The ideology claims the sole source of political power for the nation and the ultimate loyalty of its citizens, preferably in their own sovereign nation-state. The wider 'culture of nationalism' is concerned with transcending narrower group loyalties for the 'ideals of autonomy, unity and identity', [*ibid.*] in a larger more free, egalitarian and fraternal whole.

There is an inherent conflict here between an assimilating national ideology and a resistant ethnic consciousness. But in a wider weltanschauung of nationalism there need be no contradiction between the national mythology and the ethnic 'mythomoteur', the constitutive political myth of an ethnie.' [Smith 1994:716] They both

can be reconciled in a larger whole, constituting a unity in diversity. We believe, such a pluralist culture of nationalism will allow for a multi-ethnic nation in a multi-nation state.

VII. The Gandhian 'Civil-State'

To our thinking, neither the adversarial model of conventional liberal politics, nor the recently proposed 'consociational' one of elite negotiation and consensus [Lijphart 1977:25] seem adequate to this venture. These are both Western models premised on a pragmatism born of their particular history. We need to break out of such textbook models and imagine and construct our own, premised on the crucial distinction between the state and society so important for most non-Western civilizations.

In the Gandhian view the more minimalist a state and the less dependent a society was on it, the greater the space for democratic participation and national integration for a unity in diversity. [Jain 1989] For Gandhi, the state was basically an instrument of violence in a concentrated and organized form, [Ramamurthi 1986: 136] and hence rather than the capturing of state power by a few, his endeavour was to generate people power for the many. This decentralisation and mass mobilization forms the basis of the Gandhian concept of a moral polity and the non-violent state. [Rao 1986: 147]

The basis for this would be the older civilisational order in which the state did not order society, rather it is the order of society that the state maintained. It is possible then, in this indigenous model, to consider

'the state not as an instrument of an ethnically defined nation, but a political entity functioning under the control of a civil society. It will be a state for and on the behalf of civil society: in brief a civil state and not a nation state' [Sheth 1989: 626]

Patriotism and Nationalism

For in Gandhi

> 'over time, the Indian freedom movement ceased to be an expression of only nationalist consolidation; it came to acquire a new stature as a symbol of the universal struggle for political justice and cultural dignity.' [Nandy 1994:2-3]

Hence in Gandhi's patriotism,

'there was a built-in critique of nationalism and refusal to recognize the nation-state as the organizing principle of the Indian civilization and as the last word in the country's political life.' [Nandy 1994:3]

Indeed, for Gandhi, as with Tagore, this was 'the ultimate civilizational ambition of India: to be the cultural epitome of the world and convert all passionate self-other debates into self-self debates.' [*ibid.*:82] In other words to convert divisive debates into integrating dialogues, to transform exclusive identities into inclusive ones, to change hostile controversy into empathetic consensus.

For only a civil society, that can incorporate the state within a larger civilisational matrix of coexistence and co-operation among interlocking groups, will be able to defuse the conflict and contradiction between exclusive ethnicity and homogenising nationalism, and reconstruct them in more constructive and creative ways, in the richer diversity of civilisation, and a deeper unity of civic humanism. Only then will the aggressive political nation-state have withered away! Only then will a multi-nation state constrained in a multi-cultural society be feasible.

VII. Concluding the Discussion

To recapitulate the argument, we began this presentation with a discussion of the inescapable plurality of our society and urged tolerance and dialogue as an authentic humanising response. We examined the limits to which tolerance can be constructively extended at various levels, with respect to two dimensions of understanding: 'myth' and 'ideology'. We treated dialogue as a fundamental condition of our human existence and urged a metanoia of our hearts to free us from our paranoia of each other.

Finally, we focused on ethnicity as a process, and the relationship of diverse kinds of ethnicity to various forms of nationalism. But none of these by themselves guarantee an adequate political model to address the fundamental issues involved: issues of social pluralism and distributive justice, of group identity and personal dignity, of ethnic diversity and cultural rights, of economic equality and political participation. Hence beyond the nation-state, a civil-state embedded

in a civilisational order is required. This will make possible a multi-nation state in a multi-cultural society.

Today tolerance and dialogue are defining ways of being human in our plural, ethnified world. The relevance of Gandhi to all this cannot be over-emphasised: whether this be an ethic for tolerance or an epistemology for dialogue, an alternative politics or a counter-cultural community, Gandhi's sensitivity to pluralism and his understanding of truth as praxis, his commitment to non-violence and his practice of satyagraha, his pursuit of swarajya and his critique of modernity, all this and more makes Gandhi a crucial ally in defining the terms of a critical alternative discourse, for a multi-ethnic society in our times, a society in which tolerance and dialogue would be a crucially defining/definitive response.

Some Searching Questions

This study has attempted to identify the themes in a discourse relevant to a plural society and a multi-ethnic state, though it can by itself make no pretence of dealing adequately with all the themes and topics involved. This would need to be part of a larger and perhaps a team effort to frame the questions to be probed and articulate the issues to be explored. Hence the attraction of a seminar/workshop that could help towards this end.

Here some of these questions and issues are presented for discussion at this seminar and further investigation later. These are intended to focus our concerns so that our response can be more fine-tuned and committed.

1. Given the hard reality of our pluriform society and the impossibility of homogenising our peoples without dehumanising them, how do we set a framework for a 'politics of difference', based on unique identity, and a 'politics of universalism', based on equal dignity? What space do we give for the politics of recognition and affirmative action?

2. In choosing tolerance as our response to plurality, how do we explore the various dimensions and levels of toleration, and establish ethical and practical limits for them? How do we legitimate and practice a tolerance that is not just a matter of acceptance of the other, but one of respect for another's difference, and even a celebration of our diversity?

3. How do we contextualise the dialogue between the 'self' and the 'other', within and across various levels of interaction, of persons,

groups, and communities in our society? How do we establish individual and community rights within a framework that respects the dignity of persons and the identity of groups?

4. What relationships do we need to explore and establish between civil society and the state? What are the possibilities and the resources we have to construct a 'civil state', that will contain both ethnicity and nationalism, since we seem unable to exorcise either in our world today?

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3.
GANDHI'S HIND SWARAJ: NEED FOR A NEW HERMENEUTIC

(This paper is based on a presentation made at Pune University, Dept. of Philosophy, for a seminar on Rethinking Swaraj, 25 -27 June 1998.)

INTRODUCTION: A HERMENEUTIC ENDEAVOUR
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II. GANDHI'S CRITIQUE OF THE MODERN WEST
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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abstract

In our present context of neo-colonialism, post-industrialism and post-modernism, themes of colonial imperialism, industrial capitalism, and rationalist materialism need to be re-appraised with a new hermeneutic. With his critique of modern civilization, Gandhi goes on to make an emphatic affirmation of Indian culture. Here are the major themes for our dialogic encounter: unity and diversity, swaraj, swadeshi, satya and satyagraha with their imperative of ahimsa or non-violence. In rooting such themes in Indian culture, Gandhi is not just re-interpreting and re-appraising our cultural heritage, he is refreshingly relevant to the cascade of contemporary crises, even as he poses a liberating challenge to a deeper self-realisation and the achievement of a more humane and humanising society.

Introduction: A Hermeneutic Endeavour

Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* (HS) is surely a foundational text for any understanding of the man and his mission. To dismiss it as quaint and out of date is not just to miss his contribution to our contemporary situation, but to misunderstand his message as well. And yet a slavish interpretation of the text would simply amount to a kind of Gandhian fundamentalism that is neither creative nor constructive. Our attempt in this paper will be to engage in a dialogue with the text in its context, so that both the man and his message can speak to us in our contemporary situation. What we would hope from such a dialogue would be to discover not just the meaning but the meaningfulness of the text. For in an authentic hermeneutic understanding, it is the 'surplus of meaning' we encounter in dialogue that we finally want to comprehend.

Gandhi is a critical traditionalist whose critique does speak to critical modernity today. There is much in 'modern civilisation' he rejects, but not the liberative contribution of modernity: civil liberties, religious tolerance, equality, and poverty alleviation. Rather his effort can be interpreted as an attempt to integrate these positive elements with a liberating re-interpretation of tradition. In his unique way, he sets up a creative encounter for this integration, even as some see him as radical and others as reactionary. With his critique from within the tradition, Gandhi becomes the great synthesizer of contraries if not of contradictions, within and across traditions.

1. Multiple Dialogues

Gandhi presents his *Hind Swaraj* in the form of a dialogue between an 'editor' and a 'reader', between Gandhi as editor of the *Indian Opinion* and his sceptical protagonist, the composite reader to whom the book is addressed: patriots and expatriates, extremists and moderates, leaders and people. He explains that 'the Gujarati language readily lends itself to such treatment and it is considered the best method of treating difficult subjects.' (HS 'Preface to English Ed.') Indeed, as with Plato's dialogues, this is a prevalent form in traditional Indian philosophical discourse. It suggests open-ended guidelines rather than closed-end blueprints.

Many have suggested Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* is also a dialogue with himself, sorting out, clarifying and sharpening his own thoughts on the subject. In making this presentation I too am suggesting a similar dialogue with ourselves, in a search for the relevant truth, the 'satya', that underpins and founds Gandhi's own lifelong quest. My intention is not to provoke a debate but rather to catalyse a dialogue not just within oneself, but between ourselves as well, a dialogue between presenter and respondents, as also among the respondents themselves. We believe such a dialogue demands a new hermeneutic.

For the fundamental concerns expressed in this dialogue certainly do speak to us today, even though they are not identical to ours. Gandhi is surely a seminal thinker. Whether in his analysis of our colonial experience, (Nandy 1987) or his method of conflict resolution or for developmental alternatives (Schumacher 1975) or on religious pluralism (Chatterjee 1983), his relevance to our cumulative crises is crucial. Hind Swaraj is the seed from which Gandhi's later thinking grew. The tree did blossom and fructify, as it was pruned and engrafted anew. For Gandhi never hesitated to change, but always in view of a more comprehensive consistency. But the basics were all there in 1908.

This was 'a proclamation of ideological independence' (Dalton 1993:16) he never compromised, his 'confession of the faith' (Nanda 1974:66) he never abandoned, this 'rather incendiary manifesto' (Erikson 1969:217) proclaiming his revolution. No wonder it was banned by the colonial government in 1910 for fear of sedition. But Gandhi's purpose was focused elsewhere. Parel elaborates six reasons for writing *Hind Swaraj*:(Parel 1997: xiv-xvii) Gandhi's own compulsions; to clarify the meaning of swaraj; to respond to the ideology of political terrorism; to warn against modern civilisation; to

reconcile Indians and Britishers; to propose a practical philosophy in the modern world.

What we need, today, is a critical appreciation and re-interpretation, so that the text can speak to us and not past us, as often happens when someone like Gandhi is idolised and left on a pedestal far from our everyday lives, or trivialized and dismissed from our contemporary living. Hence this attempt at a new hermeneutic.

2. Text and Context

Paul Ricoeur cautions us against certain misconceived ways of appropriating a text. (Ricoeur 1976) Our attempt must go beyond the author, the 'mens autoris', to open up the text in a more dynamic way. (*ibid*.:92) For a text has a life often beyond the intentions of the author. Neither can we restrict ourselves to the understanding of those originally addressed by the text, since once a living and foundational text escapes both its author and his situation, it escapes its original addressees as well. (*ibid*.:93) Nor can the actual readers in their present context claim an authoritative interpretation, since here too finite capacities, pre-judgements and pre-options are inevitable. (*ibid*.)

The first two ways of appropriating a text can only make for a reconstruction of the past, the third only a subjective present. But if each of these three separately are inadequate, falling short of a viable hermeneutic, taken together more comprehensively, they can add up to 'a mediation of the past into the present', so that our understanding of a text is situated in the present and shaped by the past.

Hence for Hans-Georg Gadamer, the present situation of the interpreter is not something negative, but 'already constitutively involved in any process of understanding. (Linge 1977:xiv) We can never be entirely rid of our prejudices, or more literally our 'pre-judgments', or in communication terminology our 'filters'. For 'the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience.' (*ibid*.:9) Hence it follows there can be no pre-suppositionless interpretation since there is no pre-judgmentless experience!

Now if we realize that the significance of a text is located within a 'horizon of meaning', then when it is read within different 'horizons', different potential meanings will be actualized. (*ibid*. 9) For 'the sense of a text is not behind the text but in front of it.' (Ricoeur 1976:88) Unfortunately only a 'collision with other's horizons' makes us aware of our own deep-seated pre-judgments. (Linge 1997:xxi) This happens

usually in times of intense inter-cultural contact or rapid intra-cultural change.

There can in such circumstances be a 'fusion of horizons', that brings out the meaning of a text beyond the original intention of the author, or the understanding of the first addressees, or even the perception of a present reader. For there is always an 'excess of meaning' in a text (*ibid.*:xxv) hidden in its 'circle of the unexpressed' as it has been called. (*ibid.:*xxxii) To understand a text thus 'is to follow its movement from sense to reference; from what it says, to what it talks about.' (*ibid.:*xxxii)

Being aware of one's own pre-judgments and those of the author, will enable the interpreter to discover

'the fundamental concern that motivates the text – the question that it seeks to answer and that it poses again and again to its interpreters..... To locate the question of the text is not simply to leave it, but to put it again, so that we, the questioners, are ourselves questioned by the subject matter of the text.'(*ibid.:*xxxi).

In such a dialogue, 'it is this infinity of the unsaid--this relation to the whole of being that is disclosed in what is said--into which the one who understands is drawn.' (*ibid.:*xxxii) Hence we need to go beyond the Enlightenment ideal of an unbiased autonomous subject striving towards an objective rationality, and pretending to succeed in unearthing the true meaning of a text in a universally valid context. For we must realise that such a rationalist methodology does violence to text and context, to author and reader.

3. Mutual Interrogations

Such is the conversation, that we, with this new hermeneutic, seek to initiate and carry forward with Gandhi and his Hind Swaraj. We want to enter into his context and comprehend his worldview from within as it were, while being fully aware of our own situation and world. We want to be aware of the concerns and aspirations, fears and hopes that make up our world and his, and as we question his Hind Swaraj from where we are, we must allow the fundamental options and commitments, the values and the mind-set there, to challenge us in our present situation and calling.

Surely there is an 'infinity of the unsaid' still to be articulated in this mutual interrogation. For all the major themes are certainly rich and varied and yet integrated in a way that adds up to a comprehensive perspective and a compelling praxis: a politics beyond

pragmatism, a patriotism beyond nationalism, an ethics beyond utilitarianism, a spirituality beyond religion.

Now even an initial stage of such questioning cannot but begin from a particular perspective and with its own pre-assumptions. This is what we would call the hermeneutical 'suspicion'. 'It is more than a doubt. It is an insight, still dim and unconfirmed but already charged with an interrogatory force.'(Libano 1982:15) But in a dialogic encounter, such interrogation cannot but be mutual.

For our hermeneutic suspicions are not just a matter of casting doubts so much as locating the text within its own horizon of meaning and then interrogating it from within own our contemporary understanding. Hopefully, this will bring about a fusion of horizons that will bring out the excess of meaning hidden in the text. It will help us not just to reinterpret the text, but to reconstruct our own self-understanding as well, thus making the text meaningful to our context. This precisely is the test for the validity of any new hermeneutic in regard to any foundational text. We will begin this dialogue with Gandhi's critique of modern civilisation as realised in the West of his day.

Here some of the crucial themes we interrogate are: colonial imperialism, industrial capitalism, rationalist materialism. In our present context of neo-colonialism, post-industrialism and post-modernism, these need to be re-appraised with a new hermeneutic so that they can speak to us today.

With his critique of modern civilization, Gandhi goes on to make an emphatic affirmation of Indian culture. Here the main focus of our interrogation is the heart of our dialogic encounter: swaraj, both personal and social; swadeshi, as localism and rural mindedness; satya and satyagraha with their imperative of ahimsa or non-violence. Thus it is now Gandhi who interrogates our understanding of unity and diversity, our commitment to tolerance and dialogue, our practice of assimilation and pluralism.

In rooting such themes in Indian culture Gandhi is not just re-interpreting and re-appraising our cultural heritage, he is refreshingly relevant to the cascade of our contemporary crises, of which we consider three crucial ones here: our post-socialist world, the globalisation it is undergoing, and violence that is so endemic to it. To all this Gandhi poses a liberating challenge to a deeper self-realisation and the achievement of a more humane and humanising society in a unique and integrated way. Finally, we invite a Marxist complement and conclude our dialogue with the hope of a counter-cultural transformation.

II. Gandhi's Critique of the Modern West

After a failed political mission in London on behalf of the Indians of South Africa, on the boat back to the Cape, Gandhi wrote Hind Swaraj almost in a manic surge. Yet his critique is directed not at the British people but at their 'modern civilisation'. His concern is not just to caution Indians against it and save the British from being ruined by it, but also to revitalise true cultural values of both East and West in a new regenerated modernity. For Gandhi civilisation was by definition a moral enterprise: 'Civilisation is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty.' (HS Ch.13) Yet he is not as pessimistic about this 'Civilisation and Its Discontents' as was Freud or as despairing of this 'Brave New World' as was Aldous Huxley. Even though he had seen and experienced its brutal and shocking downside, he did not regard it as an 'incurable disease.' (*ibid.* Ch.5) At the very start then, it is important to note that the 'modern West' that Gandhi rejected quite unambiguously in Hind Swaraj, is not the traditional culture of Europe, nor its expression in Christian civilisation.(CW 8:244) Rather this 'modern West', was really a contradiction of both, and for Gandhi 'just a hundred or perhaps not even fifty years old'.(CW 8:374) His rejection is uncompromising. He refuses to see it merely as an aberration of something that could be sound in principle. It is the very basic ethos of this modern West that Gandhi sets himself against. For he finds two unacceptable and unethical principles at its very core: 'might is right' and the 'survival of the fittest'. The first legitimated the politics of power as expounded earlier by Machiavelli; the second idealised the economics of self-interest as proposed by Adam Smith.

In the West, there is no doubt a vigorous rejecting of this ethic by the socialists and a clear distancing from it by the romantics. But 'With rare exceptions, alternatives to Western civilisation are always sought within its own basic thought system.' (Saran 1980:681) However,

> 'Gandhi rejects the central assumptions and world view implicit in modern civilisation... His commitment to an altogether different vital center makes his critique of modern civilisation total and his rejection final. That is why this condemnation of modern civilisation is so forthright, brutal and shocking.' (Roy 1984a:38-39)

There are three recurrent themes in Hind Swaraj that sum up and express Gandhi's critique and rejection of this unethical modern West which we will discuss here: colonial imperialism, industrial capitalism, and rationalist materialism.

1. Colonial Imperialism

Gandhi categorically insisted that 'the English have not taken India; we have given it to them. They are not in India because of their strength: but because we keep them.' (HS Ch.7) Thus the British did not defeat us, it is rather we who allowed and even welcomed our subjugation! Gandhi's critique of colonialism is more incisive and comprehensive than that of the moderates, like Gokhale, or the extremists, like Tilak or the terrorist from Bengal. He was one of the earliest to realise that colonialism was something to be overcome in our own consciousness first. (Nandy 1983:63) Unless this '*Intimate Enemy*' was exorcised and exiled. Unless we addressed this '*Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism,* (*ibid*.) we would always be a people enslaved by one power or another, whether foreign or native. For Gandhi would not want to exchange an external colonialism for an internal one, a white sahib for a brown one, or compensate the loss of 'Hindustan' with 'Englistan'! (HS Ch.4)

Some nineteenth-century colonials, like Sir James Fitzjames Stephen, legal member of the Viceroy's council, would claim that the 'Foundation of the Government of India' rested on conquest not consent. Yet no government can rule by naked power and be stable or secure. It must find some legitimacy, not just in terms acceptable to itself, but accepted as well by those over whom it exercises its power. Thus in British India colonialism was first justified by a supposedly Christianising mission, but very soon this was articulated in terms of a civilising one. 'The logic of justification required a perfect match between British gifts and Indian needs, the British strength and Indian deficiency.' (Parekh 1985:11) The complementarity between the two, gave the British their mandate to be here; a mandate that was acceptable to Indians as long as they needed these civilising 'gifts'. In turn, the British accepted their 'great historical task of bringing India the benefits of civilisation.' (*ibid*.:14)

But even this, if at all, was very selectively done. For 'liberalism and liberal institutions were thought appropriate for industrial societies; imperialism and colonialism for non-industrial ones, such as India.' (Parel 1997:xix) In rejecting this modern civilisation,

Gandhi is subverting the legitimacy of the colonial enterprise at its core. For there could be no colonialism without a civilising mission, (Nandy 1983:11) since it could hardly be sustained in India by brute force.

2. Industrial Capitalism

Gandhi sees capitalism as the dynamic behind colonial imperialism. Lenin too had said as much, and like Marx, Gandhi's rejection of capitalism is based on a profound repugnance to a system where profit is allowed to degrade labour, where machines are valued more than humans, and where automation is preferred to humanism.

It was this that moved Gandhi to his somewhat hyperbolic claim in Hind Swaraj: 'Machinery has begun to desolate Europe. Ruination is now knocking at the English gates. Machinery is the chief symbol of modern civilisation; it represents a great sin.' (Ch.19) However, by 1919 his views on machinery do begin to change right up to 1947, as he gradually comes to concede some positive aspects like time and labour saving, even as he warns against the negative ones of concentrating wealth and displacing workers (Parel 1997:164-70, 'Gandhi on Machinery, 1919-47')

For Gandhi quite rightly, what gives such a system its reach and capacity is the technology on which it is founded. Gandhi is very concerned with the shadow side of such technology, which is the very basis of industrial capitalism. He was acutely sensitive to how machinery can dehumanise and technology alienate. He extends the critique to the professions of medicine and law. Here the poor hardly benefit from these professional services, though they are often their victims. He backs up his criticism of these professions in *Hind Swaraj* with a later suggestion for their nationalisation: state-paid salaries through taxation and free professional services for all! (CW 68:97)

Here Gandhi is surely anticipating the trenchant criticism of someone like Ivan Illich who in *Medical Nemesis* (Illich:1977) underlines the iatrogenic consequences of medicine, i.e., doctor-caused disease! One only has to look at our judicial system today to realise how it has become the very denial of the justice it claims to propagate, a classic example of the contradiction between formal and substantive rationality that Weber cautioned us against.

3. Rationalist Materialism

Technology in turn is but the expression of science, which in modern civilisation becomes an uncompromising rationalism. For Gandhi, this is but a dangerously truncated humanism. His incisive remark is much to the point:

> 'Experience has humbled me enough to let me realise the specific limitations of reason. Just as dirt is matter misplaced, reason misplaced is lunacy! I plead not for the suppression of Reason, but for a due recognition of that in us which sanctifies reason itself.'(CW. 6:106)

Certainly, Gandhi is right in insisting on the unreasonableness of not setting any limits to reason. More recently a post-modern world has emphasised the aggressive and destructive march of this 'age of reason'. But Gandhi was not one to throw out the baby with the bath water. He would test his faith with his reason, but he would not allow his reason to destroy his faith.

What makes such technological rationalism even more destructive in Gandhi's view, is its flawed materialism. That is, the negation of the spiritual, the transcendent, or in other words, the denial of a religious worldview. It would be to trivialise Gandhi's critique to imagine that he was just another ascetic upset with a hedonistic society. His critique cuts much deeper. Rather he sees India as the Kurukshetra, the great battleground of these two antagonistic worldviews.

For Gandhi truth, satya, was much more than could be grasped by science or reason. For him, there was a reality beyond that perceived by the senses. It is this transcendent reality that gave meaning and value to our present one. In this Gandhi is very much in the mainstream of Hindu tradition, whether in its philosophical or popular expression. Indeed, most religious traditions would be similarly sensitive to such a transcendent world, even when it is not perceived as wholly other-worldly.

In a more secular world today we may not be sympathetic to such a worldview. And yet a materialism that is over-deterministic leaves no scope for human freedom and hope. It is here that we must find the relevance of this transcendent dimension to human life, that Gandhi so emphasises. It is this reaching out to a beyond, to a something more rather than a nothing else, that gives this human freedom and hope its dynamism and a reach beyond its grasp.

III. The Relevance of Gandhi's Critique Today

If we are to discover the validity of Gandhi's critique of modern civilisation for our times, we must concede that in stressing its shadow side, Gandhi does overlook many of its strengths: its scientific and critical spirit of inquiry: its human control over the natural world; its organisational capacity. Such achievement would imply a certain 'spiritual dimension' that Gandhi seems to have missed. (Parekh 1997:35)

However, in fairness to him, it must also be conceded that the focus of his criticism is modern civilisation of a specific period; his condemnation of colonialism focuses on its imperialistic inspiration; his rejection of industrialism derives mostly from its capitalist context; his apprehensions about rationality regard its truncation by materialism.

However, once the real limitations of Gandhi's critique are acknowledged, then we can better contextualise and interpret his relevance for us today. His insistence on greed and want as the decisive dynamic of modern civilisation emphasises how our active moral being is transmuted into passive consuming - whether this be with regard to politics in our neo-colonial world, or technologies in our post-industrial times, or culture in our post-modern age. These will now be some of the issues on which we must allow Gandhi to interrogate us. For

'the kinds of questions Gandhi asked nearly eight decades ago are the ones which now face both the underdeveloped and the post-industrial societies caught up in a deep upsurge of confusion and disillusionment.' (Sethi 1979:3)

1. Neo-colonialism

Gandhi's rejection of the supposedly civilising mission of colonialism brings into question the whole legitimacy of colonial rule, at a fundamental ethical level. He would have India unlearn much that she has from the modern West. Rather he suggests that it was this dehumanising civilisation that needed to be 'civilised'. If anything, there ought to be reversal of roles here! For if Indians 'would but revert to their own glorious civilisation, either the English would

adopt the latter and become Indianised or find their occupation in India gone.' (HS, Preface to English Ed.)

Thus, he opens up a host of ethical issues between the coloniser and the colonised, the dominant and the dominated, the oppressor and oppressed. The post-colonial era brought such issues into sharper focus across the world. Now with globalisation in a unipolar world, such concerns with empowerment and disempowerment, dependence and inter-dependence, have gained, not lost their urgency. Moreover, closer home this widening divide bears down on us more decisively than ever before. Our new economic policy increasingly represents a whole new vision of society, that takes for granted the internal colonialism we are experiencing today, as for instance between Bharat and India, the Bahujan and the twice-born *jatis,* the avaran and the savarna castes, the toiling masses and the privileged classes, the oppressed people and the oppressor groups, the minority traditions and the majority one,....

In a post-colonial world, with independence already fifty years old one would have thought that we, as a society, would have found our own distinctive place among the nations, and all our people their place in the sun. Yet the world in which we live in today can only be described as a neo-colonial one, *inter*-nationally divided into developed and developing nations, as also *intra*-nationally between privileged and under-privileged citizens. Moreover, these divisions are mutually reinforced, not just economically and politically but culturally and socially as well.

The victory of the West over our minds still prevails. It is still the centre of our world for we have not the self-respect, the self-reliance, the self-sufficiency to centre ourselves and so we condemn ourselves to remain on the periphery of someone else's centre. If there is a global system emerging, it is more strongly a Western than an Eastern one, no matter how much we urge that it is modern rather than traditional; and no matter how hard we try to be modern we are not allowed to catch up with and beat the West at its own game, though we seem willing to lose our souls in this vain attempt. Gandhi of course would want us to walk to the beat of other drummers, on our quest to self-realisation.

For the colonial masters had stripped our collective identity of any intrinsic dignity by denigrating us as a cowardly and passive people. Gandhi sought to reverse the damage to our collective psyche by his 'redefinition of courage and effective resistance in terms of, or through non-violence.' (Roy 1986:185)

The issue then of our identity as a nation and a people still remains to be resolved. Such identities are only viable in a genuinely multi-cultural world. Gandhi's urging in this regard is certainly relevant today even as we struggle to maintain a certain cultural pluralism in our own society where the propagation of a cultural nationalism is growing every day:

> 'I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want cultures of all lands to blow about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.' (*Harijan* 9 May 1936, p.100)

In urging us to be open to the future, he would not want us to lose our sheet anchor in the past. Today we seem to be in danger of losing both. Yet 'nothing could be more anti-Indian than attempts to make an ideology of Indianness and to fight, instead of incorporating or bypassing non-Indianness.' (Nandy 1980:112)

2. Post-industrialism

With the new information-intensive technologies moving away from the energy-intensive ones, there was surely much hope for a new freedom from degrading and monotonous work. However, what seems to have come in to replace this degrading monotony is not a new dignity of labour but rather a compulsive consumerist society, which is but dehumanising in newer ways. Thus the new information technology we have evolved has led to an overload that now finds its expression in 'infotainment'!

This should hardly surprise us since the ethic underlying post-industrialism is the same as that which underpinned industrial capitalism, namely, the profit motive and the market mechanism. Gandhi's critique was precisely a condemnation of these. If we find his ideas of trusteeship a little naive and impractical, we still have no alternative answer to humanising a system that seems to have betrayed what possibilities it might have had of bringing freedom and dignity to the toiling masses.

Moreover, technology, be it energy- or information-intensive, in the public rather than the private domain, has its own intrinsic dynamism, that instrumentalises our world and inevitably leads to a disenchantment and loss of innocence that can only bring us to the 'iron cage', as Weber warned us long ago. Our environmental crises and ecological breakdowns are surely a manifestation of this loss of

innocence, even to the point when we want newer technologies to repair the damage already done by the older ones.

The faith of one such recent technological ideologue runs thus: 'the deterioration of the environment produced by technology is a technological problem for which technology has found, is finding and will continue to find solutions.' (Medawar 1973:135) Hence extra-technological solutions to such problems are dismissed. Gandhi was precisely rejecting such a naive 'nineteenth-century optimism which sought for the positive sciences the liberation of humanity.' (Nandy 1986:102) But Such anti-modernism then was ahead of its time!

3. Post-modernism

The excessive and aggressive rationalism of this age of reason, now seems to have turned on itself with the postmodern revolt. But this revolt has thrown up its own irrationalities. It seems to have lost the liberating project that was implicit in modernity, and by devaluing reason, it seem to have fallen into another kind of romance of power, with the relativising of ethics. Paradoxically, what started in our post-modern venture as the affirmation of marginal peoples and groups, now has been co-opted in support of the status quo. For the kind of subjectivisation of ethics that this post-modernism has led to, undermines the appeal and the claims of any justice. For without an objective basis for rights and values, there can hardly be any mutually accepted legitimacy to arbitrate conflicting claims, when consensus irrevocably breaks down--a situation not uncommon among our deconstructionists. So then might becomes right, and the power its own legitimation.

Gandhi's trenchant critique of modernity was focused on modernist rationalism, but was equally opposed to a postmodern rejection of rationality. What Gandhi was pleading for is a richer concept of rationality and a meta-theory of rationalism. (Parekh 1995:165-6) Certainly, he would want one that would buttress and, not undermine an objective basis for ethics and justice. He wanted to contain excessive rationality within reasonable bounds without an irrational revolt against reason itself, but he would emphatically reject any forced choice between totalising rationalism and relativising subjectivism.

4. A New Hermeneutic

This is but the beginning of a dialogue with Gandhi on the three basic themes sketched in this section: freedom from the coloniser, the intimate enemy lodged in our consciousness, the one from whom we must have swaraj in its deepest and most authentic sense; an alternative to the capitalist ethic in a world where the known socialist states have collapsed, and where the crisis of capitalism itself seems to go unnoticed; the relevance of a reasonable rationality, particularly for a society that is still as tradition and caste bound as ours.

Such were the concerns of Gandhi already in 1908 and they have remained the same throughout his life. If he refused to change anything that he had written in *Hind Swaraj*, what he wrote then, was nonetheless fine-tuned, by his own personal growth and search for moksha, and contextualised by his later political commitments and agenda. Certainly, these represent themes that are not alien to us, and even as we contextualise Gandhi's basic concerns in the pilgrimage of his own life, we need to reinterpret and recontextualise them in our own, so that they can be the more relevant, and our dialogue with Gandhi the richer. This is precisely what we hope a new hermeneutic will do.

IV. Gandhi's affirmation of Indian Culture

Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* presents us with an idealised version of Indian culture that is completely counterpunctal to the 'modern West' he has so harshly criticised. He distances himself from the bourgeois democracy of the British parliament, (HS Ch.5) as from the political pragmatism of Garibaldi's unification of Italy (HS Ch.15). Neither was Japan's blind imitation of the West an acceptable model for India, even after its 1905 victory over Russia.(HS Ch.4) For with regard to 'true civilisation', Indian 'has nothing to learn from anybody else'.(HS. Ch.13) This was an obvious but deliberate hyperbole!

Thus Indian culture is emphatically affirmed as the very opposite of the West: centripetal, adaptive, contemplative. But Gandhi is not blind to the very real defects and deficiencies of our ancient civilisation, and he wants to 'utilise the new spirit that is born in us for purging ourselves of these evils.' (HS Ch.13) Hence, Gandhi is really re-interpreting Indian culture even as he idealises our ancient traditions. Already in *Hind Swaraj,* we can see the beginning of such

a re-interpretation that finds fuller expression in Gandhi's later life. Here we pick out three seminal themes: swaraj, swadeshi and satya.

1. Swaraj

It was at the Calcutta Congress in 1906 that 'swaraj' was first used by Dadabhai Naoroji to mean national independence, that is, freedom from colonial rule. But Gandhi radically re-interprets the word and gives it a dual meaning. The original Gujarati text uses 'swaraj' in both senses. Gandhi's English translation makes the duality explicit: swaraj as 'self-rule' and as 'self- government.' The first as self-control, rule over oneself, was the foundation for the second, self-government. In this second sense, local self-government was what Gandhi really had in mind. Gandhi very decidedly gives priority to self-rule over self-government, and to both over political independence, swatantrata.

To an anguished soul wondering what a mere individual could do after reading *Hind Swaraj* he wrote:

'Emancipate your own self. Even that burden is very great. Apply everything to yourself. Nobility of soul consists in realising that you are yourself India. In your emancipation is the emancipation of India. All else is make belief.' (CW 10:206-7)

Indeed, he believed 'if there were only one such Indian,' as he was to prove in his own life, 'the English will have to listen to him.' (HS Ch.20)

Essential to both meanings of swaraj, was a sense of self-respect that is precisely Gandhi's answer to colonial rule. For Gandhi freedom in its most fundamental sense had to mean freedom for self-realisation. But it had to be a freedom for all, for the toiling masses, and the privileged classes, and most importantly for the least and last Indian. In this sense then sarvodaya was precisely the patriotism that Gandhi espoused. It focused on people's welfare, not on national pride: 'By patriotism I mean the welfare of the whole people, and, if I could secure it at the hands of the English, I should bow down my head to them.' (HS Ch.15) And so he could write: 'my patriotism is for me a stage on my journey to the land of freedom and peace.' (Young India, April 13, 1924, p 112) And yet swaraj was not something given by the leaders, Indian or British, it was something that had to be taken by the people for themselves.

Clearly then, the foundation of swaraj in both its senses had to be threefold: self-respect, self-realisation and self-reliance. This is what

Gandhi tried to symbolise with the chakra, and khadi, both much misunderstood symbols today. Even before he wrote Hind Swaraj, in London in 1909 with some earnest Indians, he had 'many long conversations about the condition of India and I saw in a flash that without the spinning-wheel there was no swaraj. I knew at once everyone had to spin.' (CW 37:288) Later in his 'Constructive Programme' (CW 75:146-66) he advocates khadi with all its implications for 'a revolutionary change in the mentality and the taste of many.' For Gandhi khadi 'is the symbol of the unity of Indian humanity, of its economic freedom and equality and therefore, ultimately, in the poetic expression of Jawaharlal Nehru, the livery of India's freedom.' (CW 75:146-66, 'Constructive Programme', no. iv)

Today the chakra and khadi have not retained this powerful multivalent symbolism. Yet the ethic that Gandhi was trying to introduce and inscribe into Indian political life was that swaraj must never mean 'capturing power by a few', but rather generating power for the many to resist domination of any kind. He was acutely aware that 'real swaraj will not be the acquisition of authority by a few but the acquisition of the capacity of all to resist authority when it is abused.' (Prabhu 1961:4-5)

For Gandhi 'Civilisation is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path duty.' (HS Ch.13) The basis then of his swaraj could not be just rights, it had to be duties as well. In fact, Gandhi privileged duties over rights, but it is not true or fair to say that Gandhi did not envisage a regime of rights. He did affirm the rights of the individual, but these were never without duties to the community. For Gandhi real rights are legitimated by duties they flow from, for both are founded on satya and dharma. The modern theory of rights reverses this priority and founds rights on the dignity and freedom of the individual. But comprehensive morality can never be adequately articulated or correctly grasped in terms of rights alone.

2. Swadeshi

Swadeshi is the means for Gandhi's quest for swaraj. Fundamentally it meant 'localism'. This was not an isolated localism of the 'deserted village', that Goldsmith romanticised, or the degradation of caste oppression that Ambedkar revolted against, but rather the local neighbourhood community, the village as the node in a network of oceanic circles that over-lapped and spread out in its

ever-widening embrace. It is this commitment of the individual to his 'desh' that was Gandhi's Indian alternative to Western nationalism. (Parekh 1995:56-7)

In 1908 he does seem to idealise ruralism, and to privilege this 'Gospel of rural-mindedness', as he called it, (Harijan May 16, 1939) against urbanism as a way of life. His basic insight is surely sound, for he perceived that power in India was inevitably monopolised by the urban elite, at the expense of village folk. Gandhi was trying to reverse this dependency and make the state serve the weaker sections. His was an egalitarianism, not just a romantic inspiration. Mao attempted as much in China.

But the village Gandhi idealised was not just a geographic place, or a statistic, or a social class. It was an event, a dream, a happening, a culture. As he used 'the term 'village' implied not an entity, but a set of values.' (Sethi 1979:23) It brought together his three basic themes of swaraj: self-respect, self-realisation and self-reliance.

In privileging the rural over the urban, Gandhi was arguing for a minimal state. Any exercise of state power made Gandhi suspicious, since he saw the state essentially as an instrument of violence. He would have preferred an 'ordered' or 'enlightened' anarchy of self-ruled, self-controlled individuals, not as isolated atoms but as persons in a community of communities. Perhaps he was too influenced by the colonial state in generalising his negative perceptions. It was only in the communal cauldron at the time of partition, that he began to see the need of state power to contain and end the violence. And yet our experience of the post-colonial state in this country would bear out his apprehensions even as we seem to be careening into anarchy.

Gandhi perhaps did not fully appreciate the role of the state as an agency for regeneration and redistribution, in planning and coordination. But he was acutely sensitive to the centralised state appropriating what belonged to the local community and the individual. He was deeply suspicious of power being used in the cause of freedom or to contain violence. His swadeshi was an attempt to address this complex dialectic on an ethical rather than a political foundation.

3. Satya

For Gandhi truth was not a matter of theory but of practice. His autobiography entitled *Experiments with Truth* is surely an indication of this. But Gandhi's truth has little to do with experimental

science and the method first indicated by Aristotle and later elaborated by Bacon. Rather his truth was an experiential one, a reflexive understanding of oneself very much in the tradition of the Buddha and the ancient rishis of this land.

The experimental method of course is the foundation of the predictive sciences, the experiential one can only leave us with an interpretive discipline. But the whole of Gandhi's life's journey was not to predict the outcome of his life's struggle, but rather to interpret and direct the struggles of the masses for what they themselves could legitimately claim.

For Gandhi satya, truth, was an absolute reality that we could only partially grasp. Thus the many-sidedness of truth that we experienced was nothing but a consequence of such relative knowledge. Overcoming these limitations of our 'relative knowledge' for a more comprehensive grasp of this 'absolute truth' could never be forced by violence. Only ahimsa, non-violence, could make the quest for such truth viable. Gandhi operationalised this quest in his strategy of satyagraha, or truth-force. Moreover, he makes no ethical separation between means and an end. Both must be morally good. For him 'the goal did not exist at the *end* of a series of actions designed to achieve it, it shadowed them from the very beginning.' (Parekh 1995:142)

Thus satyagraha was not just a political strategy, it was both a means and an end. It was basically a method of dialogue that would bring two disagreeing parties not just into mutual agreement, but into the realisation of a deeper truth together. Thus, the dichotomy between the oppressor and the oppressed is transcended in this 'heightened mutuality', but even beyond this 'satyagraha ruptures the trichotomy among the oppressor, oppressed and emancipator,' (Pantham 1986:179) for it seeks to involve all three in this quest for greater self-realisation of the truth. From the satyagrahi as the initiator, this required a demanding discipline: 'those who want to become passive resisters for the service of the country have to observe perfect chastity, adopt poverty, follow truth and cultivate fearlessness.' (HS Ch.17)

But satyagraha was also a political strategy. In *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi defines 'passive resistance' as he called it then, as 'a method of securing rights by personal suffering.' (HS Ch.17) Clearly there is a non-political dimension involved in this strategy as well, but that does not make it any the less effective politically. 'Gandhi's satyagraha then was an ingenious combination of reason, morality and politics; it

appealed to the opponent's head, heart and interests.' (Parekh 1995:156)

This was a 'vernacular model of action' (Parekh 1995:211) that the people understood. But it was Gandhi who first used it so effectively to mobilise them and to appeal to their oppressors. In fact, he was the first leader to bring non-violence to centre-stage in the struggle for freedom with the British. He was well aware that adopting 'methods of violence to drive out the English' would be a 'suicidal policy,' (HS Ch.15) And his Hind Swaraj was precisely intended to stymie such a soul-destroying venture.

4. Gandhi's Re-interpretation

Gandhi locates himself as an insider to mainstream Hinduism, the sanathan dharma that he claimed to follow. In fact the radicality of his re-interpretation goes unnoticed precisely because of this. Gandhi does not reject, he simply affirms what he considers to be authentic, and allows the inauthentic to be sloughed off. For 'Gandhi's Hinduism was ultimately reduced to a few fundamental beliefs: the supreme reality of God, the ultimate unity of all life and the value of love (ahimsa) as a means of realising God.' (Nanda 1985:6) His profound redefinition of Hinduism gave it a radically novel orientation. In sum

'Gandhi's Hinduism was an ingenious intellectual construct… For him religion culminated but was not exhausted in social service and it had a spiritual meaning and significance only when inspired by the search for moksha. Gandhi's Hinduism had a secularised content but a spiritual form and was at once both secular and non-secular.' (Parekh 1995:109)

Thus for example one of the most remarkable and yet unremarked re-interpretations of Hinduism that Gandhi effected was that of the Gita. Here was a text intended to persuade a reluctant warrior on the legitimacy and even the necessity of joining the battle. Gandhi re-works its nish-kama-karma to become the basis of his ahimsa and satyagraha!

We have only to contrast Gandhi's Hinduism with V. D. Savarkar's Hindutva to see how starkly contrapuntal they are! Savarkar's 'Hinduise politics and militarise Hinduism' are the very opposite of Gandhi's sarva-dharma-samabhav. Gandhi did not believe in a separation of religion and politics. But he brought a religious ethic to politics rather than political militancy into religious communities. Savarkar's ideology was narrow and exclusivist in its conflation of

janma bhoomi and *puniya bhoomi*. Moreover, it played on the insecurities of the traditional upper caste elite, now trying desperately to make the transition to a modern upper class one. Hence in spite of its pretensions to be nationalist and modern, its militant chauvinism and authoritarian fundamentalism make Hindutva the very antithesis of Gandhi's Hinduism. It is in fact but a contemporary synthesis of Brahminism!

This is why in the end he is vehemently opposed by the traditional Hindu elite, who finally recognised and felt threatened by the challenge he posed. As a protege of Savarkar, 'Godse not only represented the traditional Indian stratarchy which Gandhi was trying to break,' (Nandy 1980:86) in a sense his 'hand was forced by the real killers of Gandhi: the anxiety-ridden, insecure traditional elite concentrated in the urbanised, educated, partly westernised, tertiary sector whose meaning of life Gandhian politics was taking away.' (*ibid*.:87)

But then again precisely because he presents himself as a Hindu in his interpretation of Indian culture, he was seen as too inclusive by traditional Hindus, and at the same time as not ecumenical enough by contemporary non-Hindus. Hence his appeals for Hindu-Muslim unity were rejected, by the Muslims as being too Hindu, and questioned by the Hindus for not being Hindu enough.

Gandhi's failure to bridge the religious divide between Hindu and Muslim, was matched in many ways by his failure to bridge the caste divide between Dalits and others. He never quite understood Jinnah, or his appeal to Muslim nationalism. One could say the same in regard to Ambedkar and his Dalits, who have never forgotten or forgiven Gandhi for the imposition of the Pune Pact. We can only wonder now whether separate electorates for Dalits then would have made reservations for Scheduled Castes unnecessary now. What we do know is that the caste divide has only deepened with increasing conflict and indeed the same can be said about the religious divide and religious conflict in this country.

Yet for Gandhi, the unity of humankind was premised on the oneness of the cosmos, which was a philosophical principle that was ontologically prior to diversity. This is precisely what an advaitin would hold. Hence for him, unity in diversity was the integrating axis not just of Hindu but of Indian culture as well.

Thus the legitimacy of religious diversity was rooted in the fundamental Jaina principle of anekantavada, the many-sidedness of truth. Once this was conceded as a foundational truth, then religious

tolerance was a necessary consequence. But this was not to be a negative tolerance of distance and coexistence, but rather one of communication and enrichment. (Heredia 1997) Indeed, Gandhi would ground the dialogue between East and West in their religious traditions, since for him religious rootedness was precisely the basis for mutual learning.

In cultural matters, however, he was an assimilationist, not in the sense that he wanted other cultures to be assimilated into his own, but rather all cultures to be enriched by each other without losing their identity. Gandhi's cultural assimilation, then was opposed to political revivalists and religious nationalists, to Tilak and M.M. Malaviya as also to Dayanand Saraswati and Savarkar. For Gandhi, open and understanding dialogue must precede not follow a free and adaptive assimilation. The basis for such a dialogic encounter would have to be a 'pluralist epistemology'. But Gandhi was convinced that it would only bear real fruit when it was 'sunk in a religious soil.' (HS Ch.20)

Thus, an enriched diversity would then contribute to a more invigorated pluralism and an enhanced unity. This was precisely Gandhi's understanding of Indian culture and civilisation, and he had, indeed, grasped its fundamental strength and the secret of its survival.

IV. Our World Today

Against Gandhi's critique of Western civilisation and his affirmation of Indian culture, we must now locate ourselves with regard to the critical issues of our world today to dialogue with him. By now it should be apparent that the real contradiction is not so much between an English West and an Indian East, as between ancient culture, whether East or West and modern civilisation. Here we have chosen three such issues as being the most fruitful for this encounter: the collapse of socialism and the crisis of capitalism, globalisation in an interdependent world, and the unresolved violence of our atomic age.

1. Post-socialism

In our present world, the socialist ideal is being discredited as a god that failed, when it is rather the once socialist states that have collapsed. It would seem that the sky had fallen for those with political commitments on the left. Now we have to come to terms with 'self-interest' and the 'profit motive'. Yet we can hardly accept the kind of

exploitation that our labourers are still subjected to in a system that benefits a few at the expense of the many. Moreover, today the crisis of capitalism is every day more apparent with the collapse of the much acclaimed Asian tigers as the new model for the cornucopia of development and progress; and the growing unemployment in the West, cannot but presage further crises there as well.

With liberalisation and privatisation as accepted policy today, the Bharat versus India divide, that Gandhi had intuited long ago, is, if anything, rapidly and disastrously growing. Only now the elite of Bharat seems to have been co-opted by the privileged of India, even as the refugees of India have been forced into an urbanised Bharat.

Much has been made about the disagreements between Gandhi and Nehru, and their diverging models of development. Nehru did not share Gandhi's predilection for the 'village' or his suspicion of technology. (Nehru 1958:507-10) Nehru is right in affirming that Congress had never completely accepted, nor had Gandhi himself imposed his understanding of *Hind Swaraj*. (*ibid*.)

But in the exchange of letters in 1945, (Parel 1997:149-156) it is quite clear that the axis of their reconciliation was precisely around this quest for equality. Their paths may have been different but Nehru's socialism and Gandhi's swaraj were both oriented to this quest for equity and equality across all the divides, of caste, class, region, etc.. This is how Gandhi put together their understanding in 1945:

'the real question... is how to bring about the highest intellectual economic, political and moral development... In this there should be equal rights and opportunity for all... equality between town-dwellers and villagers in the standard of food, drink, all other living conditions... In order to achieve this equality today people should be able to produce for themselves the necessaries of life.... If we try to work out the conditions for such a life: we are forced to the conclusion that the unit of society should be a village, or call it a small and manageable group... self-sufficient (in the matter of their vital requirements) ... in bonds of mutual cooperation and inter-dependence.' (Nehru 1958:511-12)

For Gandhi was quite radical in urging equality, even more so than the communists. For he would have equal wages and bread labour for all, following Ruskin in his *Unto this Last*, who wanted a more humane economy based on 'social affection' not on the self-interest and competitiveness of 'economic man'. Gandhi's 'Constructive Programme', (CW 75:146-66) section xii on 'Economic equality'

affirms this as 'the master key to non-violent independence,' for it means 'abolishing the eternal conflict between capital and labour... levelling down of the few rich:... and levelling up of the semi-starved millions.' (*ibid.*) Hence Gandhi's concept of equality in 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'.

At first, he saw no contradiction between such fraternal equality and the idealised hierarchy of varna. But in his later years, he reversed himself to urge that 'classless society is the ideal, not merely to be at aimed at but to be worked for.' (Harijan Feb. 17, 1946, p.9) By now he was promoting inter-caste marriages and hoping 'there would be only one caste known by the beautiful name Bhangi, that is to say the reformer or remover of all dirt.' (Harijan July 7, 1946, p.212)

But if Gandhi's quest for equality is something that our complex world cannot accommodate, we seem to have given up not just this ideal of equality, but even the quest for equity in the distribution of the rewards and burdens of our society. Today Gandhi's proletarian 'levelling down' certainly seems to be much more viable than Tagore's elitist 'levelling up'. But if Tagore would have all Indians to be Brahmins, Gandhi would want all of us to be shudras, workers or rather bhangis, reformers. Certainly, such a 'responsible, respectful, non-violent, non-contractual, non-competitive, non-hegemonising, symbolic equality had a place in Gandhi's life and in his theory of life.' (Nandy 1986:111)

In such a scenario the relevance of Gandhi's idea of sarvodaya as the goal of swaraj is something we need to re-examine. Certainly, the state capitalism masquerading as socialism was hardly Gandhi's idea of the India of his dream. But a decentralised participative democratic and humane society, is certainly a more attractive, and one may dare say, a more viable ideal today, than the kind of consumerism and iniquitous divisions that the new economic policy in our country seems to welcome.

We are now coming back to the panchayati raj and local self-government that Gandhi urged long ago. Indeed, the principle of subsidiarity, that is, the devolution of authority downwards together with the delegation of coordination upwards, seems to be the only viable solution to national governments, that are too large to address local problems, while being too small to cope with global ones.

Today the 73rd and 74th amendments to the constitution once again affirm Panchayati Raj and Tribal self-rule. We are coming back to a devolution of powers that Gandhi had urged in his ideal of swaraj

and had tried to have written into our Constitution. Hopefully, this will be a presage of more to come.

2. Globalisation

Globalisation and the alienating homogeneity that it must inevitably promote, is the very opposite of the localism and the celebration of diversity that Gandhi's swadeshi was meant to encourage. Today we are rushing headlong into this globalising world, and hoping to find our place in the sun in the community of nations by at least joining their game, though we cannot beat them at it.

However, Gandhi's principle of swadeshi, 'simply means that the most effective organisation of social, economic and political functions must follow the natural contours of the neighbourhood,' thus affirming 'the primacy of the immediate community.' (Roy 1985:114) Gandhi's 'goodness politics' as it has been called, (Saran 1980:691) could only really operate on such a scale. For

'Gandhi decentralisation means the creation of parallel politics in which the people's power is institutionalised to counter the centralising and alienating forces of the modern state.... Thus the Gandhian decentralised polity has a built-in process of the withering away of the state.' (Sethi 1986:229)

But before this is dismissed as too naive or impractical for our sophisticated and complicated world, we might pause to think of the kind of politics our centralised states have in fact spawned. The very hegemonic homogeneity it promotes succeeds less at obliterating difference than at alienating minorities and enkindling their resentment. On the contrary, to take a lesson from ecology, micro-variability is needed for macro-stability in political and economic systems as well.

Gandhi's swadeshi could never mean ethnocentrism. He was no nationalist or cultural chauvinist, who would negate the global dimensions of our common humanity, even as he firmly stood his local ground. His concept of 'oceanic circles' was precisely an attempt at articulating inter-related levels of human social organisation. Unlike some Hindu and Muslim 'nationalists' Gandhi never used 'nationalism' for narrow sectarian purposes. He mobilised his people as 'Indians' not as Hindus or Muslims. His nationalism was anti-imperialistic not chauvinistic, a struggle for political justice and cultural dignity. (Nandy 1994:3) He was a patriot who wanted 'Indian

nationalism to be non-violent, anti-militaristic and therefore a variant of universalism.' (Nandy 1995:14) He was only too aware of the number of 'nationalities' that could be mobilised in India, once the genie was out of the bottle!

Indeed, an ecological understanding is now propelling us to a new and deep realisation of our interdependence. We have only one earth, we must learn to share and care. Gandhi refused to see our relation to nature in imperialistic terms. We are not so much God's vice-regent over the universe as a contingent part of the cosmos, debtors born, whose proper response to life must be the 'yagna', service-offering of our lives for others. (Parekh 1995:88)

Thus with regard to the economy and the polity, Gandhi would have the village as his world; but with regard to culture and religion, it was the world that was his village! Surely here we have a viable example of thinking globally and acting locally. Indeed, today the global ecological crisis has begun to press on us anew the relevance of Gandhi's paradoxical ideas. For the institutional individualism that seemed to be the very foundation of the democratic quest in the West seems quite inadequate to the ecological crises of today. For it privileges individual rights over the common good. But even enlightened self-interest has no answer to the 'tragedy of the commons' except an external coercion.

However, for Gandhi, 'individuality' must be 'oriented to self-realisation through self-knowledge... in a network of interdependence and harmony informed by ahimsa.' (Roy 1986a:84) Nor was this to be an interdependence of dominant-subservient relationships so prevalent in our local communities and global societies. His swadeshi envisaged a more personalised and communitarian society on a human scale, yet extending to include both the biotic and even the cosmic community. This was the logical extension of the Jaina doctrine of 'syadvada', that everything is related to everything in the universe in 'a great chain of being'.

However, the Gandhian ideal was a community modelled on the joint family and on varna as a non-competitive division of labour. Later in his life, his own promotion of inter-caste marriages testifies to a change in his views. Yet even as we critique such Gandhian ideas, we must discover in dialogue what value and relevance they have for us today. For ultimately Gandhi insists on both: that the community is not a mere means for the self-interest of the individual and that the individual in not a mere resource for the concerns of the community. And this would go for the community of communities, that our global community must be.

3. Violence

There can be no negating the liberation that modernity has brought in our post-modern world to vast masses of people. But for all its much-vaunted 'rationality' some would rather say because of it, modernity has failed to cope with this endemic irrationality of violence. Now after two world wars, and a global cold war, not to mention the many smaller hot ones that have been a continuing presence on this earth, we cannot help but realise that modernity has not effectively or ethically addressed the problem of violence, either at the individual or group level, and certainly not at the national or international one.

If Gandhi's ahimsa seems impractical, what are the alternatives we have trapped ourselves in? How would Gandhi, the apostle of ahimsa respond to our claim to be a nuclear weapons state? What all this has to do with the quality of life of our impoverished masses remains a question that must haunt us. If Gandhi was right that 'to arm India on a large scale is to Europeanise it,' (Hind Swaraj 1938:59) then what would nuclear arms do? Americanise us? And this is an initiative being pushed by our cultural nationalists! But then in a globalised world, it is surely only the elite that will get to strut and fret upon this global stage, while the masses of our people are a passive and manipulated audience to this macabre theatre.

The whole effort of the modern world in dealing with violence has been to control the other. But mastery over others has not meant less violence for ourselves. Only now have we become the perpetrators, not the sufferers of violence. Gandhi's attempt begins with controlling oneself, as the first source of violence one must master in order to fearlessly and non-violently win over the violent others.

Thus the modern world gave primacy to rights and privileged freedom, Gandhi privileged duty and gave the primacy to conscience. His concern was with 'socialising the individual conscience rather than internalising the social conscience'. (Iyer 1973:123) Certainly, Gandhi has much relevance to our present need to once again bridge this dichotomy between rights and duties, and integrate both in a more comprehensive freedom of choice and the obligation of conscience, humanist worldview and a more genuinely humane world-community. This is our only real chance for peace in our now globally interdependent world.

4. Gandhi's Synthesis

Our hermeneutic of Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* reads therein more than a brutal and incisive critique of 'modern civilisation'. It is not a rejection of the liberative contribution of modernity: civil liberties, religious tolerance, equality, poverty alleviation. Rather his effort can be interpreted as an attempt to integrate these positive elements with a liberating re-interpretation of tradition. In his unique way, he sets up a creative encounter for this integration, even as some see him as radical and others as reactionary. With his critique from within the tradition, Gandhi becomes the great synthesiser of contraries if not of contradictions, within and across traditions.

His purna (comprehensive) swaraj would harmonise rights and duties, head and heart, individual and community, faith and reason, economic development and spiritual progress, religious commitment and religious pluralism, self-realisation and political action. He brings together philosophical discourse and popular culture in enlightened renewal and social reform. Not since the time of the Buddha, some have argued, has such a synergy between the philosophic and the popular in our traditions been experienced. Thus Gandhi integrates the Upanishad and the Tulsi Ramayan in his religious synthesis. When it comes to bridges across traditions, Gandhi brings the Gita together with the 'Sermon on the Mount' and reads one into the other. In fact, if he has Christianised Hinduism he has certainly also presented us with a Hinduised Christian spirituality.

Precisely as a re-interpretation from within, Gandhi can so much the more effectively and authentically integrate into his synthesis elements from without. For 'Gandhi was neither a conservative nor a progressive. And though he had internal contradictions, he was not a fragmented self-alienated man driven by the need to compulsively conserve the past or protect the new.' (Nandy 1980:71)

Thus 'effortlessly transcending the dichotomy of orthodoxy and iconoclasm,'(*ibid.*) he reconciles meaningful faith and reasonable modernity. In the best traditions of this land, he combined both faith and reason. For faith and reason are implicated in each other. For Gandhi blind faith or a fundamentalist, revivalist version of religion was totally unacceptable. He would constantly critique faith to ascertain whether it was meaningful and reasonable in terms of basic human value commitments. And so too he would demand of reason the same fidelity to these values as well.

However, the ascetic dimension of Gandhi's integration at times loses the aesthetic one. A criticism of Gandhi's ashrams was that it grew only vegetables not flowers! (Parekh 1995:209) Growing vegetables represented more than the Gandhian pre-occupation with vegetarianism and bread-labour. But that his ashram did not grow any flowers, would indicate a certain distancing from the aesthetic. Indeed, Gandhi surprised and shocked Tagore when he claimed he could hardly enjoy the glory and the beauty of a sunset when so many of his brothers and sisters could not but be ground down by the very burden of their lives.

But in rightly emphasizing the need for renunciation, certainly a message that our consumerist and self-indulgent world needs more than ever today, the Gandhian ashram seemed to miss out on the need for celebration, which our tired and alienated, dis-spirited and pessimistic world needs almost as much. We do need the self-renunciation Gandhi espoused, as well as his affirmation of selflessness. But we also need to celebrate the other, and the enrichment that comes from this encounter.

A re-interpretation of Gandhi would precisely allow such a celebration if only we can realise that for him the ultimate other is the 'utterly Other' who is the final quest of our self-realisation in moksha, and yet realised only in our encounters with each other. For while Gandhi's understanding of moksha as service is a seminal breakthrough, even this can be enriched by affirming not negating the other dimensions of life. For it is only thus that we will be able to bring some wholeness to, in Iris Murdoch's unforgettable phrase, the 'broken totality,' of our modern world.

VI. Conclusion: Partners in Dialogue

It is certainly not our intention to idealise Gandhi into a new 'ism', neither post- nor neo-Gandhianism. In urging a re-thinking and a re-interpretation, we want to be sensitive to the special contribution Gandhi has made, but in a critical way. In trying to seize on his relevance for our times we want to enter into a meaningful dialogue with him. Idealising him by being blind to his limitations and being insensitive to the context in which he lived, can hardly be helpful to anything constructive or creative. We need an open-ended critique of Gandhi, not a close-ended 'ism', as seems to have happened with some of the official Gandhians. Gandhi is, indeed, greater than their

'Gandhianisms' and he will be more relevant than those of any others as well. Renan with Gallic irony is supposed to have once said, that when fate could not destroy a great man it sent him disciples in revenge! Perhaps we may need to save Gandhi from such a fate.

1. Gandhi and Marx

It is our firm conviction that some of Gandhi's limitations are addressed by Marxist thought, not the classical, dogmatic Marxism but a rather more critical, creative one. Many have urged such a dialogue between Gandhi and Marx as being both enriching to these discourses, without assimilating one to the other. Unfortunately, many practising Marxists have treated Gandhi with dogmatic dismissal or classic misunderstanding. They would do well to heed a respected scholar-politician and contemporary of Gandhi, comrade Hiren Mukherjee: 'None else - not even Rabindranath Tagore or the great figures of modern China - has represented, in his life and work, as Gandhi has done uniquely, the spirit, schizophrenic and sublime, of New Asia.' (Mukherjee 1958:202)

Here we will try to draw out the counter-cultural inspiration that we need for our times from, 'the social realism of Marx and the ethical idealism of Gandhi,' (Varma 1959:320)

Thus Marx's great contribution was the structural thinking and analysis that he made the very basis of social intervention. Gandhi emphasised personal introspection as the foundation of any political involvement, and individual change as the beginning of any social transformation. But if Gandhi's starting point is different, it has something to contribute as well. For Gandhi alerts us to something the Marxists had totally overlooked, and which feminists brought, to our attention, that 'the personal is political'. To focus only on structural analysis and change is precisely to miss this integral dimension of any human encounter at whatever level it takes place.

Thus structural analysis sensitizes us to the role group interests play in our society. These are not just an aggregation of self-interests. Individual interests articulate in complex ways and have unintentional consequences that only structural thinking can adequately analyse and corporate group action can effectively address. But then personal behaviour too has subconscious and unconscious sources of motivation that need a probing personal self-introspection and a deeply committed life response. In the final analysis, any stable development for a better society must mean both

change of structures as well as a change of heart. For if we cannot ignore the unintended consequences of group interests, neither must we dismiss the moral possibilities of human choice.

We believe that Marxist interest analysis and conflict theory need to be complemented by a Gandhian value affirmation and non-violent strategy for an incisive and effective praxis in our land. It is only such a synthesis that can precipitate a revolution that will not devour its children. This is precisely the danger with all revolutions so far, more particularly violent ones, even when they have made justice their goal. Though 'the Gandhian revolution cannot devour its children (Parekh 1995:198) for when it comes it would be a non-violent one, it is in danger of being devoured by its own children even before it has taken place!

2. Counter-cultural Transformation

Gandhi is certainly a counter-cultural inspiration that cannot but be relevant for our times, though all too often he is made into a counterfeit idol. In these times of Hindu cultural nationalism, and the vacuum of 'Congress culture' as we see these and others on the national scene, not to mention the marginalisation of the official Gandhians, we need to rethink and revive the counter-cultural inspiration of Gandhi's oppression-centred, victim-oriented, spiritually-grounded and uniquely Indian political philosophy. (Parekh 1995:6)

His life was a continuing series of controversies and contestations with those in power on behalf of the powerless. He never lacked opponents, among the British and even the Indian elites. He did not want India's freedom fighters to settle into the status quo and often found himself isolated and alone particularly at the end of his life, which was far from being one long triumphant procession.

Yet one of the great contributions of Gandhi was precisely his centring of the periphery: in politics with anthyodaya (or *antyodya*); in religion by de-Brahminising Hinduism, de-institutionalising practice and personalising belief; in education by his proposal for nai talim or basic education as it came to be called; in the economy by symbolically urging khadi. Not all of these efforts were successful or perhaps even practical, but they did make a contribution which is still valid today. And all of Gandhi's original ideas can be found seeded already in his *Hind Swaraj*.

Nehru's, 'modernism, like his version of socialism, is as pathetically orphaned as last year's fashions.' (Nandy 1986:118) The Nehruvian model of development has crashed under its own weight. Today we need a new developmental model, and increasingly people are beginning to see that such a model cannot be a top-down one based on the trickle-down effect. It has to begin by 'Putting the Last First'.(Chambers 1983) It certainly has taken us a torturous route to come back to the last Indian that Gandhi would have as the talisman of our social planning.

No one can claim that Gandhi's reformist appeal has fulfilled the 'revolution of raising expectations' of our masses. But then neither has the revolutionary call of the Marxist, against class exploitation, or that of the Ambedkarites, against caste oppression, empowered the workers or the Dalits effectively enough to claim their place in the sun. This only underscores the need for a more fine-tuned analysis and a wider dialogue in our society for constructive change given the limits of reformism and the constraints on revolution.

There can be no doubt that Gandhi was an authentic 'organic intellectual', articulating and symbolically expressing the people's aspirations. But he was no less a uniquely transformative leader, who changed persons and structures, and transformed a people and their culture, albeit for a while. Here was a *yugapurush* if ever there was one. If we are looking for a new synthesis for a counter-culture, we must take Gandhi as a dialogue partner in this project but first, we must redefine and re-interpret him. We do believe that such an encounter will help us to re-examine and reconstruct ourselves as well.

In a globalised world, we all seem to be impelled to a kind of global culture that is ultimately based on Western civilisation which is in fact the dominant strand in such a culture. When Gandhi was once asked what he thought of Western civilisation, he said rather impishly, that it would be 'a good idea'. The challenge today for us in our globalising world is to find another, a better, a more integral, a more human ideal for our society, for our world today.

Gandhi has been severely criticised as impractical, as someone who took out an impossible overdraft on human moral resources. But this is to claim that human beings are not capable of a metanoia, a radical change of heart, that can open up new perspectives, not just for individuals and groups, but for entire societies and whole cultures as well. What we need are organic intellectuals and transformative activists who can articulate and precipitate such a social movement. The cascading crises that our society and our world is experiencing,

only underlines more emphatically the need to find new ways of redefining ourselves and understanding our problems, before we can begin to respond to the situation.

If this seems a tall order, then we can remember the words of Herman Hesse: most men will not swim until they are able to! We can wait and sink, or start to swim.

(My thanks to Mahesh Gavaskar and others for their comments on an earlier draft)

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4.
GANDHI AND THE MYTH OF PEACE

'Gandhi and the Myth of Peace', New Quest, No. 136, Jul-Aug. 1999, pp.231-239. (This paper is based on a presentation made for a seminar at the University of Mumbai, Dept. of Civics and Politics on the 'Culture of Peace', 15 - 16 March 1999)

PEACE AND POWER: UNDERSTANDING THE OPTIONS
GANDHI'S DISCOURSE OF PEACE: IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA
MODERNITY AND VIOLENCE: THE NEED FOR ALTERNATIVES
THE MYTH AND IDEOLOGY
RAM SAUMYA AND OCEANIC CIRCLES
CONCLUSION

Abstract

Our understanding of peace necessarily implies the negation of violence, not only unjustified violation, which is obviously the very contradiction of peace, but also what is sometimes considered as justifiable force. An authentic understanding of peace would be premised not on power over, not on power as domination, but on power to, power as enabling. In this context, the Gandhian discourse and praxis has foundational implication for any understanding pursuit of peace.

Peace and Power: Understanding the Options

There are such different perspectives on peace and Gandhi, that any discussion on them needs must begin with conceptual clarifications that set a framework for a fruitful dialogue rather than a useless debate.

In common parlance, peace is often understood as the opposite of war and conflict. These necessary imply the use of force, which is legitimated as a means to an end pursued, as happens with what has been called a just war or a justifiable conflict. All too often such use of force is seen as a preamble to peace, a war to end all wars, a conflict now to minimise greater conflict later! This amounts to a negative perception of peace through its opposite. But it does give us one crucial element in our understanding of peace, namely, that as a

minimum, peace is not compatible with the continuing use of force. But the problem of a peace founded on the use or threat of force remains. This was the basis of the Pax Romana, 'si vis pacem, para bellum' (if you want peace prepare for war!).

However, all would agree that war can only be the means of last resort for peace, because it can never be justified as a good or indifferent means to an end, and if at all it is legitimated this can only be as the lesser of two evils: violent subjugation by an unjust tyranny versus a violent rejection of it. But war must not be seen as inevitable or endemic to the human situation. Indeed 'the chief reason warfare is still with us is neither a secret death wish of the human species nor an irrepressible instinct of aggression nor, finally and more plausibly, the serious economic and social dangers inherent in disarmament, but the simple fact that no substitute for this final arbiter in international affairs has appeared on the political scene.' (Arendt 1970:5)

Thus, we realise that war can never be an end in itself. We must always question the end of war: war for what? Victory, honour, revenge, redress, or peace? All these except peace are further fraught with moral ambiguities. Even the peace we seek must be qualified lest common parlance degrade its potentially rich meaning.

When force, as active aggression or as passive restriction, harms or destroys that which it is applied to, then is it concomitant with violence. Sometimes by extension, the exercise of any vehement force is also called 'violence', though more precisely it is when force violates, that it constitutes violence. In this sense violence by definition cannot be justifiable, except when used in self-defense, to oppose and protect oneself from violation. This is counter-violence, rather than violence per se. Moreover, only when it is proportionate to the violence it opposes can this defensive use of force be justified. Such counter-violence is then instrumentally justified by a rationalisation in terms of its ends.

It should be quite apparent that peace is not reconcilable with violence. Certainly not with violation, since any peace brought about by such means would itself be an unjustifiable peace. Moreover, it is difficult to see how force can be a morally neutral means when used in a human context. To justify force in terms of the ends it is used for would seem to imply this. But when used in such a context, force impinges on human beings who are ends in themselves. And even when used to protect the dignity of such human persons from being violated by other persons, or by impersonal structures, such violence

can only be thought of as a preliminary for peace, not something compatible with it.

More pertinently, the exercise of such 'justifiable force' or 'counter-violence' cannot be uncritically accepted, since the exercise of violence in a human context involves more than just the victims and the violators. For our capacity for violence too easily engulfs all around. There are no non-combatants in war, just as there are no bystanders in a general revolution. All around are somehow implicated. And yet, as with the ancient Romans, force and violence are still often thought of as a viable means to peace.

However, if peace itself is not compatible with force and violence, how does one protect such a peace against the violent forces, when these threaten to engulf it, not just from without but from within as well? Here we must understand that if peace implies the absence of force and violence, it does not mean a negation or the absence of power. However, we need to understand what kind of power is compatible with a stable peace.

Power is still mostly understood after the classic definition of Max Weber, as the capacity to impose one's will against resistance. This is an understanding of power as domination, as 'power over', that implies a zero-sum game in which there must be losers in order that they may be winners. In this understanding violence will necessarily be implicated in any exercise of power, in fact here 'violence is nothing more than the most flagrant manifestation of power' (Arendt 1969:35) C. Wright Mills draws the logical consequence of a politics based on this: 'all politics is a struggle for power; the ultimate kind of power is violence.' (Mills 1956:171)

One cannot help but notice the Hobbesian assumption underlying such a notion of power. In the 'war of all against all' such an understanding makes for good survival sense. For if the final integrating principle of society is coercion, then the powerful must prevail and impose a minimum consensus for a viable social order. It is precisely this power as domination which corrupts, and when absolute, corrupts absolutely!

In this context, peace can never be a reality. It can only be simulated by a forced imposition of some measure of consensus by some rules of the game, to contain the inevitable conflict and competition implicit in such an understanding of society lest it go out of hand and lead to the destruction of the players themselves; in which case there would be no winners but all losers. But at the very most this can achieve a balance of power, which all too readily becomes a

balance of terror. Such a precarious balance can be the basis for only a precarious peace.

However, there is another understanding of power that is more functional and has been articulated by Talcott Parsons. In this sense, 'power to' is efficacy or capacity to achieve or effect something. Thus the social expression of such power concerns persons rather than things. Thus empowering a group is to enable it to 'not just act, but to act in concert,' and then such power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence as long as the group keeps together. (Arendt 1969:44)

Such capacities need not be in any inherent contradiction, though they may well need to be controlled and coordinated, if they are to complement, and not conflict with each other. The underlying assumption here is that of consensus as the fundamental principle of integration which makes for cooperation between persons and groups rather than competition or conflict.

But no society is integrated exclusively by consensus or coercion, and in no society would power be premised on just one or the other principle. For even where there is coercion and competition, there can still be a coincidence of interests, that make for some measure of cooperation, just as when there is consensus and cooperation there still could be a conflict of interests that makes for competition or worse.

Hence in either understanding, of power over and power to, there must be control and coordination in any viable social order. This cannot be done by mere coercion and sheer force, but must be based on some level of consent, that legitimates power, and stablises it. This is what Weber called 'authority'. Hence, in his Politics as a Vocation, the state is defined as 'a human institution that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.' (Gerth and Mills 1967: 78)

However, legitimacy can still be questioned and subverted, particularly by those under this authority, as would happen when power is dominating and not enabling. Maclver wisely observes that 'coercive power is a criterion of the state, but not its essence.' (Maclver 1926:223) Moreover, 'it is true that there is no state, where there is no overwhelming force... But the exercise of force does not make the state.' (Maclver 1926:223) It is rather the monopoly of coercive power by the state needed to constrain the use of such power by other political players that is essential to the modern state. Unfortunately, the state often becomes the perpetrator of the violent use of power

against its own subjects, not the protector of all its citizens. In sum, 'power is indeed the essence of all government, but violence is not.' (Arendt 1969:51)

Its very ambiguities make any balance of power, which implies power over others, inherently unstable and open to realignment. A peace premised on such a balance would be acceptable only when there is no other alternative. However, power as efficacy and capacity, implies not a balance but rather a complementarity of power, that requires coordination more than control. It is not only compatible but can be very much the foundation of a sound and stable peace, precisely because it is not premised on domination but on complementarity. Thus power, whether, as domination or as enabling, will inevitably become violent if it becomes an end in itself. Indeed some like Sorel, Pareto, Fanon, seem to have glorified violence, but even with these it was as a means to destroy the old order and bring to birth a new age.

What is important to note in this conceptualisation and understanding of power and violence is that it is based on a pre-understanding of the human, and a pre-option for underlying ethical values, as the foundation on which a social consensus can be built. It would be naive to assume that the real situation of society is actually reflected by such pre-understandings and pre-options, rather these express the 'ought' of an ideal. Clearly the balance of power and the peace that follows would be more practical in very many of our human situations, but it would certainly be far from the longing for peace that is so much part of our deepest human yearnings.

Gandhi's Discourse of Peace: Implications for India

The Coming now to Gandhi's contribution to the key concepts in our understanding of violence and force, of power and domination: to begin with one must affirm that Gandhi's approach is always holistic, for the him the personal is the political, and the political is inclusive of the other dimensions of social life, precisely because it is essentially a religious or rather an ethical struggle for a new and liberated society.

Thus, Gandhi's understanding of non-violence, ahimsa, is not a negative concept. He insists that it must be a positive understanding of compassion and love, of empathy with all humans, even our enemies, and indeed with the whole of the cosmos. It is precisely in

terms of such a positive understanding, that Gandhi sees violence, even in the sense of 'force', however justified, as always a violation of this love, compassion, empathy. A violation not just of persons but of the very structure of reality itself. For Gandhi it is truth that is the ultimate reality, satya, and violence is always a violation of this truth. And ultimately such a violation cannot but betray the deepest truth of the violator himself. Indeed, for Gandhi God is truth, and more than that in the final analysis truth is God, satya the ultimate reality.

The 'will to power' has been glorified and romanticised as an instinctual human drive. But to make power thus an end in itself unleashes its immense destructive potential all the more. Gandhi was acutely aware of this. The only force he accepts as ethical, is truth force or satyagraha. And even at the personal level his life long quest was against any kind of domination. The only domination that Gandhi would accept was self-control or domination over oneself.

Hence his quest for femininity, to be more mother than father, more feminine than masculine and so to be the more human. Ashis Nandy discusses this with great insight. Needless to say Gandhi in his personal life did not always succeed in his personal quest for self-control and non-domination. Certainly, there are difficult questions that can be raised regarding the young Gandhi, as a husband and a father in his family.

Yet his 'experiments with truth' never ceased. His satyagraha was essentially an appeal to truth, and to conscience. It did indeed have emotional and political implications, but if these were to be the determining characteristics of satyagraha then it would be manipulation and betrayal, one more manifestation of the perversion of power. For satyagraha as an instrument for change in Gandhi's own estimate had to be used with great caution and with much self-examination. What we have today is civil disobedience rather than satyagraha and often it has violent implications and consequences that Gandhi would never countenance.

The Gandhian notion of swaraj does correspond to the characterisation of peace we have earlier made. For Gandhi self-rule meant primarily rule over one's self as the foundation for living with others, in justice, and freedom and harmony. But with swadeshi Gandhi goes a step further by indicating the contours of such a society of peace, the self-reliance and neighbourliness of a little community, which would inevitably be a counter-cultural one today. Thus for Gandhi, justice, must be founded on equality and dharma; freedom

on self-control and self-reliance; harmony on self-respect and self-realisation.

Gandhi's ahimsa and satyagarha, his swadeshi and swaraj are certainly not the last word in the continuing understanding of peace, it is rather a first sure and positive step. For peace must be a continuing quest, perhaps the most relevant and deepest quest for a new age. A quest that not only bonds each to the other, but embraces the whole of the cosmos as well, in one inclusive ecological community, beginning with the local village and neighbourhood, in ever-widening oceanic circles to include the whole world.

When nation-states are surely the greatest menace to international peace today, and as yet nationalism a most powerful mobilising ideology, we need more than ever the moral sanity of Gandhi. For him 'swaraj' was never mere independence, 'swatantra'. His 'purnaswaraj' meant comprehensive freedom, 'azadi', for all and especially the huddled mass of our peoples. Gandhi had intuitively realised 'that war could never bring power to the masses and therefore his intention in India was to devise an instrument by means of which the common people would gain power to build up a new life in freedom.' (Bose and Patwardhan 1967:19)

His patriotism was a rejection of imperialism as well as an in-built critique of nationalism. For Gandhi, as also for Tagore, 'the Indian freedom movement ceased to be an expression of only nationalist consolidation; it came to acquire a new stature as a symbol of the universal struggle for political justice and cultural dignity.' (Nandy 1994:2-3) And so Gandhi would claim: 'My ambition is nothing less than to see international affairs placed on a moral basis through India's effort.' He was convinced that 'it is the duty of free India to perfect the instrument of non-violence for dissolving collective conflict, if freedom is to be really worthwhile.' (Harijan 31-8-1947, p.302) Indeed, 'if India reaches her destiny through truth and non-violence, she will have made no small contribution to world peace'. (Harijan, 14-4-1946, p.90) For 'unless India develops her non-violent strength, she has gained nothing either for herself or for the world. Militarisation of India will mean her destruction as well as of the whole world.' (Harijan 14-12-1947 p.471)

This was the discourse of Gandhi for the India of is dreams, but today cultural nationalism and religious fundamentalism, caste patriotism and class chauvinism have broken any tryst with such a destiny as we might have hoped for.

Modernity and Violence: The Need for Alternatives

There can be no negating the liberation that modernity has brought in our post-modern world to vast masses of people. But for all its much vaulted 'rationality' some would rather say because of it, modernity has failed to cope with the endemic irrationality of violence. Now after two world wars, and a global cold war, not to mention the many smaller hot ones that have been a continuing presence on this earth, we cannot help but realise that modernity has not effectively or ethically addressed the problem of violence, either at the individual or group level, and certainly not at the national or international one.

If Gandhi's ahimsa seems impractical, what are the alternatives we have trapped ourselves in? How would Gandhi, the apostle of ahimsa respond to our claim to be a nuclear weapons state? What all this has to do with the quality of life of our impoverished masses remains a question that must haunt us. If Gandhi was right that 'to arm India on a large scale is to Europeanise it,' (HS Ch. 15) then what would nuclear arms do? Americanise us? And this is an initiative being pushed by our cultural nationalists! But then in a globalised world, it is surely only the elite that will get to strut and fret upon this global stage, while the masses of our people are a passive and manipulated audience to this macabre theatre.

The whole effort of the modern world in dealing with violence has been to control the other. But mastery over others has not meant less violence for ourselves. Only now, we become the perpetrators, not the sufferers of violence. Gandhi's attempt begins with controlling oneself, as the first source of violence one must master in order to win over the violent others fearlessly and non-violently.

Thus, the modern world gave primacy to rights and privileged freedom, Gandhi privileged duty and gave the primacy to conscience. His concern was with 'socialising the individual conscience rather than internalising the social conscience'. (Iyer 1973:123) Certainly Gandhi has much relevance to our present need to once again bridge this dichotomy between rights and duties, and integrate both in a more comprehensive freedom of choice and the obligation of conscience, in a humanist worldview and a more genuinely humane world-community. This is our only real chance for peace in our now globally inter-dependent world.

The Myth and Ideology

Following Panikkar, we can distinguish two levels of understanding, or rather pre-understanding Thus our comprehension can be in terms of a more or less explicit meaning that is conceptually grasped; or in the context of our pre-understanding, of implicit pre-judgments and presumptions, in terms of a meaningfulness that can be only symbolically represented. These are the levels of 'myth' and 'ideology', respectively.

Myth is 'the horizon of intelligibility or the sense of Reality.' (*ibid.* :101) It is expressed in the 'mythic narrative' with its varied themes. This is precisely why one can speak of the 'myth of peace', where 'myth' is a pre-rational, not an irrational but rather a transrational, grasp that can only be expressed in symbol and metaphor. Joseph Campbell describes such myths as collective dreams that express the unarticulated depths of a people's unconscious, their deepest longings that they themselves may not be consciously aware of. Once it is rationally articulated, myth then develops into an 'ideology': 'the more or less coherent ensemble of ideas that make up critical awareness, i.e., the doctrinal system that enables you to locate yourself rationally….' (*ibid.*)

These distinctions have crucial implications for our understanding and practice of peace. For the more coherent and cogent the articulation of an ideology is, the more likely it is to reduce other understandings to its own terms, or reject them, if they cannot be fitted into its own horizons. We do of course, need ideologies for we need to articulate and rationalise our understanding in the various dimensions of human experience. But ideologies must be able to accept such alternative understandings, and open themselves out into broader and deeper perspectives. This will depend on the myth, the pre-understanding, from which it derives. For the more extensive and intense the myth's meaningfulness, the richer and denser its symbolism, the more open and accommodating the ideology that can be built on it.

What we need, then, is a metanoia of our myths to escape and be liberated from the paranoia of our ideologies, whether religious or political. Both myth and ideology are found in both these dimensions, though there is obviously a greater affinity for ideology in the political, as there is for 'myth' in the religious one.

A mythic pre-understanding of humans, such as the Roman 'homo homini lupus', (man is a wolf to man) or the Hobbesian 'quest for power after power …', can only make for an ideology of conflict, competition and domination. Whereas a more authentic pre-understanding of ourselves as essentially social and fundamentally moral will allow for an ideology of peace not in terms of a balance of power or of terror, but of empowerment for justice, freedom and harmony.

We can now attempt to give some content to such a longing for peace. After the Romans, St. Augustine defined peace as 'the tranquillity of order'. But tranquillity is still a rather passive understanding, and surely peace must have a more positive content. Thus, besides justice, which is implied by order, there must be freedom, if this just order is to be compatible with human dignity. Moreover, if the dialectical tension between justice and order is effectively and constructively resolved, then we would have a third element in our understanding of peace, that is harmony.

Each of these three elements, justice, freedom and harmony, can be described, but we still need to put them together in a collective myth. At this profound level, peace can be an end in itself, as in fact expressed so universally by various salvation myths. This is the peace that is reflected in popular greetings: pax shalom, salam, shanti, … that needs to be explored as a foundation for a brave new world.

Hence Panikkar calls for a 'cultural disarmament', i.e., the abandonment of our vested interests and non-negotiable positions, some of which are so much part of our culture and our psyche that we fail to notice them. We need to de-mystify much in our modern world that has come to be considered as rational, progressive and scientific, while we fail to see how this rationality has become aggressive, the progress degenerated into regressive consumerism, while the technology has instrumentalised us all.

Tragically modern man with his loss of innocence in a de-mythologised world, has no longer any abiding myths. Today more than ever we need such bonding myths to sustain our world. Now myths are collective, never individual projects, and the 'myth of peace' is one in which we can all share. Certainly, it is one whose time has now come in our tired and torn, our broken and bruised world. But as yet we have no such common myth. Even the symbols and images we use for peace are quite inadequate or needlessly divisive: the dove with the olive branch or the steel fist gloved in velvet! The tragedy of modern humanity seems to be that it has too few creative and

inspiring myths to live by. In desperation we revive and cling to images and symbols that draw on the darkest recesses of our destructive potential.

Ram Saumya and Oceanic Circles

We believe that Gandhi with his non-violence and satyagraha, his swaraj and swadeshi, has much to teach us about this peace that more than ever we realise must be the foundational myth of our societies today, for a brave new world tomorrow.

Gandhi did try to express such an ideal of peace with his secularised myth of 'Ramraj'. But this could not quite free itself from its religious context and so was not as universal in its appeal as Gandhi intended. Now it has been misappropriated to sanction the very opposite of what Gandhi stood for, Ram rudra, the warlike, not Ram saumya, the gentle

But if Gandhi does not leave us with an effective myth of peace he does give us an image of society that can point us the way to a deeper mythical foundation for this peace. Gandhi's vision of the oceanic circles, centring on little communities and neighbourhoods, ever-widening and overlapping, reinforcing and inclusive, reverses the pyramidal image of a society, stratified by class and/or segmented by caste. It gives us a commanding image and symbol for peace on which we can hope to base our new foundational social myth, our deep collective dream of peace.

But for this dream to even begin to become a reality, we must divest ourselves of a great deal of the cultural baggage we carry, the presumptions and pre-options we have been, and still are being socialised into. We must not allow our history to control our destiny, we must come to terms with our collective memories and allow our wounded psyche to heal. This would amount to what Panikkar perceptively calls a 'cultural disarmament', and a social metanoia, a collective change of heart, as a pre-condition for a dialogue with the 'other', and more importantly for the dialogue among ourselves, and even within our 'self', where this myth of peace must first be rooted. Gandhi died a beaten, broken old man. It is not he who has fail us, it is we who failed to live his ideals, and so betray our deepest most enriching dreams.

Conclusion

In sum then, our understanding of peace necessarily implies the negation of violence, not only unjustified violation, which is obviously the very contradiction of peace, but also what is sometimes considered as justifiable force. For even with defensive force and counter-violence, there are moral ambiguities involved that rarely make for an acceptable or stable peace. But peace does not imply the absence of or the negation of power. Although power as domination, even when it is considered just and legitimate, can at best lead to a passive and negative peace, a peace that can only be as precarious as any balance of power must inevitably be. Rather an authentic understanding of peace would be premised not on power over, not on power as domination, but on power to, power as enabling. This can make for a strong and stable peace, that is more than mere tranquillity, and would include justice, freedom and harmony in our social order.

In this context, the Gandhian discourse and praxis has foundational implication for any understanding and pursuit of peace. His ahimsa, swaraj and swadeshi cannot any more be dismissed in our coping with the violence we have perpetrated on ourselves, within societies and between nation-states. But as yet we do not have a viable 'myth' to found a feasible 'ideology' of peace. Though we can begin to prepare for this with a 'cultural disarmament' as a prelude to a more comprehensive military one.

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INTERPRETING GANDHI'S HIND SWARAJ

Economic and Political Weekly June 12, 1999, pages 1497-1502

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Abstract

Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* (HS) is surely a foundational text for any understanding of the man and his mission. In dialogue with the text in its context, with the author and among ourselves, we hope to locate the text within its own horizon of meaning and then interrogate it from within our own contemporary understanding.

I. Gandhi's Critique of the Modern West

For Gandhi civilisation was by definition a moral enterprise: 'Civilisation is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty' (HS, Ch 13). Hence it is the very basic ethos of this modern West that Gandhi sets himself against. For he finds two unacceptable and unethical principles at its very core: 'might is right' and the 'survival of the fittest'. The first legitimated the politics of power as expounded earlier by Machiavelli; the second idealised the economics of self-interest as proposed by Adam Smith. In the West 'with rare exceptions, alternatives to Western civilisation are always sought within its own basic thought system' [Saran 1980:681].

The three recurrent themes in Hind Swaraj which we will discuss here are colonial imperialism, industrial capitalism, and rationalist materialism.

Colonial imperialism

Gandhi categorically insisted that 'the English have not taken India; we have given it to them. They are not in India because of their strength: but because we keep them' (HS, Ch 7). He was one of the earliest to realise that colonialism was something to be overcome in our own consciousness first [Nandy 1983:63].

Unless this 'Intimate Enemy' was exorcised and exiled, unless we addressed this 'Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism' (*ibid.*), we would always be a people enslaved by one power or another, whether foreign or native. Certainly, Gandhi would not want to exchange an external colonialism for an internal one, a white sahib for a brown one, or compensate the loss of 'Hindustan' with 'Englistan' (HS, Ch 4).

British Indian colonialism was first justified by a supposedly Christianising mission, but very soon this was articulated in terms of a civilising one. In rejecting this modern civilisation, Gandhi is subverting the legitimacy of the colonial enterprise at its core. For there could be no colonialism without a civilising mission [Nandy 1983:11] since it could hardly be sustained in India by brute force.

Industrial capitalism

Gandhi sees capitalism as the dynamic behind colonial imperialism. Lenin too had said as much, and like Marx, Gandhi's rejection of capitalism is based on a profound repugnance to a system where profit is allowed to degrade labour, where the machines are valued more than humans, where automation is preferred to humanism.

It was this that moved Gandhi to his somewhat hyperbolic claim: 'Machinery is the chief symbol of modern civilisation; it represents a great sin' (HS, Ch 19). However, by 1919 his views on machinery do begin to change right up to 1947, as he gradually comes to concede some positive aspects like time and labour saving, even as he warns against the negative ones of concentrating wealth and displacing workers [Parel 1997:164-70]. He was acutely sensitive to how machinery can dehumanise and technology alienate, and he extends his critique to the professions of medicine and law (HS, Chs 11, 12). The poor hardly benefit from these professional services, though they are often their victims. He backs up his criticism of these professions in Hind Swaraj with a later suggestion for their nationalisation (CW, 68:97).

Rationalist Materialism

Technology is but the expression of science, which in modern civilisation becomes an uncompromising rationalism. For Gandhi, this is but a dangerously truncated humanism. His incisive remark is much to the point: 'Just as dirt is matter misplaced, reason misplaced is lunacy! I plead not for the suppression of Reason, but for a due recognition of that in us which sanctifies reason itself' (CW, 6:106). Certainly, Gandhi is right in insisting on the unreasonableness of not setting any limits to reason. More recently a post-modern world has

emphasised the aggressive and destructive march of this 'age of reason'.

However, Gandhi would test his faith with his reason, but he would not allow his reason to destroy his faith. What makes such technological rationalism even more destructive in Gandhi's view, is its flawed materialism. That is, the negation of the spiritual, the transcendent, or in other words, the denial of a religious worldview.

For Gandhi truth, was much more than could be grasped by science or reason. For him, there was a reality beyond that perceived by the senses. It is this transcendent reality that gave meaning and value to our present one. In this Gandhi is very much in the mainstream of Hindu tradition. Indeed, most religious traditions would be similarly sensitive to such a transcendent world, even when it is not perceived as wholly other-worldly. In a more secular world today we may not be sympathetic to such a worldview. And yet a materialism that is deterministic leaves no scope for human freedom and hope. Gandhi emphasises this reaching out to a beyond that gives this freedom and hope its dynamism and a reach beyond its grasp.

II. Relevance of Gandhi's Critique

Today Gandhi's critique of modern civilisation does overlook many of its strengths: its scientific and critical spirit of inquiry: its human control over the natural world; its organisational capacity. Such achievement would imply a certain 'spiritual dimension' that Gandhi seems to have missed [Parekh 1997:35]. However, the focus of his criticism is modern civilisation of a specific period; his condemnation of colonialism focuses on its imperialistic inspiration; his rejection of industrialism derives mostly from its capitalist context; his apprehensions about rationality regard its truncation by materialism.

However, once the real limitations of Gandhi's critique are acknowledged, then we can better contextualise and interpret his relevance for us today, whether this be with regard to politics in our neo-colonial world, or technologies in our post-industrial times, or culture in our postmodern age. These will now be some of the issues on which we must allow Gandhi to interrogate us. For 'the kinds of questions Gandhi asked nearly eight decades ago are the ones which now face both the underdeveloped and the post-industrial societies caught up in a deep upsurge of confusion and disillusionment' [Sethi 1979:3].

Neo-colonialism

Gandhi's rejection of the supposedly civilising mission of colonialism brings into question the whole legitimacy of colonial rule, at a fundamental ethical level. He would have India unlearn much that she has from the modern West. For if Indians 'would but revert to their own glorious civilisation, either the English would adopt the latter and become Indianised or find their occupation in India gone' (HS, Preface to English edition).

Thus, he opens up a host of ethical issues between the coloniser and the colonised, the dominant and the dominated, the oppressor and oppressed. The postcolonial era brought such issues into sharper focus across the world. Now with globalisation leading to a unipolar world, such concerns with empowerment and disempowerment, dependency and interdependency, have gained, not lost their urgency. Moreover, closer home this widening divide bears down on us more decisively than ever before.

Our new economic policy increasingly represents a whole new vision of society, that takes for granted the internal colonialism we are experiencing today, as for instance between Bharat and India, the Bahujan and the twice-born jatis, the avarna and the savarna castes, the toiling masses and the privileged classes, the oppressed people and the oppressor groups, the minority traditions and the majority one.

Thus, our post-colonial world can only be described as a neo-colonial one, internationally divided into developed and developing nations, as also intra-nationally between privileged and underprivileged citizens. Moreover, these divisions are mutually reinforced, not just economically and politically but culturally and socially as well.

Moreover, the West is still the centre of our world for we have not the self-respect, the self-reliance, the self-sufficiency to centre ourselves and so we condemn ourselves to remain on the periphery of someone else's centre. For the colonial masters had stripped our collective identity of any intrinsic dignity by denigrating us as a cowardly and passive people. Gandhi sought to reverse the damage to our collective psyche by his 'redefinition of courage and effective resistance in terms of, or through non-violence' [Roy 1986:185].

The issue then of our identity as a nation and a people still remains to be resolved. Such identities are only viable in a genuinely multicultural world. Gandhi's urging in this regard is certainly

relevant today in our own society where the propagation of a cultural nationalism is growing every day. Yet 'nothing could be more anti-Indian than attempts to make an ideology of Indianness and to fight, instead of incorporating or bypassing non-Indianness' [Nandy 1980:112].

Post-industrialism

With the new technologies, there was much hope for a new freedom from degrading and monotonous work. However, what seems to have come in to replace this degrading monotony is not a new dignity of labour but rather a compulsive consumerist society, which is but dehumanising in newer ways. This should hardly surprise us since the ethic underlying post-industrialism is the same as that which underpinned industrial capitalism, namely, the profit motive and the market mechanism.

Gandhi's critique was precisely a condemnation of these. If we find his ideas of trusteeship a little naive and impractical, we still have no alternative answer to humanising a system that seems to have betrayed what possibilities it might have had of bringing freedom and dignity to the toiling masses. Moreover, technology has its own intrinsic dynamism, that instrumentalises our world and inevitably leads to a disenchantment that brings us to the 'iron cage', as Weber warned long ago.

Our environmental crises are surely a manifestation of this loss of innocence, even to the point when we want newer technologies to repair the damage already done by the older ones. Gandhi was precisely rejecting such a naive 'nineteenth-century optimism which sought for the positive sciences the liberation of humanity' [Nandy 1986:102]. But such anti-modernism then was ahead of its time!

Post-modernism

The excessive and aggressive rationalism of the age of reason now seems to have turned on itself with the post-modern revolt. But this has thrown up its own irrationalities. It seems to have lost the liberating project that was implicit in modernity. For the kind of relativising and subjectivising of ethics that postmodernism has led to, undermines the claims of any justice. For there can hardly be any

mutually accepted legitimacy to arbitrate conflicting claims when consensus irrevocably breaks down. So, might becomes right, and the power its own legitimation.

Gandhi's trenchant critique of modernity was focused on modernist rationalism, but it was equally opposed to a post-modern rejection of rationality. What Gandhi was pleading for is a richer concept of rationality and a meta-theory of rationalism [Parekh 1995:165-66]. He wanted to contain excessive rationality within reasonable bounds without an irrational revolt against reason itself, but he would emphatically reject any forced choice between totalising rationalism and relativising subjectivism.

III. Gandhi's Affirmation of Indian Culture

Gandhi's Hind Swaraj presents us with an idealised version of Indian culture that is completely counterpunctal to the 'modern West'. Here we pick out three seminal themes: swaraj, swadeshi and satya.

Swaraj: Gandhi radically re-interprets 'swaraj' and gives it a dual meaning. The original Gujarati text uses 'swaraj' in both senses. Gandhi's English translation makes the duality explicit: swaraj as 'self-rule' and as 'self-government'. The first as self-control, rule over oneself, was the foundation for the second, self-government. In this second sense, local self-government was what Gandhi really had in mind. Gandhi very decidedly gives priority to self-rule over self-government, and to both over political independence, swatantrata.

Essential to both meanings of swaraj, was a sense of self-respect that is precisely Gandhi's answer to colonial rule. For Gandhi freedom in its most fundamental sense had to mean freedom for self-realisation. But it had to be a freedom for all, for the toiling masses, and the privileged classes, and most importantly for the least and last Indian. In this sense, sarvodaya was precisely the patriotism that Gandhi espoused. It focused on people's welfare not on national pride: 'By patriotism I mean the welfare of the whole people, and, if I could secure it at the hands of the English, I should bow down my head to them' (HS, Ch 15). So he could write 'my patriotism is for me a stage on my journey to the land of freedom and peace' (Young India, April 13, 1924, p 112). And yet swaraj was not something given by the leaders, Indian or British, it was something that had to be taken by the people for themselves.

Clearly, the foundation of swaraj in both its senses had to be threefold: self-respect, self-realisation and self-reliance. This is what Gandhi tried to symbolise with the chakra and khadi, both much misunderstood symbols today. For Gandhi khadi 'is the symbol of the unity of Indian humanity, of its economic freedom and equality and therefore ultimately in the poetic expression of Jawaharlal Nehru, the livery of India's freedom' (CW 75:146- 66). Today the chakra and khadi have not retained this powerful multivalent symbolism.

Yet the ethic that Gandhi was trying to introduce and inscribe into Indian political life was that 'real swaraj will not be the acquisition of authority by a few but the acquisition of the capacity of all to resist authority when it is abused' [Prabhu 1961:4-5]. For Gandhi 'Civilisation is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path duty' (HS, Ch 13). The basis then of his swaraj could not be just rights, it had to be duties as well. For Gandhi real rights are legitimated by duties they flow from, for both are founded on satya and dharma. The modern theory of rights reverses this priority and founds rights on the dignity and freedom of the individual. But comprehensive morality can never be adequately articulated or correctly grasped in terms of rights alone.

Swadeshi

Swadeshi is the means for Gandhi's quest for swaraj. Fundamentally it meant 'localism'. This was not an isolated localism of the 'deserted village', that Goldsmith romanticised, or the degradation of caste oppression that Ambedkar revolted against, but rather the local neighbourhood community, the village as the node in a network of oceanic circles that over-lapped and spread out in its ever-widening embrace. It is this commitment of the individual to his 'desh' that was Gandhi's Indian alternative to Western nationalism [Parekh 1995:56-57].

Gandhi perceived that power in India was inevitably monopolised by the urban elite, at the expense of village folk, and was trying to reverse this dependency to make the state serve the weaker sections. His was an egalitarian, not just a romantic, inspiration. Mao attempted as much in China. But the village Gandhi idealised was not just a geographic place, or a statistic, or a social class. It was an event, a dream, a happening, a culture. As he used 'the term 'village' implied not an entity, but a set of values' [Sethi 1979:23]. It brought together

his three basic themes of swaraj: self-respect, self-realisation and self-reliance.

In privileging the rural over the urban, Gandhi was arguing for a minimal state, since he saw the state essentially as an instrument of violence. It was only in the communal cauldron at the time of partition, that he began to see the need of state power to contain and end the violence. And yet our experience of the post-colonial state in this country would bear out his apprehensions even as we seem to be careening into anarchy. Gandhi perhaps did not fully appreciate the role of the state as an agency for regeneration and redistribution, in planning and coordination. But he was acutely sensitive to the centralised state appropriating what belonged to the local community and the individual. He was deeply suspicious of power being used in the cause of freedom or to contain violence. His swadeshi was an attempt to address this complex dialectic on an ethical rather than a political foundation.

Satya

For Gandhi truth was not a matter of theory but of practice. His autobiography entitled *Experiments with Truth* is surely an indication of this. But Gandhi's truth has little to do with experimental science, concerned with external prediction. Rather his truth was an experiential one, a reflexive understanding of oneself very much in the tradition of the Buddha and the ancient rishis of this land. The whole of Gandhi's life's journey was not to predict the outcome of his life's struggle, but rather to interpret and direct the struggles of the masses for what they themselves could legitimately claim.

For Gandhi, satya, was an absolute reality that we could only partially grasp. Thus, the many-sidedness of truth that we experience is nothing but a consequence of such relative knowledge. Overcoming these limitations of our 'relative knowledge' for a more comprehensive grasp of this 'absolute truth' could never be forced by violence. Only ahimsa, non-violence, could make the quest for such truth viable. Gandhi operationalised this quest in his strategy of satyagraha, or truth-force. Moreover, he makes no ethical separation between means and an end. Both must be morally good. For him 'the goal did not exist at the end of a series of actions designed to achieve it, it shadowed them from the very beginning' [Parekh 1995:142].

Thus, satyagraha was not just a political strategy, it was both a means and an end. It was basically a method of dialogue that would bring two disagreeing parties not just into mutual agreement, but into

the realisation of a deeper truth together. The dichotomy between the oppressor and the oppressed is transcended in this 'heightened mutuality', but even beyond this 'satyagraha ruptures the trichotomy among the oppressor, oppressed and emancipator' [Pantham 1986:179] for it seeks to involve all three in this quest for greater self-realisation of the truth. From the satyagrahi as the initiator, this required a demanding discipline.

But satyagraha was also a political strategy. In Hind Swaraj Gandhi defines 'passive resistance' as he called it then, as 'a method of securing rights by personal suffering' (HS, Ch 17). Clearly, 'Gandhi's satyagraha then was an ingenious combination of reason, morality and politics; it appealed to the opponent's head, heart and interests' [Parekh 1995:156].

This was a 'vernacular model of action' [Parekh 1995:211] that the people understood. But it was Gandhi who first used it so effectively to mobilise them and to appeal to their oppressors. In fact, he was the first leader to bring non-violence to centre stage in the struggle for freedom with the British. He was well aware that adopting 'methods of violence to drive out the English' would be a 'suicidal policy' (HS, Ch 15). And his Hind Swaraj was precisely intended to stymie such a soul-destroying venture.

Gandhi's re-interpretation

Gandhi locates himself as an insider to mainstream Hinduism, the 'sanathan dharma'. Hence, the radicality of his re-interpretation goes unnoticed. Gandhi does not reject, he simply affirms what he considers to be authentic, and allows the inauthentic to be sloughed off.

For 'Gandhi's Hinduism was ultimately reduced to a few fundamental beliefs: the supreme reality of God, the ultimate unity of all life and the value of love (ahimsa) as a means of realising God' [Nanda 1985:86]. His profound redefinition of Hinduism gave it a radically novel orientation. In sum, 'Gandhi's Hinduism had a secularised content but a spiritual form and was at once both secular and non-secular' [Parekh 1995:109].

Thus, one of the most remarkable and yet unremarked re-interpretations of Hinduism that Gandhi effected was that of the Gita, a text intended to persuade a reluctant warrior of the legitimacy and even the necessity of joining the battle. Gandhi reworks its 'nishkamakarma' to become the basis of his ahimsa and satyagraha!

We have only to contrast Gandhi's Hinduism with V D Savarkar's Hindutva to see how starkly contrapuntal they are! Hence, in spite of its pretensions to be nationalist and modern, its militant chauvinism and authoritarian fundamentalism make Hindutva the very antithesis of Gandhi's Hinduism. Hindutva is in fact but a contemporary synthesis of Brahminism! This is why in the end the Mahatma is vehemently opposed by the traditional Hindu elite, who felt threatened by the challenge he posed.

But precisely because he presents himself as a Hindu in his interpretation of Indian culture, he was seen as too inclusive by traditional Hindus, and at the same time as not ecumenical enough by contemporary non-Hindus. Hence his appeals for Hindu-Muslim unity were rejected, by the Muslims as being too Hindu, and questioned by the Hindus for not being Hindu enough.

Gandhi's failure to bridge the religious divide between Hindu and Muslim, was matched in many ways by his failure to bridge the caste divide between Dalits and others. He never quite understood Jinnah, or his appeal to Muslim nationalism. One could say the same in regard to Ambedkar and Dalits, who have never forgotten or forgiven Gandhi for the imposition of the Pune Pact. We can only wonder now whether separate electorates for Dalits then would have made reservations for them unnecessary now. What we do know is that the caste divide has only deepened with increasing conflict and indeed the same can be said about the religious divide and religious conflict in this country.

Yet for Gandhi, the unity of humankind was premised on the oneness of the cosmos, which was a philosophical principle that was ontologically prior to diversity. Once the legitimacy of religious diversity is rooted in the fundamental Jaina principle of 'anekantavada', the many-sidedness of truth, then religious tolerance is a necessary consequence – not a negative tolerance of distance and coexistence, but rather one of communication and enrichment [Heredia 1997].

In cultural matters, Gandhi wanted all cultures to be enriched by each other without losing their identity. But such cultural assimilation was opposed by political revivalists and religious nationalists. Yet for Gandhi, open and understanding dialogue must precede, not follow, a free and adaptive assimilation. Thus, an enriched diversity would then contribute to a more invigorated pluralism and an enhanced unity. This was precisely Gandhi's understanding of Indian culture and civilisation, and he had, indeed, grasped its fundamental strength and the secret of its survival.

IV. Our World Today

We must now situate ourselves with regard to the critical issues of our world today to enter into dialogue with him. Here we have chosen three such issues as being the most fruitful for this encounter: the collapse of socialism and the crisis of capitalism, globalisation in an interdependent world, and the unresolved violence of our atomic age.

Post-socialism

In our present world, the socialist ideal is being discredited as a god that failed, when it is rather the once socialist states that have collapsed. Moreover, today the crisis of capitalism is every day more apparent, with the collapse of the much-acclaimed Asian tigers as the new model for the cornucopia of development and progress; and the growing unemployment in the West cannot but presage further crises there as well. With liberalisation and privatisation as accepted policy in our country today, the Bharat verses India divide, that Gandhi had intuited long ago, is, if anything, rapidly and disastrously growing. Only now the elite of Bharat seems to have been co-opted by the privileged of India, even as the refugees of India have been forced into an urbanised Bharat.

Much has been made about the disagreements between Gandhi and Nehru. But in the exchange of letters in 1945 [Parel 1997:149-56], it is quite clear that the axis of their reconciliation was precisely around this quest for equality. Their paths may have been different but Nehru's socialism and Gandhi's swaraj were both oriented to this quest for equity and equality across all the divides, of caste, class, region, etc.

Gandhi was quite radical in urging equality, even more so than the communists. 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'. In the beginning, he saw no contradiction between such fraternal equality and the idealised hierarchy of varna. But in his later years, he reversed himself to urge that 'classless society is the ideal, not merely to be aimed at but to be worked for' (*Harijan*, February 17, 1946, p 9). By now he was promoting inter-caste marriages and hoping 'there would

be only one caste known by the beautiful name *Bhangi*, that is to say, the reformer or remover of all dirt' (Harijan, July 7, 1946, p 212).

But if Gandhi's quest for equality is something that our complex world cannot accommodate, we seem to have given up not just this ideal of equality, but even the quest for equity in the distribution of the rewards and burdens of our society. And yet today Gandhi's proletarian 'levelling down' certainly seems to be much more viable that Tagore's elitist 'levelling up'. In such a scenario the relevance of Gandhi's idea of sarvodaya as the goal of swaraj is something we need to re-examine. Certainly, a decentralised participative democratic and humane society is a more attractive, and one may dare say, a more viable ideal today, than the kind of consumerism and inequitable divisions that the new economic policy in our country seems to welcome.

Indeed, the principle of subsidiarity seems to be the only viable solution to national governments that are too large to address local problems, while being too small to cope with global ones. Today the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution once again affirm Panchayati Raj and tribal self-rule. We are coming back to a devolution of powers that Gandhi had urged in his ideal of swaraj and had tried to have written into our Constitution. Hopefully, this will be a presage of more to come.

Globalisation

Globalisation and the alienating homogeneity that it must inevitably promote, is the very opposite of the localism and the celebration of diversity that Gandhi's swadeshi was meant to encourage. However, Gandhi's principle of swadeshi, 'simply means that the most effective organisation of social, economic and political functions must follow the natural contours of the neighbourhood,' thus affirming 'the primacy of the immediate community' [Roy 1985:114]. Gandhi's 'goodness politics' as it has been called [Saran 1980:691], could only really operate on such a scale. For 'Gandhi decentralisation means the creation of parallel politics in which the people's power is institutionalised to counter the centralising and alienating forces of the modern state....Thus the Gandhian decentralised polity has a built-in process of the withering away of the state' [Sethi 1986:229].

But before this is dismissed as too naive or impractical for our sophisticated and complicated world, we might pause to think of the kind of politics our centralised states have in fact spawned. The very hegemonic homogeneity it promotes succeeds less at obliterating difference than at alienating minorities and enkindling their resentment. On the contrary, to take a lesson from ecology, micro-variability is needed for macro-stability in political and economic systems as well. Gandhi's swadeshi could never mean ethnocentrism. Unlike some Hindu and Muslim 'nationalists' Gandhi never used 'nationalism' for narrow sectarian purposes. He mobilised his people as 'Indians' not as Hindus or Muslims. His nationalism was anti-imperialistic not chauvinistic, a struggle for political justice and cultural dignity [Nandy 1994:3]. He was a patriot who wanted 'Indian nationalism to be non-violent, anti-militaristic and therefore a variant of universalism' [Nandy 1995:14]. He was only too aware of the number of 'nationalities' that could be mobilised in India, once the genie was out of the bottle!

An ecological understanding is now propelling us to a new and deep realisation of our interdependence. We have only one earth, we must learn to share and care. We are but a contingent part of the cosmos, debtors born, whose proper response to life must be the 'yagna', service-offering of our lives for others [Parekh 1995:88]. Thus, with regard to the economy and polity, Gandhi would have the village as his world; but with regard to culture and religion, it was the world that was his village! Surely, here we have a viable example of thinking globally and acting locally. Indeed, our global ecological crisis has begun to press on us anew the relevance of Gandhi's paradoxical ideas. For the institutional individualism that seemed to be the very foundation of the democratic quest in the West seems quite inadequate to the ecological crises of today. For it privileges individual rights over the common good. But even enlightened self-interest has no answer to the 'tragedy of the commons' except an external coercion.

However, for Gandhi, 'individuality' must be 'oriented to self-realisation through self-knowledge... in a network of interdependence and harmony informed by ahimsa' [Roy 1986a:84]. Nor was this to be an interdependence of dominant-subservient relationships so prevalent in our local communities and global societies. His swadeshi envisaged a more personalised and communitarian society on a human scale, yet extending to include both the biotic and even the cosmic community. This was the logical extension of the Jaina

doctrine of 'syadvada', that everything is related to everything in the universe in 'a great chain of being'.

However, the Gandhian ideal was a community modelled on the joint family and on varna as a non-competitive division of labour. Later on in his life, his own promotion of inter-caste marriages testifies to a change in his views. Yet even as we critique such Gandhian ideas, we must discover in dialogue what value and relevance they have for us today. For ultimately Gandhi insists on both: that the community is not a mere means for the self-interest of the individual and that the individual is not a mere resource for the concerns of the community. And this would go for the community of communities, that our global community must be.

Violence

There can be no negating the liberation that modernity has brought in our post-modern world to vast masses of people. But for all its much vaulted 'rationality' some would rather say because of it, modernity has failed to cope with this endemic irrationality of violence. If Gandhi's ahimsa seems impractical, what is the alternative we have trapped ourselves in? If Gandhi was right that ' to arm India on a large scale is to Europeanise it,' (HS, Ch 15) then what would nuclear arms do? Americanise us? And this is an initiative being pushed by our cultural nationalists! But then in a globalised world, it is surely only the elite that will get to strut and fret upon this global stage, while the masses of our people are a passive and manipulated audience to this theatre of the macabre.

The whole effort of the modern world in dealing with violence has been to control the other. But mastery over others has not meant less violence for ourselves. Only now, we become the perpetrators, not the sufferers of violence. Gandhi's attempt begins with controlling oneself – as the first source of violence one must master in order to fearlessly and non-violently win over the violent others. His concern was with 'socialising the individual conscience rather than internalising the social conscience' [Iyer 1973:123]. Certainly, Gandhi has much relevance to our present need to once again bridge this dichotomy between rights and duties, and integrate both in a more comprehensive freedom of choice and the obligation of conscience, in a humanist worldview and a more genuinely humane world community. This is our only real chance for peace in our now globally interdependent world.

Gandhi's synthesis

Gandhi's Hind Swaraj is not a rejection of the liberative contribution of modernity: civil liberties, religious tolerance, equality, poverty alleviation. Rather his effort can be interpreted as an attempt to integrate these positive elements with a liberating reinterpretation of tradition, even as some see him as radical and others as reactionary. With his critique from within the tradition, Gandhi becomes the great synthesiser of contraries if not of contradictions, within and across traditions. His 'purna (comprehensive) swaraj' would harmonise rights and duties, head and heart, individual and community, faith and reason, economic development and spiritual progress, religious commitment and religious pluralism, self-realisation and political action. He brings together philosophical discourse and popular culture in enlightened renewal and social reform. Not since the time of the Buddha, some have argued, has such a synergy between the philosophic and the popular in our traditions been experienced. Thus, Gandhi integrates the Upanishad and the Tulsi Ramayan in his religious synthesis. When it comes to bridges across traditions, Gandhi brings the Gita together with the 'Sermon on the Mount' and reads one into the other. In fact, if he has Christianised Hinduism he has certainly also presented us with a Hinduised Christian spirituality.

Precisely as a re-interpretation from within, Gandhi can so much to more effectively and authentically integrate into his synthesis elements from without. Thus he reconciles meaningful faith and reasonable modernity. In the best traditions of this land, he combined both faith and reason, for each is implicated in the other. Gandhi would constantly critique faith to ascertain whether it was meaningful and reasonable in terms of basic human value commitments. And so too he would demand of reason the same fidelity to these values as well.

However, the ascetic dimension of Gandhi's integration at times loses the aesthetic one. A criticism of Gandhi's ashrams was that it grew only vegetables, not flowers [Parekh 1995:209]. Growing vegetables represented more than the Gandhian pre-occupation with vegetarianism and bread-labour. But in rightly emphasising the need for renunciation, certainly a message that our consumerist and self-indulgent world needs more than ever today, the Gandhian ashram seemed to miss out on the need for celebration, which our tired and alienated, dis-spirited and pessimistic world needs almost as much.

A re-interpretation of Gandhi would precisely allow such a celebration. While Gandhi's understanding of 'moksha' as service is a seminal breakthrough, even this can be enriched by affirming, not negating the other dimensions of life. It is only thus that we will be able to bring some wholeness to, in Iris Murdoch's unforgettable phrase, the 'broken totality,' of our modern world.

V. Conclusion: Partners in Dialogue

Gandhi's life was a continuing series of controversies and contestations with those in power on behalf of the powerless. He never lacked opponents, among the British and even the Indian elites, and often found himself isolated and alone particularly at the end of his life, which was far from being one long triumphant procession. Yet one of the great contributions of Gandhi was precisely his centring of the periphery: in politics with 'anthyodaya'; in religion by de-Brahminising Hinduism, de-institutionalising practice and personalising belief; in education by his proposal for 'nai talim' or basic education as it came to be called; in the economy by symbolically urging khadi. Not all of these efforts were successful or perhaps even practical, but they did make a contribution which is still valid today. And all Gandhi's original ideas can be found seeded already in his *Hind Swaraj*.

Today we need a new developmental model, and increasingly people are beginning to see that, it has to begin by 'Putting the Last First' [Chambers 1983], to come back to the last Indian that Gandhi would have as the talisman of our social planning. No one can claim that Gandhi's reformist appeal has fulfilled the 'revolution of raising expectations' of our masses. This only underscores the need for a more fine-tuned analysis and a wider dialogue in our society for constructive change given the limits of reformism and the constraints on revolution. If we are looking for a new synthesis for a counterculture, we must take Gandhi as a dialogue partner in this project but first, we must redefine and re-interpret him. Such an encounter will help us to re-examine and reconstruct ourselves as well.

Gandhi has been severely criticised as impractical, as someone who took out an impossible overdraft on human moral resources. But this is to claim that human beings are not capable of a metanoia, a radical change of heart, that can open up new perspectives, not just for

individuals and groups, but for entire societies and whole cultures as well. We need organic intellectuals and transformative activists who can articulate and precipitate such a social movement. The cascading crises that our society and our world is experiencing, only underlines more emphatically the need to find new ways of redefining ourselves and understanding our problems, before we can begin to respond to the situation.

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6.
REVISITING GANDHI, RETHINKING 'NAI TALIM': AN APPROACH FOR NON-FORMAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

New Frontiers in Education, Vol. 30, No.3, Jul-Sep, 2000.

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Abstract

The principles of Gandhi's basic education or '*nai talim*': bridging the school with the world of work, imparting an activity orientation to the curriculum, and inculcating a sense of self-reliance. It is well served when the learner has both the freedom and the opportunities to learn in a supervised environment. These are further strengthened when classroom activities become the extension of home experiences.

I. Gandhi's Basic Education

Among the radical alternatives to the present system of education that have been proposed, none was more promising than Gandhi's basic education or '*nai talim*'. Unfortunately, Gandhi's proposal was out of phase with the prevailing educational system, and academic doubts seems to have stymied it from the start. Neither was any effort made to promote a popular movement in its favour, and eventually a half-hearted implementation relegated 'basic education' to the back burner from where it has not been retrieved. It is still official policy in Gujarat, and some few new attempts have been made more recently, e.g., a basic school was founded in memory of Acharya Pramathanath Mukhopadhya at Shiksha Niketan in 1987 in Burdwan district of West Bengal.

An Alternative Model

But Gandhi's radicalism in the freedom movement is even more out of phase with the developments in our post-independent society. His proposals are dissonant with both the educational system prevailing and the developmental model being promoted. There have been extensive critiques of Gandhi's 'basic education'. Thus, John Kurien has argued against the Gandhian model in favour of R. V. Parulekar's one of universalising education up to standard four. (Kurien 1983: 32-42) However, the search for an alternative model has still not yielded any really constructive re-orientation of our approach to education or development.

With the failure of our educational system to reach even basic literacy to the mass of our people, and moreover, with the crisis of our developmental model that has led to increasing social tensions, now more than ever we need to revisit Gandhi and rethink more critically his proposals both for education and for development. At the very least we must allow Gandhi to critique us, if we are open-minded enough to learn. More specifically, I submit that Gandhi's educational principles and pedagogic methods are particularly relevant to vocational training, of the kind SKIP (Skills for Progress) is now committed to.

Education and Development

For the system of education must correspond with the model of development, if in fact we want to promote education for development as suggested by the Kothari Commission in 1966. But we need to rethink both. Our developmental model has focused on growth rather than equity, on capital not labour, centralisation not devolution, bureaucracy not participation. Correspondingly, our education system is preoccupied with training for bureaucratic service and technical competence, and not self-reliance or self-employment.

Presenting an alternative developmental model would involve a much larger project than what can be undertaken in this presentation. But briefly, I would urge that an option for the poor would favour a bottom-up developmental paradigm that would privilege poor, rather than the top-down one we have adopted that benefits the upper classes and higher castes (Heredia 1997).

Principles and Methodologies

Here our focus will be on the educational system. From the extensive debate on Gandhi's nai talim, we can put together the following basic principles of Gandhi's education:

* Bridging the school with the world of work;
* Imparting an activity orientation to the curriculum; and
* Inculcating a sense of self-reliance. (Kumar 1995: 50)

Bridging school and work implies a school-community linkage in order to be effective and productive. An activity orientation demands an integration of action/experience with classroom learning. Self-reliance requires the development of the pupil's resourcefulness. Already in 1957, G. Ramachandra clarified in a Government of India Report that 'the main object of productive work was education through such work and income is only a corollary.' (Cited by Kumar 1995: 15) Whereas under conditions of injustice work becomes a drudgery and child labour an oppressive exploitation, 'basic education defines work in its broadest sense so as to make it a medium of socialising the child into a participative culture.' Kumar 1995: 16)

The pedagogical methodology of Gandhi focuses on the following guidelines:

*The child's immediate milieu must serve as a resource for the rediscovery of accepted knowledge;

*Children must have the freedom to create their own models of knowledge about the world;

*Learning must provide opportunities for children to be physically active;

*Classroom activities must resonate and extend the child's life at home and in its surroundings. (*ibid*.)

The pedagogy suggested here derives from and operationalises the educational principles indicated earlier. Thus the environment as the milieu and resource for learning will link the school to the community. An activity orientation arouses best and retains longest the curiosity of the pupil. It is well served when the learner has both the freedom and the opportunities to learn in a supervised environment. These are further strengthened when classroom activities becomes the extension of home experiences. Moreover, the opportunity to learn in a supportive environment will develop the resourcefulness of the learner and make for self-reliance.

Gandhi and Dewey

Here the correspondence between Gandhi and John Dewey should be immediately apparent.

'For Dewey, then, the barrier that the classical tradition set up between the practical and the educational world, the 'shop' and the 'school', were an obstacle to the important socializing function that the relationship between theory and practice provided. Significant learning was by doing, not simply teaching. We may note here in passing, that Gandhi's own idea of basic education was in continuity with this.' (Heredia1992: 333)

Dewey urged the problem-solving approach and the project method, as pedagogic methodologies. But for him, the goal of such education was to create a critical citizenry for democracy. An efficient workforce for production purposes was only a means to this more radical goal. Unfortunately, this goal has been displaced and his methodology has been coopted to train workers for the workplace and not educate them for critical participation in a liberal democracy. (Heredia 1992:334) Thus even in industrial countries, Dewey has been used to increase the efficiency of their workers rather than the effectiveness of their democracies.

Hence Gandhi's education for swaraj is fundamentally in accordance with Dewey's 'Education for Democracy', though in fact

'Gandhi was more radical. His own 'experiments with truth', implied an experiential basis to learning, closer to the empirical one of Dewey, than to the a priori philosophical one of Brahminism. So too his concern for the 'basic education' of the masses distanced him from the elitism of the classical traditions in India. Certainly, his pedagogy was closer to the artisan-apprentice relationship in a working context, than the guru-shishya one in an ivory tower.' (*ibid.* 333)

The implications of this for vocational training should be obvious. However, too easily has the Gandhian model been dismissed as idealistic and impractical.

Moreover,

> Gandhi's choice of the local as the appropriate context for the exercise of initiative and persistence suggests an obvious parallel to the exploration and reconstruction we find in Piaget's psycho-philosophy of knowledge. (Kumar 1995: 15)

For Gandhi's nai talim like his swaraj was meant to create a self-reliant community and not an army of dependent employees. The school was to be the institutional expression of the community to socialise the child into such self-reliance. Little wonder then that 'basic education became a victim of the bureaucratic culture entrenched in the education system.' (Kumar 1995: 17) And once students of basic schools were denied access to higher education its death kneel was struck by short-sighted educational administration, just as 'purna swaraj' for the India of Gandhi's dreams was rejected by powerful economic and bureaucratic interests.

It is necessary to distinguish in any educational endeavour or project, first, the value-commitment and attitude-formation that must form the student as a participating and responsible member of society, and second, the skills-training and information that are required for the student to function in society. Gandhi like Dewey would not have made a disjunction between the two. For the methodology that they have proposed is precisely to bring both skills and values, information, and formation as close together as possible, and to integrate the two into a single educational and pedagogic endeavour.

Formal and non-formal Education

This is why his model is extremely relevant for vocational education, particularly for the non-formal kind that is now being promoted. In the present dispensation, the temptation for any non-formal education project is to orient itself to the formal system and finally integrate with

it. But non-formal ventures were started in the first place to remedy the formal system not to integrate with it, to reform the system not support it. To do otherwise would only betray the initial promise with which non-formal education was launched in the first place, namely to address the inequities and wastage that were structured into our formal education.

As early as 1972 UNESCO's International Education Commission urged the need for non-formal education. (Faure 1977) For it was found 'that the formal education system made only a limited contribution to development and that the potential of non-formal education was much greater.' (Naik 1977: 19) For vocational training this would mean that non-formal technical schools would have as their reference model not the engineering college, but rather the productive workshop. Gandhi's principles and methodology might help us to re-orient ourselves and reverse this inclination.

II. Education for Community Development, not Individual Mobility

Precisely because Gandhi's ideal of education is community-centred and the school integrated into the community, it is relevant to promote community development and not just individual mobility. For individual mobility does not bring about any structural change in the system. It results only in the positional change of individuals, and perhaps of groups eventually. But the system reproduces itself so that the upward mobility of a few will mean the downward mobility of others. Thus, the overall equilibrium of the system is maintained. The acceptance of a few individuals who 'pass' and make their way up the hierarchy is but the kind of tokenism that is too readily mistaken for real change. In other words, individual mobility results in a zero-sum game, that cannot be the context for a more just and human society.

In linking education to community development and not just individual mobility, we would look for a fourfold integration (Rathanaiah 1977:9)

The Community within Society

If nothing is done to redress the marginalisation of disadvantaged communities of the poor, the Dalits, the tribal, then the education system in such a society cannot but past them by, as indeed the rest of the developmental process will. It is only when the model of development is oriented to positively include these marginalised people, Gandhi's last and least Indians, that the educational system itself would be able to deliver for such groups. In other words a marginalised community in society will continue to be marginalised even with the overall development of that society, unless its marginalisation is directly redressed and remedied. In regard to education this will demand that it become a means to conscientise the community and not remain a welfare measure to socialise individuals into society.

The School in Community

If education is to build the community, then the school must be integrated into the community. For this local control of the school is much more essential than supervision by a bureaucratic administration from some distant district or state headquarters. For if the stake holders in the community do not have a stake in the school, it is unlikely that the non-stake holding bureaucrats will be able to run a sustainable and functioning school at the local level in the community without involving it. PTAs, and committees of local functionaries can certainly help to make such links.

Local self-government with Panchayati raj and tribal self-rule promises precisely such local control of the schools. But if local control is to be effective, then there must be a certain conscientisation of the community with regard to its responsibility for the schools. If local control has failed in places, it is because conscientisation has not preceded control. Furthermore, besides being a community-school it must also be a community learning-centre. Indeed, this is what education relevance must mean: 'relating the design of basic schooling to the life and work of the wider community.' (Sinclair and Lilis 1980:33)

The Pupils in the Classroom

The isolation of the pupils in the classroom only deprives them of a creative learning environment. For this, the classroom must take into consideration the context of the pupil. Most classroom curricula and programmes are imposed from the outside, without any regard for the local circumstances of the student, or for that matter the teacher or the community. No wonder classroom education becomes alienating, and success here for those who achieve it merely distances them from their home and community. Rather classroom learning must relate to what the students are already doing and learning at home, by both affirming as also critiquing it. Only then can it creatively and constructively integrate the pupil into school programmes. Thus, education can become a continuing process, rather than a disruptive procedure.

Teachers in the Educational system

A teacher who is treated as a cog in the machine, cannot be creative or effective. The pedagogic relationship must be a personal one, it cannot be simply dictated from the outside. Hence the autonomy and responsibility of the teacher must not only be respected but encouraged, and teacher training must be geared in this direction. We cannot have self-reliant students if we do not have self-reliant and resourceful teachers. We cannot have joyful learning if we do not have joyful and competent teachers. What is needed is

the progressive build-up of committed personnel through the normative-re-educative strategy….to shelter the work of these innovators and permit diffusion of their work based on 'contagion' of the re-educative spirit and the rational-empirical appreciation of their work. (Sinclair and Lilis 1980: 112)

III. A Pedagogy for Self-reliance

Education for self-employment, not service requires a liberative pedagogy that enables and empowers students, not one that makes them submissive and dependent. We see immediately how radically different such a pedagogy must be from what happens in our classrooms today. Learning by rote and by guidebooks, studying to get 'marks' and pass examinations, etc., precisely develops the kind of passivity that encourages subservience. This might train faithful bureaucrats and obedient employees, but it can never produce the effectiveness and

creativity, that is required for self-employment and enterprise. In other words, we need to educate and socialise our students into a 'counter-culture for communities of solidarity'. (Heredia 1996:236)

For this we need rather Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to initiate our subaltern peoples into *Cultural Action for Freedom*. This is a radical pedagogy that expresses hope, critical reflection and collective struggle. The action-reflection-action praxis that Freire proposes, based on the experience of the persons involved, makes for a process of critical learning. Freire's methodology is directly opposed to the passive 'banking' process of education, so prevalent in our society, for this distances and alienates rather than enables or empowers a learner, whereas Gandhi's 'nai talim' is geared to making the student self-reliant and resourceful.

IV. Implementing the Vision

The initiatives and innovations proposed here will surely meet with opposition from vested interests in society at large, the particular school system, the local community. For the changes implied pose a challenge to government bureaucrats and private school managements, as also to parents and teachers. For

while it is comparatively easy to introduce educational reforms that support the existing social structure, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to implement radical educational reforms which threaten the existing social structure or run counter to its imperatives. (Citizens for Democracy 1978:35)

In the scenario prevailing in the country, a big push in the directions suggest here seems beyond our horizon. But small steps can make a difference and if these do not add up immediately to any revolutionary change now, they can surely prepare the ground for a great leap forward in the future later.

Strategies for Change

In their six-nation review of *School and Community in the Third World*, Sinclair and Lilis offer three possible strategies for educational change:

the first is thus the stepwise development of a subpopulation of innovating institutions. This would be the preferred policy, if political and other pressures allowed such choice. The second model offered for

consideration is that of universal adoption of a relevance orientation but with a two-tier system permitting stepwise development of high-quality programmes in an expanding group of selected innovative schools. This policy would have much to commend it where political pressures necessitated immediate system-wide adoption of some kind of relevance venture. A third strategy involves the omission of any special relevance programmes but attempts to reorient the existing curriculum towards activity methods and local relevance. An attempt to build on its strengths and overcome its weakness would be appropriate where the government was unwilling to provide the resources and organisational infrastructure for a major relevance programme. (Sinclair and Lilis 1980:164)

A single management running several institutions in a coordinated subsystem would represent the most likely agency for the first strategy above, whereas the third strategy can be implemented in a single institution. However, success in just one institution may have too small an impact to have a multiplier effect on the larger system. For this, a subsystem of schools may provide more credible 'model schools' to impact the larger educational system. The second strategy above can be attempted only with a larger system of schools such as the ones the government runs in a district or state. But such a big step may well be too large a leap for the pedagogic imagination and political will of the government bureaucracy. Eventually, however, strategies for implementation must take stock of the given context, the policies and pressures, the opportunities and persons that obtain, and fine-tune their approach accordingly.

Vision and Mission

Here it is my submission here that the educational principal and pedagogic methodology of Gandhi's basic education, need to be revisited and drawn on, since they can indicate practical and relevant strategies to operationalise the vision and the mission of SKIP.

In integrating learning with the work environment and the cultural context of the learner, Gandhi expresses a faith in the ability of the student to be self-reliant citizens in the community. In integrating the school with the community, and the teaching and learning at school with the knowledge and skills of that community, Gandhi is in fact proposing an education that will make for the development of a self-reliant community that draws on its own resources, where local knowledge and

skills of the subalterns, the peasants, the artisans, etc., are affirmed and valued, and become the foundation of further learning and higher knowledge. Centring education around vocational skills as the basis for learning, and further integrating this with income generation activities, is already a crucial step that orients students to becoming self-employed rather than being employees. This is an empowerment at the grassroots that should not be easily undervalued or dismissed.

V. Revolution and Reform

For Gandhi's basic education is designed around local crafts and productive skills, bringing these to the centre of the school and its curriculum. This affirms and legitimates the

systems of knowledge developed by and associated with the oppressed groups of Indian society, namely artisans, peasants, and cleaners. It was no less than a proposal for a revolution in the sociology of knowledge. (Kumar 1987:509)

Vocational training lends itself to the kind of work-centred learning and income generation that Gandhi visualised with his basic education. This must also go with the kind of formation and training necessary for self-employment and self-reliance, if in fact vocational training is to fit in with the SKIP's faith in human beings, its vision of a just society, and its mission to the marginalised. And if this does not add up to a sustained revolution it will surely be a viable reform of our education and training.

Obviously, such a project cannot be implemented or be effected in isolation. But the multiple impact from such vocational education could have a cumulative, first effect on the educational system, then indirectly on the local community, and eventually on society at large. However, to be realistic, we also must support such educational innovations and initiatives with changes and reorientation in other areas of society as well. In particular, the development model would also need to undergo a Gandhian critique as we have suggested earlier.

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7.
AUTONOMY AS MOKSHA: THE QUEST FOR LIBERATION

Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 36, No. 2, 13 Jan. 2001, pp. 116 – 118.

Abstract

A review article of *Gandhi: Struggle for Autonomy*, by Ronald J. Terchek: Vistar Publication, New Delhi, 2000, pp. xiv+265

The most persistent and urgent quest of Mahatma Gandhi's life by his own admission, like a true 'sanatani dharmik', was undoubtedly 'moksha', and the witness of his life, the way he lived, bares this out. But unlike most sanatani dharmiks this quest for Gandhi was never an other-worldly detachment as with some ancient 'rishis'. Gandhi's quest was not a 'jnana marg' that took him away, from everyday concerns, nor a 'bhakti marg' that focused on the deity, nor just a 'karma marg' that was preoccupied with ritual and action. Rather Gandhi's 'marg' was truly a new and creative reconstruction of Hinduism that subsumed all these paths into what can only be called a 'seva marg'. This was the only dharma he accepted, the service of the Darydra Narayan, whom he found in the least, the last and the lonely among his people.

And the yet for all the political implications of such a quest, as clearly seen in the freedom struggle that he led, there was a distinct ethical dimension that anchored Gandhi's quest firmly in moral and spiritual principles which transcended the here and now, even while he subsumed this into a higher order of struggle. This was the 'nish-kama-karma' ethic that Gandhi found in the Bhagwad Gita, and which

he made foundational for his own struggle for liberation, even as he tried to inspire others to do the same.

But 'moksha' is a quintessentially Hindu category, with other-worldly overtones that make it unattractive if not incomprehensible to modern secular society, particularly in the West. And in spite of Gandhi's reconstruction of it into an ethic of service and freedom, 'moksha' is all too often understood as a spiritual escape from the cycle of 'karma' and as such is alien to modern Western society.

In his effort to interpret Gandhi to modern society, in spite of the devastating critique that he made of modernity, Terchek finds an analytical category that he uses as a master lens to make Gandhi intelligible and relevant not just for today, but as he claims for tomorrow as well. There can be little doubt about the centrality of personal autonomy and freedom in the individualist ethic of the West. Terchek ably uses this as a bridge to make Gandhi intelligible to a Western world that has often been exasperated by his critique and rejection of modern civilisation as little more than 'a good idea'!

For Terchek finds that

animating all of Gandhi's work is his consistent respect for and tenacious defence of the integrity and worth of persons; this commitment to autonomy inspires all of his other projects.

Autonomy stands at the centre of Gandhi's political philosophy. It is his greatest good and precedes in importance his other political and social goals (p 21).

Gandhi's affirmation of individual dignity cuts across boundaries of history and geography, across barriers of space and time. He believed that each one can and should take charge of their lives and resist every form of domination, whether traditional or modern. However, while Gandhi's understanding of autonomy is premised on personal freedom and rationality, in common with the West, yet there are distinctive differences which he brings to bear that interrogate and challenge his Western counterparts.

A Western understanding of autonomy is basically premised on the free choice of rational persons that must be respected. Thus Gerald Dworkin holds that autonomy is "the capacity of persons to critically reflect upon, and then attempt to accept or change, their preferences, desires values, and ideals" (p 26). There are indeed implicit individualistic overtones that go back to the Protestant Ethic that idealised every man as 'his own priest and prophet'. The rugged 'can do' individualism of the wild West is nothing but a secular version of this.

Terchek rightly sees that this understanding of autonomy is premised on rights, and these are central to any modern Western political philosophy (p 25). Obviously, duties are not excluded, but when rights are prioritised then duties become consequent not foundational to our understanding of civil society. In this Western regime of rights then it is 'freedom from' that is primary whereas 'freedom for' becomes secondary, in other words, civil liberties and protection from the state and others are prioritised over empowering and enabling persons to exercise their liberty.

Gandhi's autonomy is quite the opposite of such an individualist version of freedom, for his understanding is premised on 'dharma', 'ahimsa' and conscience. For him "the true source of right is duty. If we all discharge our duties rights will not be far to seek" (*Young India,* January 8, 1935). Indeed, it is this free moral choice that founds the equality and dignity of persons whom he calls to resist domination and humiliation. In prioritising duties then Gandhi locates persons in community, even while he insists on protecting their autonomy from this community. Moreover, for him the truly autonomous person must be concerned with the autonomy of others as well.

Indeed for Gandhi, it is a person's struggle for internal freedom from inner compulsions like fear, anxiety, anger, etc, that is the more definitive and crucial freedom. Freedom from external forces of political oppression, from the compulsions of poverty and hunger, is but a necessary condition we must struggle for and strive after, precisely so that this inner freedom can find its proper expression and fulfilment.

Yet, in spite of this emphasis on the exteriorisation of autonomy, Gandhi steers clear from any taint of individualism. For he sees a cosmological inter-connectedness between all beings, and locates autonomy firmly with persons as a part of, not apart from community. Clearly the prioritisation of duty serves well to emphasise cohesion and community even as he affirms the inviolability of the human person.

It would seem then that for Gandhi 'moksha' is not so much autonomy but rather 'dharma'. What Terchek has done is to re-interpret 'dharma' as autonomy, as something more understandable to the West. How far is this really a legitimate exercise? Certainly, Gandhi gave a unique interpretation to 'dharma'. His is no longer the traditional 'samaj dharma' even when he seems to accept the

'varnashram dharma' as any 'sanatani dharmik' would. For Gandhi's own criticism of Hindu tradition is as severe as, if not more than, his emphatic rejection of modernisation.

Indeed, Gandhi reconstitutes and reinterprets tradition as an insider more radically than any outsider would have dared. The traditional elites noticed how he was subverting their privileged position and power and finally became inexorably opposed to him and so want to take him out. For it is not the 'samaj dharma' of tradition that can be the foundation of individual autonomy for Gandhi, it must be the 'swa-dharma' that is inspired by fidelity to the inner-voice of conscience. But Gandhi does not fall into a subjective relativism. He is well aware that "the inner-voice may be a message from god or the devil for both are struggling in the human breast" (*Harijan,* July 8, 1933). Hence is must be carefully discerned and the context for such a Gandhian discernment can never be the self-referential individual, it must be the community of persons to which one is bound in duty and service.

Thus "the defender of tradition turns out to be one of its harshest critics" (p 234). Yet rather than rubbishing tradition with a rationalist modernity Gandhi will critique it and reclaim it as a resource precisely to defend the personal autonomy that he sees is so threatened by modernity itself, particularly by the complexity and scale of modern society and the state.

Moreover, Terchek demonstrates with great facility how Gandhi's autonomy is of the critical relevance for us today: "he questions much that has been taken for granted in both India and the West, particularly the ideas that violence is an effective way to achieve justice and that modernity and modernisation spell progress" (p 3). For "his assault on modernisation is always coupled with a sense of what it promises and what it fails to deliver" (p 236). In this "Gandhi hopes not to settle the conversation but to open it up, not to offer solutions but to point to the paradox and irony embedded in any answer" (p 4).

The uncritical and uninhibited acceptance of such modernity and modernisation is precisely what Gandhi wants to contest. In problematising modernity, he certainly strikes a discordant code. But as Terchek shows, even in the West there have been counter-cultural critiques, from Rousseau and Ruskin to anarchism and atavism, that have tried to contain and moderate this inexorable march of modernisation, not to mention those that have stood against and rejected it. Gandhi was an incisive participant in this debate. For with modernisation, state power and control expands as the agents of the

state invade private spaces: the bureaucratic power over individuals, the massive lobbies of a politics of interest, giant corporations reducing humans to cogs in a machine...

For Gandhi, the issue is not who will win control over modern institutions and practices, but about questioning their efficacy and moral justifications regardless of who controls them.

For all of its rationalism and science, Gandhi finds that the modern world has created its own brand of fatalism, one that assumes that reigning institutional arrangements cannot be otherwise and it is our task to adjust to them (p 5).

In this scenario, Gandhi comes out as a strong Republican suspicious of the state but defending civil society in which he situates individual autonomy.

Thus Gandhi uses autonomy to problematise and critique political power, to unmask the hidden agenda of power and to make a strong case against a majoritarianism in democratic politics that would violate individual autonomy. For Gandhi in matters of conscience, there can be a majority of one, and even a single conscientious objector deserves the same respect as the numerical majority. The problem of political power is not resolved by democratising it, rather this only calls for greater vigilance to counter monopolistic and oligarchic tendencies. Neither is liberation achieved with the overthrow of the oppressor, rather it only begins with it.

So too with industrialisation, Gandhi's essential critique is not only that it undermines authentic individual autonomy by promoting consumerism, but more so because it negates human dignity itself by making persons themselves redundant, with increasing mechanisation and now automation. For Gandhi humans are more important than machines, labour is more valuable than capital. Hence he is most concerned with the way goods are produced since this already pre-empts how they will be distributed and consumed.

All this adds up to is a counter-cultural meta-narrative that interrogates and questions the master narrative of modernity, a narrative that now seems to have run its course, or at least so the postmodernist would have us think. But Gandhi is no postmodernist, he is still firmly routed in personal and the humanist values that trace their contemporary origins to the Enlightenment. It is these that Gandhi uses to interrogate and challenge tradition, even as he refuses to accept a self-justification of modernity from its own internal criteria. But then again Gandhi is no conservative either, at least in the sense one seeking to preserve tradition, rather he uses it as a

resource, and in a subversive way as well. Neither is he a communitarian who would submerge the individual in the group, the person remains for him an inviolable and a sacred trust.

Thus Terchek sees Gandhi as perhaps even more relevant to the 21st century than to the 20th. In spite of the apparent progress and superficial optimism that seems to embrace the information age, the electronic technology that it brought has left only dissolution and despair to at least two most critical contemporary groups, the young and the poor (p 230). Suicide rates among the young are a tragic testimony of this, just as the persistence of poverty even in affluent societies is a severe indictment on neo-liberal capitalism. Moreover, the problem of violence in the modern world simply has not been adequately addressed, and if it shies away from Gandhi and his non-violence it certainly has no viable alternative in place, except perhaps mutually assured destruction (MAD). To think that this was the official ideology of nuclear powers, only illustrates the poverty and inadequacy of contemporary political thinking.

But Terchek has a legitimate fear. It is precisely because Gandhi is in fact counter-cultural, that he may be ignored by the 21st century, just as in fact he was marginalised in his own country towards the end of his life. Certainly, Terchek does not romanticise Gandhi, and it would be a sad disservice to attempt this either. For Gandhi is too great a Mahatma to need such idealisation. Rather just as Gandhi problematises modernisation and modern society, there is need to problematise Gandhi so that in the mutual interrogation and dialectic between him and us, we might put together a meta-narrative for our society not one of nostalgia for the past or of despair for the future, or one of a superficial hope for the good life, but one that will be premised on the autonomy and freedom of persons-in-community, a community that is democratic and participative, harmonious and non-violent, in which individuals will be free from oppression and free for 'moksha'.

Gandhi is for Terchek the man for the 21st century, but he might well be an ignored and lonely figure there. For global uniformity, market consumerism, bureaucratic control, these are not the metaphors for a Gandhian narrative which privileges local diversity, bread-labour, selfless service. But there is one thing that Terchek's book does bring home: finally Gandhi is an invitation for us to struggle for the truth, to struggle non-violently, to struggle for one's own autonomy and freedom as well as that of others, or in other words, to struggle for 'moksha' by living one's 'swa-dharma'. And this is surely of fundamental relevance for our millennium and others.

8.
FAITH, REASON AND RELIGIOUS TRADITION: CELEBRATING GANDHI'S SYNTHESIS

Traditions in Motion: Religion and Society in History, eds. Satish Saberwal and Supriya Varma, Oxford Univ. Press, New Delhi, 2005,. (Earlier Indian Journal of Secularism, Vol.5, No.1, Apr. – Jun., 2001)

INTRODUCING THE PROBLEMATIC
TOWARDS A PHENOMENOLOGY OF FAITH
ARTICULATING A CRITIQUE OF REASON
FAITH AS CONSTITUTIVE OF THE HUMAN
LANGUAGE AS DISTINCTIVE OF THE HUMAN
DILEMMAS AND DIALECTICS
GANDHI'S FAITH AND REASON
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REFERENCES

Abstract

The first part discusses the dilemma between 'faith' and 'reason' in the context of religious tradition and concludes with a dialectical not a contradictory relationship between them. The second part attempts to illustrate this with Gandhi's religious understanding as a radical and relevant interpretation of beyond conventional orthodoxies.

Introducing the Problematic

Perceiving faith and reason as binary opposites rather than as two alternate ways in our quest for truth is more typical of Western thought, where this readily leads to an impassable divide, as between fideism and rationalism. 'What has Athens got to do with Jerusalem?

asked Tertullian at the beginning of the Christian era when confronted with Greek philosophy! But if believers would privilege faith, rationalists would reverse the hierarchy, and never the twain would meet! The resulting dualism between faith and reason would seem to leave each in an independent domain of human experience and knowledge, compartmentalising our lives and impoverishing them into the bargain, even as philosophers and theologians attempted to accommodate each other across the divide.

However, our contention here, as with Eastern thought more generally, is that faith and reason are complementary, not contradictory ways of seeking the truth, since in fact truth itself, satya, as ontological reality even more than just epistemological truth, cannot be contradictory, otherwise, reality itself would be absurd. What is needed is to include both in a more comprehensive understanding, which in fact would thereby be more human for being more inclusive and holistic. However, we must first refine our understanding of what we mean by 'faith' and 'reason' so as to explore more incisively the dialectic between the two.

To say that the relationship between faith and reason is dialectic, does not directly address the problematic relationship between the two, unless one further explores how this dialectic in actuality operates. For if a 'dia-lectic relationship' implies that one pole must be read against the other and vice versa, then we must still ask: *what does being 'reasonable' mean to faith, and again what does the 'being faithful to reason' require?*

For though ours is an age, which at the global level may be characterised by secularism, there are as yet strong pockets of religious resistance, at times even provoked by this very challenge of globalisation. (Beyer 1994) There is an increasing religious revivalism and fundamentalism that seems to be spreading like inkblots on the global map across countries and even continents. Then again the age of reason once seems to have undermined our faith with its rationalism, but now with the end of the Enlightenment, this very critique of reason has turned on itself and undermined our confidence in the older rationalist optimism. Today a post-modern age is putting to question all the grand narratives that once seemed to epitomise the cutting edge of our evolving rationality.

Towards a Phenomenology of Faith

More conventionally faith is understood as giving one's assent to a truth on the testimony of another. This is what makes belief credible, that is, worthy of being believed. Thus, understood faith is a matter of belief that focuses on the content and its credibility. In so far as this testimony is external to the believing person, its trustworthiness would rest on the credibility of the one giving the testimony, and not only on the content of the belief itself. Hence *what we believe depends on whom we trust*. Thus, if *I believe you*, it is not just because I accept what you say as true, but more so because *I believe in you*, i.e., I believe you are a trustworthy and truthful person. This opens up the inter-personal dimension of faith that focuses not on our relationship to things as to objects, but to persons as subjects, an I-thou, not I-it relationship. This is the faith that gives me access to the other person as a self-disclosing subject. An empiricist worldview constrained by a reductionist methodology cannot but discredit such 'knowledge'.

It is then the authority of the testimony, moral or formal, that legitimates the belief. However, as this testimony gets institutionalised in a tradition it can get even more distant from the original founding experiences and events themselves. Thus, oftentimes claims of divine inspiration for the authority of religious testimony are made by such institutional traditions, or at times the author of this testimony, the testifier, is seen to have claimed divinity itself. This would seem to put such testimony beyond human scrutiny. However, any communication, and most certainly a revelation of the divine to the human, must inevitably involve filters. Indeed, even the immediacy of a mystical experience, in its very first and necessary articulation to oneself, and in its later communication to others, necessarily involves the mediation of thought and language. This already implies an inescapable distancing from the original experience itself and the inevitable need for a hermeneutic understanding if the experience is to be relevant and reasonable.

In sum then: 'To believe is, formally, to know reality through the knowledge which another person has of it and which he communicates by his testimony; between faith and reality there intervenes the person of the witness, who communicates his knowledge so that the believer may share in it and thereby attain to the reality itself.' (Alfaro, Juan, 'Faith', *Sacramentum Mundi*, 1968, ed., Karl Rahner, Herder and Herder, p.316, pp313 – 322.)

Articulating a Critique of Reason

The term 'reason' derives from the Latin '*ratio*' and its more restricted sense

> 'absorbs the meanings of 'giving an account', 'ordering things' or 'laying things or ideas out in a comprehensive way'. Other terms it may be contrasted with are *muthos* ('tale' or 'story'), *aisthesis* ('perception'), *phantasia* ('imagination'), *mimesis* ('imitation'), and *doxa* ('belief').' (Finch 1987: 223)

Logic, deductive and inductive, the experimental method, … are among the various ways that have been proposed to systematise the use of such reason. Thus assent to truth here is 'reasoned', not dependent on testimony, but on evidence that can be verified, and which leads to conclusions that can be tested. This then is a rational method of investigation that leads not to 'belief' but to 'knowledge'. The acceptance of such knowledge is based on intrinsic criteria, and not on any extrinsic testimony or authority.

So far the focus is very much on the method of rational knowledge not on its content. In practice, much of what we accept as reasoned knowledge, scientific or otherwise, is not something that we have tested or verified for ourselves using any kind of rational investigation. Often it is merely on the authority of someone who 'knows better'. In other words, on the authority of wiser, more learned, more knowledgeable persons, or sometimes it seems simply because of the formal position the person holds. For every bit of information in our lives cannot be traced to the source and verified before being accepted. It is not just a practical impossibility, theoretically, it would lead to an infinite regress, because the very methodology of any rational knowledge rests on basic premises, like the reality and intelligibility of the world we live in, which cannot be logically proven. They are experienced existentially.

'Rational knowledge' then has an element of 'faith', which is often neglected. But once again this refers to its content. What needs to be examined is the methodology by which such knowledge is arrived at. For even when such knowledge is accepted in 'faith' in principle at least it can be tested and verified. However, even while acknowledging the limitations of a methodology, one must also accept its validity where this applies. For *a rational methodology transgressing its inherent limitations can never yield 'right reasoned knowledge'*. In

this context, Karl Popper's distinction, in his *Open Society and Its Enemies*, between classical rationalism and critical rationalism is pertinent here. (Popper 1972) The first seeks secure knowledge from axiomatic premises, and the second accepts given knowledge as 'hypothetical' and through critical testing seeks to further refine and extend it. Thus Euclidian geometry is completely rational within the constraints of its own premises, but non-Euclidian starts from different assumptions and has extended geometric applications substantially.

A critical examination of the methodology involved in these rationalisms would arrive at certain limitations that are often neglected and even violated by their proponents for reasons that are external to the methodology itself. This is precisely what the sociology of knowledge has drawn attention to and has convincingly demonstrated, how the underlying presumptions, which inevitably are socially derived, prejudice our presumed rational and impartial objectivity. These presumptions and pre-judgements are beyond the investigative methodology of such reasoning itself. How then do we critique such presumptions and prejudices? For if the ideal of the Enlightenment, of an unbiased, autonomous subject, must be abandoned how does this become a positive constituent of any interpretation, and not a limiting one? It is precisely here once again that the dialectic of faith and reason must come to bear.

Thus we have the Kantian a prioris that are accepted as methodological imperatives if such empirical/experimental knowledge is to be possible at all. However, there are pre-judgements and presumptions that must ground any rationality, as the hermeneutic tradition would insist. Moreover, when non-empirical/experimental sources of knowing are involved, other methods of ascertaining truth are required. Dilthey's understanding of an interpretive discipline, and Weber's *verstehen*, empathetic understanding, do offer such viable methodologies, while hermeneutics and deconstruction have today demonstrated the limits of the old Enlightenment rationalism and have offered alternative analytic approaches. (Weber 1946: 56)

In fact, seminal breakthroughs in science, in the paradigm shifts in our thought, are the result of intuitive leaps of the imagination as Thomas Kuhn has established. (Kuhn 1970: *The Nature and Necessity of Scientific Revolutions* pp.92-110). It is only later that staid scientific methods are used to verify the theories thus proposed. In making, then, this distinction between the content and method of

reasoned knowledge, we discover not just the limitations of the empirical-experimental methodology, but we once again uncover the 'faith' element that is more often than not decisive in the content being accepted.

For the prejudgments and prejudices that hermeneutics and the sociology of knowledge emphasise are not subject to reason so much as to the interests and status, the 'unconscious ideologies' and fundamental options of those involved. For Hans-Georg Gadamer, the present situation of the interpreter is not something negative, but 'already constitutively involved in any process of understanding.' (Linge, 1977: xiv) We can never be entirely rid of our prejudices, or more literally our 'pre-judgments', or in communication terminology our 'filters'. For 'the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience.' (*ibid*., p. 9) Hence it follows there can be no pre-suppositionless interpretation, since there is no pre-judgmentless experience! In other words, *where we position ourselves influences how we reason*.

To conclude then: 'There has been a marked decline in the prestige of reason in the twentieth century, due to a changing awareness of the conventionality of what passes for reason. But the present age does not suffer so much from a want of rationality as from a too narrow conception of what constitutes rationality. To some present-day critics, rationality has been purchased at the cost of human meaning and human understanding.' (Finch 1987: 224)

Faith as Constitutive of the Human

We need now to make a similar distinction with regard to faith. Too much attention has been focused on faith as content, that is, 'belief'. We need to examine the act of faith, and precisely what makes such belief possible. Why in fact do we accept the testimony of others? Once again the capacity to make this act of faith is certainly an a priori condition for the necessarily interdependent lives we live. Moreover, if we grant that we are not the ground of our own being, then this 'faith' must transcend and reach beyond the horizons of the human. But if all truth is to be restricted to the empirical and all knowledge to be derived from inductive or deductive logical, then clearly in such an empirical-rationalist frame of reference, there is no room for faith, or as Paul Tillich says, for 'what ultimate concerns mean'. (Tillich 1957:

2) Hence *whether we believe depends on our own self-understanding*.

In this sense, Panikkar rightly insists that faith becomes a 'consecutive element of human existence'. (Panikkar 1971: pp 223 – 254, & 1983 Ch.6: *Faith as a Constitutive Human Dimension*, pp.188-229). And it is precisely as such, that we must test any content of faith. For a content of faith that does not fulfil the human dimension, i.e. to make the believer more human, cannot be 'good faith'. In other words, *if to believe is human, then what we believe must make us more human not less!* So too rational knowledge that is the result of a methodology that has not been sensitive to its inherent limitations, can never be 'rightly reasoned'.

The test of good faith then would be whether the act of faith gives assent to a content that is in fact humanising. And this is precisely what an experiential self-reflective rationality can do. This is where and how we must seek the reasonableness of our faith. So too with blind faith; here the act of faith becomes compulsive rather than free, and catches on a content that promises security and perhaps even grandiosity, rather than one that expresses trust and dependency. In other words, *if faith is not humanising, then it cannot be good faith*. But only when we accept that faith is a constitutive dimension of human life, do we have a framework for making such an investigation.

Language as Distinctive of the Human

But if faith is a constitutive dimension of human existence, certainly we must say the same of reason. After all the classic definition of man that we have come to accept from Aristotle as a 'rational animal', does not quite integrate the elements of faith and reason together. It is a one-sided definition that stresses only a single dimension, which certainly might help to identify humans, as opposed to animals but it does very little to help to a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of what is distinctively human.

In fact, the original Greek word used by Aristotle was 'logicon' which in its more restricted sense means 'word'. Hence, Panikkar insists, Aristotle's definition would more correctly be translated as man is a 'verbal animal', or in other words, it is language that becomes the distinctive and defining characteristic of human beings. (Ranikkar 1995: 88) This of course implies reason but much more than that as well. Anthropologically this makes sound sense. And it is precisely

because language implies inter-communication and inter-relationship, that it expresses so well the inter-dependence of humans, for there is no such thing as a private language. It is only such a comprehensive understanding of the human, that would give us a framework in which faith and reason can be included, as distinct but complementary dimensions of the human.

Often reason is used to investigate, challenge and even bring down the content of faith, by applying a rational-empirical methodology. But this is precisely to misunderstand the language of faith, which is not at the level of rational-empirical discourse. What is needed rather is an interrogation that derives more from a hermeneutic investigation that contextualises content, and to interpret the content at the various levels of meaning that are often present therein, from the literal and the direct, to the symbolic and the metaphoric. For when it comes to the act of faith, an experimental methodology with its objective emphasis is quite inadequate to such a subjective act. What we need is a more self-reflexive and experiential methodology, which while being subjective is neither arbitrary or irrational, but one which focuses on meaning and 'meaningfulness', rather than just on measuring quantities and determining cause and effect.

Besides inductive and deductive logic, there are many kinds of rationality as Max Weber has emphasised, and in fact as he has demonstrated in his sociology of religion. (Weber1964: xxxii-xxxiii) If with him we understand rationality as the application of reason or conceptual thought to the understanding or order of human life, then *in so far as there can be many understandings and orderings of human life and society, there must correspondingly be many kinds of rationality as well*. Instrumental and value rationality are just two classic examples of this, but they are other complex ways in which reason can impinge on human life as when it rationalises or orders it on the basis of law, bureaucracy, tradition or charisma.

Dilemmas and Dialectics

In making a distinction between the content and the act of faith, we realise that the content may vary across various cultural and religious traditions. However, the act of faith in so far as it is constitutively human, will necessarily have a great similarity across cultures and religions because at this level we begin to touch on the most fundamental aspects of the human. Here again, it is our faith,

both as act and content that can help us discern the human authenticity of these pre-judgments and presumptions.

Institutionalisation of religion involves fundamental dilemmas that must be lived in tension since they cannot be resolved or wished away. For as Thomas O'Dea so insightfully points out: *religious experience needs most yet suffers most from institutionalisation*. (O'Dea 1969: pp.116-17)) Precisely because such experience is so fragile and impermanent it needs institutions to preserve and communicate it across generations; and yet it is so ephemeral and ineffable that it cannot but be distorted and alienated by this very institutional process. In Max Weber's phrase, the 'routinisation of charisma', is both necessary and subverting. (Weber 1946: 54, 297) There is a correspondence here between the charisma-experience and routinisation-institutionalisation dilemma, and the faith and reason dialectic discussed earlier. Each needs the complementary and critique of the other: *experience to vitalise institutions, and vice versa, institutions to preserve experience*.

For even as new experiences precipitate new understandings, they can alter our consciousness in radical ways, which then demands a renewed faith. For 'on the one hand, there is an interpretation of the faith conditioned by one's view of reality and on the other, there is a view of reality nurtured by one's interpretation of revelation.' (Libano, 1982: 15) In other words, *while it is true that faith does not 'create' reality, it does make for a 'definition of the situation' that is real in its effects*. And vice-versa, our experience of reality affects our faith understanding.

Religious traditions that have stressed 'orthodoxy' (right belief) tend to focus more on the content of faith, whether this be the intellectual content of the belief or the moral one of the commitment. The first focuses on intellectual truth, the second on moral goodness. However, such orthodoxies tend to neglect the act of faith, which as a constitutive dimension of our life represents precisely an internal critique, an intrinsic guarantor of a content of faith, which ought to fulfil our deepest human desires and hopes.

For this, a religious tradition must emphasise an 'orthopraxis' (right practice), where the focus is on the act of faith. For here the crucial emphasis is neither on belief in the true or the good, but rather a commitment to authentic human living, an existential engagement with, and a critical reflection on living. It is at this fundamental existential level that the reasonableness of faith must be sought. For it is at this level of living praxis, that truth must have meaning and

value becomes meaningful. And it is precisely here we suspect that the dialectic between faith and reason can be very fruitful, in testing and discerning the authenticity of one's faith, not so much in terms of its content, but rather in terms of its humanising our life. Hence the constant search for an ever deeper and more relevant 'orthopraxis' and 'orthodoxy', rather than an uncritical faith in a tradition, as also the continuing quest for a more adequate and pertinent 'rationality' beyond the rationalism of the Enlightenment.

Our hermeneutic suspicions can now become the points of departure for us to initiate and continue this dialogue across the apparent divide between faith and reason. But we must first be clear with regard to the horizons of understanding in which it takes place. Only then can there be a 'fusion of horizons' which can give the dialogue 'the buoyancy, of a game, in which the players are absorbed,' (Linge 1977: xix) as the later Wittgenstein had observed. And it will happen as in 'every conversation that through it something different has come to be.' (*ibid*.. xxii)

Gandhi's Faith and Reason

Here it is our contention that it is precisely such a dialectic that Gandhi sets up between faith and reason, in the context of a religious tradition, to make a genuinely new and creative synthesis for his religious belief and practice, even as he develops a powerful critique of rationalism. For Gandhi is indeed the epitome of a person who would want his faith to be reasonable in terms of making his humanity authentic, just as he would demand that his reason be truly faithful to this humanity as well.

Much has been made of Gandhi's religious sense and sensitivity. But not enough has been said by way of examining the rational basis for this. Certainly, we can see that Gandhi's 'inner voice', to which he gave such great importance in discerning and authenticating his life, was very much an experiential self-reflective reasoning. But then again he refuses to be overwhelmed by reason, simply because he is only too aware of its limitations. Perhaps what *rationalists have never examined is their own faith in rationality*, and how this easily becomes another politically committed social ideology. This is what Gandhi explicitly challenges modern rationalists to do even as he interrogates the traditional and popular faith of his people. But for both, it will be human authenticity that will be the measure for this critique.

A Radical Re-interpretation

Precisely because Gandhi's attempted reform is based on his radical reinterpretation, a rejection of one must lead to the rejection of the other, as in fact, we see happening today. Gandhi locates himself as an insider to mainstream Hinduism, the *sanathan dharma* that he claimed to follow. In fact, the radicality of his re-interpretation goes unnoticed precisely because of this. Gandhi does not reject, he simply affirms what he considers to be authentic, and allows the inauthentic to be sloughed off. For him, Hinduism was ultimately reduced to a few fundamental beliefs: the supreme reality of God, the ultimate unity of all life and the value of love (ahimsa) as a means of realising God. His profound redefinition of Hinduism gave it a radically novel orientation. Bhikhu Parekh sums this up thus:
'For him religion culminated but was not exhausted in social service and it had a spiritual meaning and significance only when inspired by the search for moksha. Gandhi's Hinduism had a secularised content but a spiritual form and was at once both secular and non-secular.' (Parekh 1995: 109)

Thus, for example one of the most remarkable and yet unremarked re-interpretations of Hinduism that Gandhi effected was that of the Gita. Here was a text intended to persuade a reluctant warrior on the legitimacy and even the necessity of joining the battle. Gandhi re-works its *nish-kama-karma* to become the basis of his *ahimsa* and *satyagraha*!

Of course, there is always a possibility that such a two-way dialectic between faith and reason need not necessarily be a constructive or creative one! Thus V.D. Savarkar's Hindutva is a reinterpretation of Hinduism in an inexorably opposed direction to that of Gandhi's *sanathan dharma*. Savarkar reduces Hinduism to a political ideology of cultural nationalism, that has awkward parallels to the 'national socialism' elsewhere. His appeal is to upper castes, and religious elites to mobilise people on the basis of a homogenous communal identity. This negates the legitimacy of diversity and difference of other communities. Gandhi on the other hand strives for a mass-based mobilisation across caste and religious communities to establish a *purna swaraj* for all especially the least and the last. Thus there can be no reconciliation between Savarkar who wanted to 'Hinduise politics' and 'militarise Hinduism', and Gandhi whose

declared agenda was to politicise spirituality and to spiritualise politics!

In the end, this is why he is vehemently opposed by the traditional Hindu elite, who finally recognised and felt threatened by the challenge he posed. Ashis Nandy's piercing analysis implicates us all. He points out that, Savarkar's faithful disciple, 'Godse not only represented the traditional Indian stratarchy which Gandhi was trying to break' (Nandy 1980:86), in a sense his 'hand was forced by the real killers of Gandhi: the anxiety-ridden, insecure traditional elite concentrated in the urbanised, educated, partly westernised, tertiary sector whose meaning of life Gandhian politics was taking away.' (*ibid.*:87)

But then again precisely because he presents himself as a Hindu in his interpretation of Indian culture, he was seen as too inclusive by traditional Hindus, and at the same time as not ecumenical enough by contemporary non-Hindus. Hence his appeals for Hindu-Muslim unity were rejected, by Muslims as being too Hindu, and questioned by Hindus for not being Hindu enough.

Yet for Gandhi, the unity of humankind was premised on the oneness of the cosmos, which was a philosophical principle that was ontologically prior to diversity. This is precisely what an *advaitin* would hold. Hence for him, unity in diversity was the integrating axis not just of Hindu, but of Indian culture, and indeed of all viable civilisations as well.

Thus the legitimacy of religious diversity was rooted in the fundamental Jaina principle of *anekantavada*, the many-sidedness of truth. Once this is conceded as foundational, then religious tolerance is a necessary consequence. But this was not to be a negative tolerance of distance and coexistence, but rather one of communication and enrichment. Indeed, Gandhi would ground the dialogue between East and West in their religious traditions, since for him religious rootedness was precisely the basis for mutual learning.

In cultural matters, however, he was an assimilationist, not in the sense that he would want other cultures to be assimilated to his own, but rather want all cultures to be enriched by each other without losing their identity. Gandhi's cultural assimilation then was opposed to political revivalists and religious nationalists, to Tilak and M.M. Malaviya, as also to Dayanand Saraswati and Savarkar. For Gandhi an open and understanding dialogue must precede not follow a free and adaptive integration. The basis for such a dialogic encounter would have to be a 'pluralist epistemology'. But already in his *Hind Swaraj,*

he was convinced that it would only bear real fruit when it was 'sunk in a religious soil.'

Thus, an enriched diversity would then contribute to a more invigorated pluralism and an enhanced unity. This was precisely Gandhi's understanding of Indian culture and civilisation, and he had, indeed, grasped its fundamental strength and the secret of its survival. No one in this century has done more to affirm Indian culture than Gandhi. Yet even as he apparently idealised our ancient traditions, he was radically reinterpreting and reforming it, an unfinished task to which he can still inspire us. That precisely is his relevance for us today.

Beyond Orthodoxy

For Gandhi is a critical traditionalist whose critique does speak to critical modernity today. There is much in 'modern civilisation' he rejects, but not the liberative contribution of modernity: civil liberties, equality, poverty alleviation, religious tolerance. Rather his effort can be interpreted as an attempt to integrate these positive elements with a liberative re-interpretation of tradition. In his unique way, he sets up a creative encounter for this integration, even though some see him as radical and others as reactionary. With his critique from within the tradition, Gandhi becomes the great synthesizer of contraries if not of contradictions, within and across traditions.

His *purna swaraj* would harmonize rights and duties, head and heart, individual and community, faith and reason, economic development and spiritual progress, religious commitment and religious pluralism, self-realization and political action. He brings together philosophical discourse and popular culture in enlightened renewal and social reform. Not since the time of the Buddha, some have argued, has such a synergy between the philosophic and the popular in our traditions been experienced. Thus, Gandhi integrates the Upanishad and the Tulsi Ramayan in his religious synthesis. When it comes to bridges across traditions, Gandhi brings the Gita together with the 'Sermon on the Mount' and reads one into the other. In fact, if he has Christianised Hinduism he has certainly also presented us with a Hinduised Christian spirituality.

Precisely as a re-interpretation from within, Gandhi can so much more effectively and authentically integrate into his synthesis elements from without. For as Nandy writes, 'Gandhi was neither a conservative nor a progressive. And though he had internal

contradictions, he was not a fragmented self-alienated man driven by the need to compulsively conserve the past or protect the new,' (Nandy 1980:71) thus 'effortlessly transcending the dichotomy of orthodoxy and iconoclasm,' (*ibid*.) he reconciles meaningful faith and reasonable modernity. In the best traditions of this land, he combined both faith and reason. For faith and reason are implicated in each other. Blind faith or a fundamentalist, revivalist version of religion was totally unacceptable, for Gandhi. He would constantly critique faith to ascertain whether it was meaningful and reasonable in terms basic human value commitments, and he would demand of reason the same fidelity to these values as well.

Moreover, he does this with a practical praxis, or rather an orthopraxis, which we have described earlier as an existential engagement with and a critical reflection on life. His '*Experiments with Truth*' were not so much experiments in a rationalist sense, they were his critical reflections on his real-life experiences, an experimental, self-reflexive method, which is what praxis is all about.

Renunciation and Celebration

However, the ascetic dimension of Gandhi's integration at times loses the aesthetic one. A criticism of Gandhi's ashrams was that it grew only vegetables not flowers! Growing vegetables represented more than the Gandhian pre-occupation with vegetarianism and bread-labour. But that his ashram did not grow any flowers, would indicate a certain distancing from the aesthetic. He once asked: 'Why can't you see the beauty of colour in vegetables?' Indeed, Gandhi surprised and shocked Tagore when he claimed he could hardly enjoy the glory and the beauty of a sunset when so many of his brothers and sisters were too burdened by their lives to welcome the sunrise!

But in rightly emphasizing the need for renunciation, certainly, a message that our consumerist and self-indulgent world needs more than ever today, the Gandhian ashram seemed to miss out on the need for celebration, which our tired and alienated, dispirited and pessimistic world needs almost as much. We do need the self-renunciation Gandhi espoused, as well as his affirmation of selflessness. He urges on us the injunction of the Ishopanishad: *tena tyaktena bhunjithah* (enjoy the things of the earth by renouncing them). But we also need to celebrate the other, and the enrichment that comes from this encounter, to celebrate our world as conscious

creatures who can wonder at its ineffable mystery and praise its surpassing beauty!

Continuing the Critique

A re-interpretation of the Gandhian synthesis would precisely allow such a celebration if only we can realise that for him the ultimate other is the 'utterly Other' who is the final quest of our self-realization in moksha, and yet realised only in our encounters with each other. For while Gandhi's understanding of moksha as service is a seminal breakthrough, even this can be enriched by affirming not negating the other dimensions of life. For it is only thus that we will be able to bring some wholeness to the 'broken totality,' in Iris Murdoch's unforgettable phrase, of our modern world.

It is certainly not our intention to idealise Gandhi into a new 'ism', neither a post- nor neo-Gandhi-ism. Being blind to his limitations and insensitive to the context in which he lived, cannot be constructive or creative. We need an open-ended critique of Gandhi, not a close-ended 'ism', as seems to have happened with some of the official Gandhians. For Gandhi is, indeed, greater than their 'Gandhi-isms' and he will be more relevant than those of any others as well. Renan with Gaelic irony is supposed to have once said, that when fate could not destroy a great man it sent him disciples in revenge! Perhaps we may need to save Gandhi from such a fate.

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9.
GANDHI'S HINDUISM AND SAVARKAR'S HINDUTVA

Economic and Political Weekly, V. 44, N. 29, 18 July 2009, pp. 62-67. Reprinted *Humanist Outlook*, 2009, Vol. 12, No. 5, Autumn. (This paper was presented at 'Social Development and the Human Civilization in the 21st Century: An International Seminar on the Centenary of Hind Swaraj', organised by the Council for Social Development on 12 – 14 February 2009.)

INTRODUCTION: THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT
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Abstract

The present national crisis of violently conflicting communal identities represents a choice between the inclusiveness of Gandhi and the exclusions of Savarkar. This paper argues that the future of our multicultural, pluri-religious people can only be even bloodier with the preclusions of Savarkar's Hindutva. Only Gandhi's sarva-dharma samabhava can possibly be an effective basis for a tolerance on which to premise a just inter-religious peace and harmony.

Introduction: The Contemporary Context

Modernising *Hind Swaraj* is foundational to an understanding of Gandhi. Moreover, he never separates religious understandings from his political commitments. There is an interaction between the two: his religious faith inspires his political convictions, just as his political aspirations critique his religious faith. One could say something similar to Savarkar, but being a rationalist atheist, for him it was more a matter of religious nationalism and political ideology. However, the relationship between religion and politics is very different for these two. Gandhi's religious faith brings an ethical urgency to politics most obvious in his uncompromising rejection of unethical means no matter how lofty the ends. On the contrary, Savarkar's ideological goals unhesitatingly are used to and privilege the most effective means regardless of ethical concerns, which seem to be more distractions than cautions.

The evolution, or perhaps more accurately the unfolding of Gandhi's *sanathan dharma* in all its rich complexities are seminally presaged in his *Hind Swaraj*, just as the unravelling of Savarkar's ideology predicated on his *Hindutva*. The present national crisis of violently conflicting communal identities represents, to my mind, a choice between the inclusiveness of Gandhi and the exclusions of Savarkar.

Who is a Hindu is the stark question, at the heart of a struggle in the Hindu community, especially of *sanathani dharmis* today. But it is not a struggle that concerns them alone, it is a struggle mirrored in other communities and their constructed identities, particularly those that derive from an exclusive religious fundamentalism or political nationalism. What does it mean to be a religious Hindu or Muslim, Sikh or Christian in secular India today? This is a battle for the soul of India, that is redefining the future of our polity for all our diverse peoples.

Gandhi's Hinduism

This refers to a religious faith tradition that is far easier to describe than define. With Savarkar, there is an emphatic distinction between Hinduism as a religious system and Hindutva as a political ideology. 'What is Hinduism?' and 'Who is a Hindu?' are questions better

answered in inclusive rather than exclusive terms as we have earlier discussed, in regard to both culture and religion. Gandhi's response is inclusive and ethical. Savarkar politicises these questions, answering them in terms of a nativist, sacred geography.

Radhakrishnan's *Hindu Way of Life* as a spiritual quest, not a doctrinal creed, provides the crucial insight into the underlying unity that grounds the diversity of the Hindu religious traditions. Indeed, it is difficult to reject or exclude someone who claims to be a Hindu. Already in 1910, the *Daily Hitavadi* in Bengal on 5th Nov concluded a discussion on this topic thus: 'whoever calls himself a Hindu is a Hindu'! (Sarkar 2002: 84) Belief was not relevant, though social customs were to be respected. It is a religion of orthodox practices, not of orthodox doctrine.

This has been the great strength of Hindu religious tradition down the ages, and its great weakness too. However, the perception as to which is greater varies with where one positions oneself in the heterogeneity versus homogeneity debate. Any attempt to homogenise such a rich and multi-faceted tradition under a hegemonic hierarchy will impoverish it religiously and devastate it culturally, even if it yields short-term political gains.

Interestingly, there are Hindus who claim Hinduism and deliberately locate themselves outside the tradition and at times even the community. The Ramakrishna Mission in West Bengal even filed a petition in the High Court in 1981 claiming minority status as a religion distinct from Hinduism, which the court upheld in 1985, but which was finally rejected by the Supreme Court in 1996. But by personal law, everyone who is not of another religious community, is a Hindu by default unless they positively disown the religion.

Gandhi locates himself as an insider to mainstream Hinduism, the *sanatan dharma* that he claimed to follow. The radicality of his re-interpretation goes unnoticed because of this. Gandhi does not reject, he simply affirms what he considers to be authentic, and allows the inauthentic to be sloughed off. B. R. Nanda identifies a few fundamental beliefs in Gandhi's Hinduism: the reality of God, the unity of all life and the value of *ahimsa* as love. (Nanda 1985: 6) His profound redefinition of Hinduism gave it a radically novel reorientation with his *sevamarg*, the path of service, adding a new dimension to three *margs* of traditional Hinduism. *jnana-*, *karma-*, and *bhakti-* . Yet, Gandhi's Hinduism has a spiritual meaning beyond service, for Gandhi's *sevamarg* is inspired by, and is a means to, *moksha*. This is just one of his radical reinterpretations, as Bhikhu Parekh demonstrates. (Parekh 1995: 104)

Another, as remarkable and yet mostly unremarked, reinterpretation that Gandhi effected, was with the *Bhagvadgita*. (*ibid*. 82) Here was a text intended to persuade a reluctant warrior of the legitimacy and even the necessity of joining battle in a just war. Gandhi re-works its *nish-kama-karma*, detached engagement, to become the basis of his *ahimsa* and *satyagraha*!

Gandhi's non-violence*, ahimsa,* is closest to the Jain tradition, but he goes well beyond the severely ascetic and uncompromisingly self-purificatory doctrines of Jainism to a more service-oriented and other-engaged understanding. He insists that it must be a positive involvement of compassion and love, of empathy with all humans, even with our enemies, and indeed, with the whole cosmos. In terms of such a positive understanding, Gandhi sees violence, *himsa*, even in the sense of 'force' however justified, as always a violation of this love, compassion, empathy. A violation not just of persons but of the structure of reality itself.

Moreover, for Gandhi truth, *satya*, is the ultimate reality, and violence is always a violation of this truth. Ultimately, such a violation betrays the deepest truth of the violator himself. Only *ahimsa*, can make the quest for such truth viable. Gandhi uses this quest in his strategy of *satyagraha*, or truth-force. He makes no ethical separation between means and ends, for the goal is already foreshadowed in the means used to achieve it.

For Gandhi 'God is Love' is too ambiguous. He prefers 'God is Truth' and finally even reverses this to 'Truth is God', where 'Truth' is the ultimate reality, *Satya*. For through its everyday existential quality, truth is where we touch the absolute, and *ahimsa* is the absolutely necessary condition in the pursuit of truth. The ultimate goal that unifies his entire this-worldly agenda is to seek this God and Truth wherever this led him. 'Ahimsa in my God and Truth is my God. When I look for Ahimsa, Truth says, 'Find it through me'. When I look for Truth, Ahimsa says, 'Find it through me'.' (*Young India* 4-6-1925) Realising this Truth through *ahimsa* was his *moksha*.

Moreover, Gandhi did not separate religion from politics. He brought a religious ethic to politics rather than political militancy into religious communities. In direct contrast, Savarkar's ideology was narrow and exclusivist in its conflation of *janma bhoomi* and *punya bhoomi*. Savarkar plays on the anxieties and insecurities of the traditional upper-caste elites, who were trying desperately to make the transition into a modern dominant class. In spite of its pretensions to be nationalist and modern, its militant chauvinism and authoritarian fundamentalism make Savarkar's Hindutva the

antithesis of Gandhi's Hinduism. Hindutva defines India as Hindu and wants all Indians to be Hindus. Indeed, it is but a contemporary avatar of an older and more chauvinistic Brahminism. In contrast, Gandhi's Hinduism gives space to all.

When the traditional Hindu upper-caste elites finally recognised the challenge he posed, they inevitably felt threatened and vehemently opposed him. As Ashis Nandy perceptively observes: it is not just Nathuram Godse, who is responsible for Gandhi's death, but the elite that provided the milieu for such hate politics. (Nandy 1980: 87)

Though Gandhi presents himself as a Hindu in his interpretation of Indian culture, traditional and revivalist Hindus saw him as too indulgent of the others and not Hindu enough. At the same time, many non-Hindu fundamentalists and nationalists viewed him as too Hindu and not ecumenical enough. His failure to bridge the religious divisions between Hindus and Muslims, was matched in many ways by his failure to break the caste barriers between Dalits and others. Both these divides have only deepened with increasing conflict in the identity politics of religion and caste today.

Openness and Rootedness

Yet as a good *advaitin*, for Gandhi the unity of humankind was premised on the oneness of the cosmos. However, diversity was rooted in the fundamental Jain principle of *anekantavada*, the many-sidedness of truth. For him 'unity in diversity' was the integrating axis not just of Hindu, but of Indian culture, and of all humanity as well. Once conceded, this becomes a foundational truth, and tolerance is a necessary consequence. This is not a negative tolerance of distance and coexistence, but rather one of communication and enrichment.

In cultural matters, Gandhi was an assimilationist, not in the sense that he wanted other cultures to be integrated into his own, but rather that all cultures were enriched by each other without losing their specific identities. Gandhi himself is a remarkable example of such an open yet rooted person:

I do not want my house to be walled 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 of them. (*Young India*, June 1921: 170)

Gandhi's cultural assimilation, then, was opposed to political revivalists and religious nationalists, to Lokmanya Tilak and Madan Mohan Malaviya, as also to Dayanand Saraswati and Savarkar.

In religious matters, he is more than just an eclectic, accepting the truth wherever he finds it. His *sarvadharma samabhava*, equal respect for all religions, implies not just a radical faith in the validity of all religions, but further a fundamental faith in the adequacy of each religion for all those born into it. Any encounter between religious traditions must be premised on equal respect for all religious traditions as the basis for mutual learning. However, complacency of a religious tradition in its adequacy for its own followers, hardly helps towards openness to learning from others' traditions. Gandhi's own understanding of religion transcends religiosity, Hindu as well as that of any other tradition. It is essentially a spiritual quest for *moksha*, but one rooted in the reality of service to the last and least in this world.

Thus, radical openness and basic rootedness are the conditions of an inter-cultural encounter, and universal equality and particular adequacy are the basis for an inter-religious one. Such free and informed dialogues must precede any mutual learning and all adaptive assimilation. Only then would an enriched diversity contribute to a more invigorated pluralism and an enhanced unity. This was Gandhi's understanding of Indian civilisation, its culture and religion. I believe, he had grasped the fundamental strength and profound secret of its survival over millennia!

Equality and Caste

In contrast to Ambedkar's single-minded critique of caste, which focused on its exploitative and oppressive character, Gandhi tries to reform the worst of these aspects by urging the abolition of untouchability. His idealisation of the *varna* system, as 'the law of life', is really an attempt to steer clear of a class system, ridden with struggle and conflict, for a more co-operative and harmonious social order. Yet, the voluntary acceptance of one's *dharma* as the underpinning for such a society is an individualist coping mechanism, which completely avoids the structural issues of inequality and discrimination. Some have sensed a subtle and implicit hegemony here.

For Gandhi the *varnashrama dharma* he was committed to implied status by ascription, not by choice. It was a matter of one's

duty to the welfare of the community, and all callings were to be considered of equal value, whether Brahmin or '*bhangi*' (scavenger):

'there is no calling too low and none too high. All are good, lawful and absolutely equal in status. The calling of a Brahmin – spiritual teacher – and a scavenger are equal, and their due performance carries equal merit before God, and at one time seems to have carried identical reward before man.' (CW 63: 153)

However, good intentions apart, this inevitably ends up with some castes being more equal than others. Trying to reverse the caste hierarchy, Gandhi describes 'The Ideal Bhangi' in *The Harijan*, 28th November 1936:

'The bhangi constitutes the foundation of all services. A bhangi does for society what a mother does for a baby. A mother washes her baby off the dirt and ensures his health. Even so, the bhangi protects and safeguards the health of the entire community by maintaining sanitation for it.' (CW 64: 86-88)

Thus in *The Harijan*, July 18, 1936, Gandhi writes in reply to Ambedkar's indictment to his thoughts on untouchables:

'varna and ashrama are institutions which have nothing to do with castes. The law of varna teaches us that we have each one of us to earn our bread by following the ancestral calling. It defines not our rights, but our duties. It necessarily has reference to callings that are conducive to the welfare of humanity and to no other.' (CW 63: 153)

Perhaps Gandhi had a shrewd sense of how far he could push his reformist ideals against orthodox Hinduism at the time before a backlash made his best efforts counter-productive. (Jaffrelot 2005: 67 -) How far ahead of their people can leaders go without undermining their own support? Ambedkar too had to face this dilemma. Certainly, by the end of his life Gandhi's ideas on the *varna* and *dharma* imposed by birth had basically changed, from his original defence to a redefinition and a final rejection as the basis for social organization.

In his later years, Gandhi reversed himself to urge that the 'classless society is the ideal, not merely to be aimed at but to be worked for.' (*Harijan* Feb. 17, 1946, p. 9) He was even hoping 'there would be only one caste known by the beautiful name Bhangi, that is to say the reformer or remover of all dirt.' (*Harijan* July 7, 1946, p. 212) Thus, if Tagore would have all Indians to be Brahmins, Gandhi would want all of us to be shudras, workers, or rather bhangis, cleansing reformers.

In his last years, he was promoting inter-caste marriages: 'If I had my way I would persuade all caste Hindu girls coming under my influence to select Harijan husbands,' (*Harijan*, 7 July 1946) in order

to dismantle caste hierarchy. In fact, in a symbolic statement very typical of Gandhi, M. S. Gore tells us that 'he solemnised inter-caste or inter-religious marriages in his own ashram'. (Gore 1993: 283) This certainly had a powerful potential to de-legitimise not just the *varnashrama dharma* but also undermine his own case for the ascription of *dharma* by birth. But it was too little, too late to have the effect of reversing his earlier legacy on this issue. The Dalits of today have neither forgotten, nor forgiven him for this.

In the final analysis, Gandhi's radical 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'. Though he rejected caste as hierarchy, he saw no contradiction between such fraternal equality and the functional groupings of *varna*. This of course was highly controversial even at the time and much contested by Ambedkar and other Dalit leaders. For, though Gandhi's reformism did arouse some resistance and much guilt, which helped towards de-legitimising the grosser aspects of the caste system, it could not meet the hopes of the Dalit leaders then, much less 'the revolution of rising expectations' of the *avarna*, the masses of outcastes today.

Ascription and Choice

In so far as *dharma* implies duty, it is also a matter of social belonging and of moral responsibility for others and one's own *varna*. For Gandhi a quest for religious identity is moral and spiritual, and within the context of one's *varna* and *dharma*. Both are ascribed at birth and he cannot see people making a change of identity in either. It would be against this *dharmic* order. But this is what is being contested by the convert and the converter.

Gandhi was unrelenting on untouchability. In his autobiography, he wrote in 1925: 'If untouchability was a part of Hinduism it could only be a rotten part.' (CW Vol 39: 33) It had to go or Hinduism itself would rot. He sought to transform caste Hinduism from within with his attack on untouchability, but he did not approve of Dalits seeking to better themselves by religious conversion. This would not resolve caste in Hinduism, and so he wanted them to wait out the reform, which many were unwilling to do, for they felt they had already waited too long.

Dharma and Varna

Gandhi proclaimed himself to be a *dharmic sanatani*, a follower of the mainstream Hindu religious tradition, though that is not really an adequate description of him even if it is his own. For Gandhi reinterprets both popular and philosophical Hinduism rather radically to transcend any particular sectarian or *panthic* religious denomination. Religion for him becomes more a matter of spirituality. Perhaps that is why the socio-cultural and economic-political effects of a religious tradition are not as central to his own religious concerns as they are with other religious fundamentalists and religious nationalists.

Theologically, Gandhi does not privilege any one religion over another, not even his own. He is emphatic about giving them all equal respect and is opposed to the confrontational approach of Dayanand Sarasvati and others. Thus, he asks in his autobiography: 'What was the meaning of saying that the Vedas were the inspired word of God? If they were inspired, why not also the Bible and the Koran?' (CW 39: 33) He was a universalist who cannot reconcile himself to conversion:

'For me, the different religions are beautiful flowers from the same garden, or they are branches from the same majestic tree. Therefore they are equally true, though being received and interpreted through human instruments equally imperfect. It is impossible for me to reconcile myself to the idea of conversion after the style that goes on in India and elsewhere today.' (*Harijan*, 30.1.1937)

The idea of an '*Istadevata*', a personal divinity, allows for a plurality of paths in Hinduism. The concept of *svadharma* is personalised as well, so that acquiring another's already violates one's own. Hence, even to 'secretly pray that anyone should embrace my faith,' he finds reprehensible, and he would exclude these from membership in an inter-religious fellowship. (*Young India* 19-1-28) His approach to other faiths was scrupulously fair: 'It is only through such a reverential approach to faiths other than mine that I can realize the principle of equality of all religions. But it is both my right and duty to point out the defects in Hinduism in order to purify it and to keep it pure.' (Kumarappa, ed.: 1950: 176)

Celebrating Gandhi's Synthesis

With his critique from within the tradition, Gandhi becomes the great synthesiser of contraries, if not of contradictions, within and across traditions, not just in India but across East and West, from the traditional and the modern, the ecological and the economic. In his unique way, he sets up a creative encounter for this integration, even as some see him as radical and others as reactionary. He is too rooted to be blown off his feet but always open to all genuine criticism of his own tradition. He never rejects the liberative contribution of modernity in its concern for civil liberties, religious tolerance, equality, poverty alleviation … that we must carry forward collectively. But he is sensitively aware of its darker side: state power, violence, inequalities, consumerism … that we too easily ignore, until the 'discontents of modernity' catch up with us as fundamentalist and extremist reactions.

Gandhi attempts to integrate the positive elements of modernity with a liberating re-interpretation of tradition. (Hardiman 2003: 66) His *purna swaraj*, comprehensive self-rule, would harmonise rights and duties, head and heart, individual and community, faith and reason, economic development and spiritual progress, religious commitment and religious pluralism, self-realisation and political action, ecological care and human need. He brings together philosophical discourse and popular culture in enlightened renewal and social reform. Not since the time of the Buddha, some have argued, has such a synergy between the philosophic and the popular in our traditions been experienced. Thus, Gandhi integrates the Upanishads and the Tulsi Ramayan in his religious synthesis. When it comes to bridges across traditions, Gandhi brings the Gita together with the 'Sermon on the Mount' and reads one into the other. In fact, if he has Christianised Hinduism he has certainly also presented us with a Hinduised Christian spirituality.

Because Gandhi re-interprets Hinduism from within, he can so much more effectively and authentically integrate into his synthesis elements from without. Though he had internal contradictions, Gandhi was neither a conservative nor a progressive. He was not compulsively driven by the need to conserve past traditions or pursue contemporary innovations. He transcends such dichotomies and he is critical of both as he strives to reconcile meaningful faith and reasonable modernity. In the best traditions of this land, he combined both faith and reason, implicating each in the other. For Gandhi, blind

faith or a fundamentalist, revivalist version of religion was quite unacceptable. He would constantly critique faith to ascertain whether it was meaningful and reasonable in terms of basic human value commitments. So too, he would demand of reason the same fidelity to these values as well.

However, the ascetic dimension of Gandhi's integration at times loses the aesthetic one. A criticism of Gandhi's ashrams was that they grew only vegetables not flowers! (Parekh 1995: 209) Growing vegetables represented more than the Gandhian pre-occupation with vegetarianism and bread-labour. But that his ashram did not grow flowers, would indicate a certain distancing from the aesthetic. Indeed, Gandhi surprised and shocked Tagore, when he claimed he could hardly enjoy the glory and the beauty of a sunset when so many of his brothers and sisters were being crushed by their struggle for survival.

Yet, at times celebrating beauty can provide some relief even to the overly burdened. More importantly, in our ugly consumerist and self-indulgent world, it can give us the strength needed for renunciation, something Gandhi had so vigorously espoused. Stressing asceticism as Gandhi had done, does not preclude celebrating beauty as Tagore wanted. For while Gandhi's understanding of *moksha* as service is a seminal breakthrough, even this can be enriched by affirming other dimensions of life. For it is only in celebrating such an authentic synthesis that we will be able to bring some wholeness to, in Iris Murdoch's unforgettable phrase, the 'broken totality,' of our modern world.

Savarkar

How distant all this is from V. D. Savarkar's 1923 definition in *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* in terms of '*pitru bhumi*' and '*punya bhumi*', fatherland and holy land! A seriously committed Hindu academic, Arvind Sharma, opines that 'the great challenge Hinduism faces in our times is to ensure for all Hindus an equal opportunity in determining what Hinduism should be for our times.' (Sharma A. 1996: 22) But first Hindus will have to challenge the legitimacy of self-appointed arbiters of their faith. Jyotirmaya Sharma's response to Hindutva could well be their shibboleth: 'Every Hindu decides what is

Hinduism. That space ought to remain inviolable. It is a space worth living for and dying for.' (Sharma J. 2003: 13)

V. D. Savarkar echoes the dark sentiments of the anti-Buddhist *Puranas* even as he claims to humbly admire the Buddha. He regards him as one, who came before his time, too soon to be of help to India or of use to humankind in general. He bemoans how Hinduism was emaciated by Buddhist pacifism. For Savarkar 'Buddhism had its centre of gravity nowhere.' (Savarkar 1964: 18)

The absorption of Buddhism into Hindu religious traditions was not without its tensions. Vivekananda made a gallant attempt to overcome this by positing a reciprocity between the two:

'Hinduism cannot live without Buddhism and Buddhism not without Hinduism ... The Buddhists cannot stay without the brain and philosophy of the Brahmins, nor the Brahmin without the heart of the Buddhist ...Let us join the wonderful intellect of the Brahmin with the heart, the noble soul, the wonderful humanising power of the Great Master.' (Vivekananda 1962: 366)

In the Indian subcontinent, the national freedom struggle could not bypass the religious question. The first to appeal to the two-nation theory was V. D. Savarkar in his presidential address to the Hindu Mahasabha in Ahmedabad in 1937, when he said: 'There are two antagonistic nations living side by side in India.' (Savarkar 1971: 24) But it found no real echo among Hindus then, for they were mostly with the Indian National Congress. Gandhiji never countenanced such a theory. He appealed to Indian nationalism, and even here he was apprehensive of possible chauvinism. He never appealed to religious or Hindu nationalism, though he publicly professed to be both a devoutly religious and committed Hindu.

Hindu Cultural Nationalism

Hindu nationalism is not particularly religious. In its present avatar, it claims to be 'cultural nationalism'. Its founding father, V. D. Savarkar, was himself a rationalist atheist, who wanted his body cremated after his death without any religious ceremonies. Yet he was fanatical about Hindutva or Hinduness, which he first formulated in 1923, and deliberately set in opposition to other religious traditions not originating in India, such as Islam and Christianity. Savarkar's early projection of Hindu-Muslim unity with his *War of Independence of 1857*, published in 1909, was completely reversed during his transportation to the Andamans from 1911-1921. His

Hindutva was articulated as a political ideology of ethno-religious nationalism to include culture and race. (Savarkar 1989) It was designed to unify and mobilise the inegalitarian classes and hierarchical castes among Hindus under a communal banner. In 1941, his birthday wish was expressed in the slogan: 'Hinduise all politics and militarise all Hindudom'. (cited McKean 1996: 71)

Thus for him 'Hinduism must necessarily mean the religion and the religions that are peculiar and native to this land and people.' (Savarkar 1989: 104) He defined Hindu in terms of 'the three essentials of nation (Rashtra), race (Jati) and civilization (Sanskriti).' (Savarkar 1989: 101) The first important qualification of a Hindu is that 'the whole continental country from the Sindhu to Sindhu, from the Indus to the Seas', (Savarkar 1989: 82) 'is not only a *Pitribhu* but a *Punyabhu*, not only a fatherland but a holy land' as well. (Savarkar 1989: 111) In his speech to the Hindu Mahasabha at Nagpur in 1938 he insisted that 'India must be a land reserved for the Hindus.' Others were here on sufferance as lesser citizens.

Savarkar is the first and principal ideologue of this extreme Hindu nationalism. Others like M. S. Golwalkar, who followed with *We Or Our Nationhood Defined* and later *A Bunch of Thoughts*, drew on him but repeated rather than advance his argument. Hindutva overlapped and was conflated with Hinduism in the popular projection. Justice J. S. Verma in his remarks in a Supreme Court judgement in 1995 concerning the political use of religion opined an explicit equivalence between the two: Hindutva is nothing but Hinduism. This has been much quoted by the Sangh Parivar to legitimise its intolerant and aggressive ideology. Later however, shocked by the horror of the Gujarat pogrom in February-March 2001, Justice Verma claimed he had been misunderstood on this account.

Hindutva is now projected as *Bharatiyata*, Indianness, an equivalence that Savarkar himself had rejected: 'the term Hindu cannot be synonymous with Bharatya or Hindi and mean Indian only.' (Savarkar 1989: 84) The change in name proposed is merely to make it more acceptable to the unsuspecting. Ultimately, as an ideology of religious nationalism, the basic content, the first premises and final conclusions of Hindutva remain the same.

From its very origins, the project of Hindu nationalism has been to mobilise Hindus into a politicised ethnic group and to construct this into a dominant majority. Non-Hindus would become subordinate minorities and/or sub-nationalisms, provided they present no threat to the Hindu majority. However, the way it exclusively equates 'Hindu' and 'India' is far from being the most significant

interpretation, or the most dominant expression of Hindu culture and religious traditions.

These ambiguities and contradictions are inherent in the Hindu revival, for the spiritual ambitions of neo-Hinduism were ambiguous enough to nurture a nationalist chauvinism, and the deep-rooted tensions in the Hindu revival were contradictory enough to precipitate an extremist reaction. Vivekanada himself was not a political chauvinist or a religious communalist. His project to Hinduise India and universalise Hinduism was very much a spiritual endeavour not a political programme. Even if what he propagated might seem to be a Hinduised internationalism, it has little in common with Savarkar's narrow parochial slogan to 'Hinduise politics and militarise Hindudom.'

Savarkar did make an exception to his own ideology and acknowledge Nivedita as a Hindu, even though her *janma bhoomi*, land of her birth, was not India, she made it her *punya bhoomi*, her holy land, because she adopted its culture and religion as her own. However, Nivedita's conversion was to the neo-Vedantism of Vivekananda, not the Hindutva of Savarkar. Even her understanding of nationality was closer to Vivekananda's universalism than to Savarkar's ethnocentricism. Anticipating the global-local dilemma she insisted: 'Only the tree that is firm in its own soil can offer us a perfect crown of leaf and blossom … cosmo-nationality consists in *holding the local idea in the world idea*' (Atmaprana, ed., 1982: 495 emphasis in text).

Conclusion: Sarva-dharmi-samabhava

Subcontinent has still not come to terms with the tragedy of the Partition in 1947. Hindu nationalists dream of reversing history, of turning the clock back to an undivided India, with some convenient ethnic cleansing, no doubt. Others, more moderate and sensible, prefer to move beyond the status quo, in which we are mired now, to a more viable South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which was founded in 1985 but has still to really take off. But wounded memories are all too easily manipulated by religious fundamentalists and political chauvinists to precipitate violent expressions of their brooding, unsatisfied rage and dangerously unreasoned fears.

Meeting in the long dark shadow of the barbaric violence that followed in the wake of the Partition, the Constituent Assembly of

India affirmed the secular understanding of the state in spite of some inevitable compromises as the debate on religious conversions shows. The Preamble of the Constitution on the 26th of November 1949

'solemnly resolved to constitute India into a sovereign democratic republic and to secure to all its citizens:

justice, social, economic and political;

liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

equality of status and of opportunity;

and to promote among them all,

fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual …'

Later in 1976, the Constitution was amended to add 'socialist' and 'secular' to the definition of the republic and to assure the 'unity of the nation' with the dignity of the individual. This is now part of the fundamental structure of the Constitution that cannot be abrogated, even by Parliament. It was meant to stymie the Hindu Right that had begun to mobilise ominously by then. When they did come to power in the late 1990s they even called for a review of the Constitution. But as the then President R. K. Narayanan emphasised which is even more relevant today, it is we who failed the Constitution, not vice versa. Now it is urgent that Constitutional secularism be impartially applied to all religious fundamentalists of whatever colour, especially when they politicise religious traditions and religionise politics.

To my mind, the future of our multicultural, pluri-religious peoples can only be even bloodier with the preclusions of Savarkar's Hindutva. Nor can the rationalism for Nehruvian *dharma-nirapekshata* have real mass appeal with the religiosity of our peoples. Only Gandhi's *sarva-dharma-samabhava* or rather *sarva-dharmi-samabhava* can possibly be an effective basis for tolerance on which to premise a just inter-religious peace and harmony.

(This paper draws on the author's *Changing Gods: Rethinking Religious Conversion in Indi*a, Penguin, New Delhi, 2007.)

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10.
GANDHI'S INTERROGATION

Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 46, November 12, 2011, pp. 30–32.

INTRODUCTION
RELIGION AND NATIONALISM
INTERROGATING GANDHI
GANDHI'S CRITIQUE

Abstract

Book Review of *The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi* edited by Judith M Brown and Anthony Parel (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press), 2011.

Introduction

From the time of Mahavir and the Buddha, Indic civilisation has always responded to the authentic renouncer. This in the final analysis was the basis of Gandhi's appeal to the masses. In turn, he called them to selfless service or *nishkamakarma*. But we have no real Mahatmas among us today, just too many *laghumanavas,* small persons, all too comfortable questioning others, uncomfortable interrogating themselves.

Given the present interest in Gandhi, this is a timely collection of essays across a wide spectrum of perspectives and issues. Understanding Gandhi is not just important for India and its national freedom movement. His theory and practice of ahimsa and satyagraha, swadeshi and swaraj, sarvodaya and sarva-dharma-samabhava have become reference points far beyond this country for any serious discourse on non-violence in our violent world.

Religion and Nationalism

The first part of this collection contextualises Gandhi's 'historical life' (p 9). Yasmin Khan introduces us to 'Gandhi's World'. Porbandar, where Gandhi grew up, was at the crossroads of many historical currents. This gave young Mohandas, an observant and sensitive person, 'the insight of a local boy matched with the global insight of an international observer' (p 27), from which vantage point he later sets out to reshape the freedom struggle in India. His professional legal training in England exposed him to a Western civilisation he was not quite at ease with. With his Hind Swaraj (1909), he became its enduring countercultural critic. From the shy, failed lawyer on his return to Gujarat, Jonathan Hyslop's essay traces '[t]he transnational emergence of a public figure' by the time he eturned to India (p 30).

Judith Brown concludes the first part with a presentation of 'Gandhi as nationalist leader' (p 51). His self-image as a pilgrim in search of truth and a champion of non-violence is essential to any understanding of his vision of swaraj as self-rule and the new society he wanted Indians to build together. Though he successfully mobilised the masses with the many satyagrahas he launched, there were not many true Gandhians even in his own Congress Party; not many at the time understood, let alone accepted, his vision for independent India. Yet he remains a more crucial figure for India, and with a far wider significance outside the country, than any other Indian of that period and after.

The second set of essays on 'Gandhi: Thinker and Activist' (p 69) begins with Tridip Suhrud's survey of 'Gandhi's key writings' (p 71). Gandhi was not a systematic thinker, and the thematic unity is not in his writing but rather in the way he lived out his thought and action. No wonder he could say: 'my message is my life'!

Akeel Bilgrami next discusses 'Gandhi's religion and its relation to his politics' (p 93), particularly Gandhi's refusal to separate the two. Gandhi's understanding of religion and his practice of politics brought the two together in a creative and innovative praxis. He insisted: 'there could be no politics devoid of religion…. They subserve religion. Politics devoid of religion are a death trap because they kill the soul' (Young India, 24 March 1924). But Gandhi's Hinduism was a 'maverick mix' of Advaita-Vedantin ideas, Bhakti ideals, Jain anekantavada (many-sidedness) and syadvada (relatively) of truth. Buddha and Jesus were exemplars of ahimsa for him. His was an

attempt to spiritualise power and humanise religion. This was clearly at odds with the realpolitik of the Westphalian nation state, so eagerly embraced by religious nationalist today: *cuius regio, eius religio!*

In his essay on 'Conflict and Violence', Ronald Terchek emphasises how Gandhi as an idealist still has 'a compelling realism' (p 128) to his understanding of power and wants to empower persons to enhance their human dignity. This power must be domesticated and not allowed to dominate; it must be diffused, not concentrated at the expense of others, but made accountable and transparent. Thus Gandhi contextualises and 'judges power by both the ends it serves and the means it employs' (p 129).

Thomas Weber discusses 'Gandhi's moral economics', tracing its inspiration to John Ruskin and Leo Tolstoy (p 135). Weber sets out the moral context for Gandhi's critique of Western materialism and its industrial civilisation, which he rejected as dehumanising and exploitative. Gandhi's ideas on bread, labour and non-consumerism, of nonpossession and trusteeship, of swadeshi and sarvodaya have been ridiculed and dismissed as utopian by both socialists and capitalists. And yet the collapse of socialist command economies and the most recent free-market meltdown should force a rethink of old hardened positions before they do irreversible damage to our world.

'Gandhi and the State' by Anthony Parel elaborates Gandhi's vision of a good state, 'surajya' (p 166). He was against an aggressive, soulless machine-like state and also opposed to a Machiavellian subordination of all values to reason of state, the raison d'etat of realist politics. Though a religious person himself, he did not want a religion-based state. His state was not to be a homogeneous, organic community but a pluralistic, political one. The good state would protect rights, internal order and external security. It would not be a powerful nationalist state but a minimalist, ethical and moral one, supported by civil society and voluntary agencies.

Tanika Sarkar's critique 'Gandhi and Social Relations' provides a useful counterpoint from the left to the other contributions in this collection (p 173), in particular of Gandhi's understanding of class and caste, his attitude to property and inequality, to Adivasis and Dalits, to gender and sexuality. For Sarkar, Gandhi's politics 'carried the seeds of self-transcendence and self-cancellation' (p 192). This seems rather harsh but it can also be read as an indictment of those who rendered lip service to his ideals and then compromised them rather shamefacedly.

The third part is on '[t]he contemporary Gandhi' (p 197). Harish Trivedi's survey of the 'literary and visual portrayals of Gandhi' demonstrates how Gandhi's legacy cannot be ignored even as India tries to come to terms with it (p 199). Anthony Parel takes this forward in his discussion on 'Gandhi in contemporary India' (p 219) and describes the new political canon Gandhi left. Gandhi wanted his country to be non-violent, inclusive, egalitarian: Sarvodaya was the way to surajya. Gandhi has left us an agenda and given us a framework within which to work at this goal. However, contemporary India has known violent divisions and secessionist movements, religious extremism and communal frenzies, endemic inequalities, and this even with rapid growth. Indeed, if we acknowledge Gandhi as the father of the nation, then we are but his lost children now.

In reviewing 'Gandhi's Global Legacy', David Hardiman points to Gandhi's 'technique of non-violent civil resistance' or satyagraha, as his most important legacy (p 239). It has had an impact on the political discourse across the world and inspired similar movements on other continents, i e, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi. Though Marxists have disparaged and dismissed Gandhi, their own ideology has not proved any more durable. The contemporary ecological movement also finds inspiration in Gandhi though there is little in his published writings concerning nature.

In a final 'Conclusion', Judith Brown recalls the many Gandhis presented in this collection and the different way in which they have been appropriated (p 258). However, in spite of the extraordinary impact of this Mahatma, the India of his dreams remains very much just that. And yet he still challenges those who encounter him to examine their fundamental values and how these work their way into society and polity.

Interrogating Gandhi

This is a valuable Companion for those with some acquaintance with Gandhi who wants to engage in further encounter with Gandhian discourse. Most contemporary critics interrogate Gandhi with the convenience of hindsight and a rather generous helping of self-righteousness. Thus the modernists, who disparage his ahimsa as naively idealistic, have no real answer to the violence in our world except to use more violence to suppress it. A war of state terror against the terrorists only perpetuates a spiral of violence in an ever more violent world!

Again, those who decry Gandhi's aversion to class struggle have themselves been insensitive to other forms of inequality that lie beyond their ideological blinkers, like patriarchy and gender, race and caste. Moreover, those critical of his approach to Dalits and tribes have not shown themselves to be above creating sub-caste divisions and partisan privileges even among scheduled castes and tribes. Nor are they above romanticising tribals rather than empowering them to take their place in the sun.

On the other hand, the self-proclaimed Gandhians, isolated in their ashrams, have little credibility themselves when it comes to engaging with the issues of the day, whether it be communal violence, endemic corruption or caste atrocities. It would seem they have reduced Gandhism to vegetarianism and satsang (prayer meetings)!

We do need an authentic critique of Gandhi. All true Gandhians would welcome this. But more than interrogating Gandhi, we need to allow him to question us. Beyond moral platitudes and legal niceties that postpone rather than implement any real solutions, what is our answer to increasing levels of collective violence? Other than continuing disputations on how to define the poverty line, what do we have to say about the increasing inequality in shining India, especially to those below the poverty line? Other than idolising women rather hypocritically, how do we respond to issues of gender justice and atrocities against women? Other than using surveys to make more sophisticated projections, what stand do we take on the electoral manipulation of vote banks and patronage politics that perpetuate rather than address communal divides? Are our Dalits and tribals any better off today after all the programmes planned for them, and implemented more in the breach than in actuality?

Inspired by Gandhi, back in 1973, E F Schumacher cogently argued in his *Small Is Beautiful* for a practical 'economics as if people mattered'. We need to reassess our new economic policies and revisit Gandhian economics instead of uncritically embracing the market or dogmatically pursuing failed statist control. While command economies have run aground, the financial crisis precipitated by free-market financiers is characterised by greed, consumerism and lack of trust. The first, among financiers and those they financed and profited with, caused it; the second on all sides, of lenders and borrowers, fuelled it; the third, of bankers and investors, now perpetuates it.

Gandhi's Critique

We should allow Gandhian economics to suggest three key corresponding principles for a viable and sustainable economy. First, there is enough for every one's need but not for everyone's greed; plain living and high thinking for a better quality of life; all property must be held in trust as its necessary social and ethical imperative. Rarely are those who have caused a crisis the ones to remedy it. Yet we are trying to remedy the crisis with more of the same by the very persons who got us there in the first place!

Gandhi rejected both the *homo economicus* and the *homo politicus* on which modern economies and state policies today are premised. So too we need to reread Hind Swaraj and see how far Gandhi's critique of parliamentary democracy applies to our own elected representatives who are more adept at stalling Parliament and rushing to the speaker than at addressing and debating real issues. Instead of the vibrant panchayati raj on which Gandhi would have founded the state, we have an alienated and alienating top-heavy bureaucracy and a corrupt political class on top; instead of an economy premised on need, trust and frugality, we have a market-based, profit-driven consumerist economy; instead of a civil society that foregrounds duty, tolerance and inclusiveness, we have one that is increasingly demanding and self-referent, intolerant and ethnocentric. Surely we need to reassess our stance on collective political violence, journey whether by state or non-state actors with rather than take shelter in the ambiguities of recent work like Steven Pinker's *Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined (Viking, 2012).*

We need a deeper engagement with Gandhi than the Bollywood version of 'Gandhigiri', best categorised as Gandhi-*lite*. This collection of essays is a good companion for that journey.

11.
CELEBRATING GANDHI'S PRAXIS: A SYNTHESIS OF HIS LIFE AND MESSAGE

Asian Values and Human Future, eds. Joy Thomas Li Jialian, 2015, Don Bosco University Guwahati. Short version in Indian Currents, 01st October 2018.

I. Understanding the Options
II.Faith and Reason
The Limits Rationality
The Act of Faith
Dilemmas and Dialectics
Gandhi's Faith-Reason Dialectic
A Radical Re-interpretation
Beyond Orthodoxy
Renunciation and Celebration
III.Peace and Power
Understanding Power
Pursuing Peace
Gandhi's Peace Discourse
Modernity and Violence
Ram Saumya and Oceanic Circles
Critique to Dialogue
References

Abstract

This presentation focuses on Gandhi's praxis in two problematic domains. The first on faith and reason discusses the dialect between 'faith' and 'reason' in the context of religious tradition. The second part on peace and power, reconceptualises the moral ambiguities involved as the basis of Gandhi political discourse.

I. Understanding the Options

Gandhi claimed, 'My life is my message' he was pointing to the synthesis in his life of various contrary themes and emphasis in his message. This underlining the unity of ideas and action was for Gandhi the authentication of his life and legacy. This was precisely Gandhi's praxis. This presentation focuses on Gandhi's praxis in two problematic domains. The first on faith and reason, discusses the dialect between 'faith' and 'reason' in the context of religious tradition. This is the essential underlying dynamic of Gandhi's religious discourse and is the foundation of his political discourse. The second part on peace and power, reconceptualises the moral ambiguities involved as the basis of Gandhi political discourse. Each part begins with a theoretical discussion of the concepts involved and then illustrates this in Gandhi's praxis.

There are such different perspectives on Gandhi that any discussion on them needs must begin with conceptual clarifications that set a framework for a fruitful dialogue rather than a useless debate. Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks* (Gramsci 1999) emphasises the synthesis of theory and practice, without presuming the primacy of either, where theory has its natural extension into practice which in turn is continually critiqued by theoretical reflection: 'The philosophy of praxis does not tend to leave the simple in their primitive philosophy of common sense but rather to lead them to a higher conception of life'. (1970: 332) Paulo Freire defines praxis as 'reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed.' (Freire 1970: 126)

II. Faith and Reason

Perceiving faith and reason as binary opposites rather than as two alternate ways in our quest for truth is more typical of Western thought, where this readily leads to an impassable divide, as between *fideism and rationalism*. 'What has Athens got to do with Jerusalem?', asked Tertullian at the beginning of the Christian era when confronted with Greek philosophy! But if believers would privilege faith, rationalist would reverse the hierarchy, and never the twain would meet! The resulting dualism between faith and reason would seem to leave each in an independent domain of human experience and knowledge, compartmentalising our lives and impoverishing them into bargain.

The 'age of reason' of the Enlightenment in Europe following on its mediaeval 'age of faith', once undermined our faith with its rationalism, but now with the end of the Enlightenment this very critique of reason has turned on itself and undermined our confidence in the older rationalist optimism. Today a post-modern age is putting to question all the grand narratives that once seemed to epitomise the cutting edge of our evolving rationalisation.

The Limits Rationality

More generally, Eastern religious traditions generally perceive faith and reason as complementary not contradictory ways of seeking the truth. In India truth as *satya*, as ontological reality even more than just epistemological truth, cannot be contradictory, otherwise reality itself would be absurd. What is needed is to include both in a more comprehensive understanding, which in fact would thereby be the more human for being the more inclusive and holistic. This dialectic relationship between faith and reason presents a problematique that must be further explored. For if a 'dia-lectic' implies that one pole of the relationship must be read against the other and vice versa, then we must still ask: *what does being 'reasonable' mean to faith, and again what does the being 'faithful' to reason require?*

The age of reason once seems to have undermined our faith with its rationalism, but now with the end of the Enlightenment this very critique of reason has turned on itself and undermined our confidence in the older rationalist optimism. Today a post-modern

age is putting to question all the grand narratives that once seemed to epitomise the cutting edge of our evolving rationality.

Rational knowledge that has not been sensitive to its inherent limitations, can never be 'rightly reasoned'. A critical examination of the rationalist-empiricist methodology that authenticates empirical science would underline certain limitations that are often neglected and even violated by their proponents for reasons that are external to the methodology itself. This is precisely what the sociology of knowledge has drawn attention to and has convincingly demonstrated, how the underlying presumptions which inevitably are socially derived, prejudice our presumed rational and impartial objectivity. These presumptions and pre-judgements are beyond the investigative methodology of such reasoning itself.

The Act of Faith

How then do we critique such presumptions and prejudices? The ideal of the Enlightenment, of an unbiased, autonomous subject, must be abandoned for a more contextualised one in its *sitz-im-leben*. How does this become a positive constituent of any interpretation and not a limiting one? This requires a hermeneutic to deconstruct the meaningfulness in the meaning of subjective propositions. It is precisely here once again that the dialectic of faith and reason must come to bear. If all truth is to be restricted to the empirical and all knowledge to be derived from inductive or deductive logical, then clearly in such an empirical-rationalist frame of reference, there is no room for faith, or as Paul Tillich says, for 'what ultimate concerns man'. (Tillich 1958: 2)

Too much attention has been focused on faith as content, that is, 'belief'. We need to examine the act of faith as an act of trust that makes belief possible. The capacity to make this act of faith is certainly an a priori condition for the necessarily interdependent lives we live. Moreover, if we grant that we are not the ground of our own being, then this 'faith' must transcend and reach beyond the horizons of the human. In this sense Panikkar rightly insists that faith becomes a 'constitutive element of human existence'. (Panikkar 1971: 188-229). And it is precisely as such that we must test any content of faith. For a faith that does not fulfil this humanising dimension, i.e. to make the believer more human, cannot be 'good faith'. In other words, *if to believe is human, then what we believe must make us more human not less!*

The test of good faith then would be whether the act of faith gives assent to a content that is in fact humanising. And this is precisely what an experiential self-reflective rationality can do. This is where and how we must seek the reasonableness of our faith. So too with blind faith; here the act of faith becomes compulsive rather than free, and on a content that promises security and perhaps even grandiosity, rather than one that expresses trust and dependency. In other words, *if faith is not humanising, then it cannot be good faith*. But only when we accept that faith is a constitutive dimension of human life, do we have a framework for making such an investigation.

Dilemmas and Dialectics

In making a distinction between the content and the act of faith, we realise that the content may vary across various cultural and religious traditions. However, the act of faith in so far as it is constitutively human, will necessarily have a great similarity across cultures and religious traditions because at this level we begin to touch on the most fundamental aspects of the human. Here again it is our hermeneutics of faith, both as act and content that can help us discern the human authenticity of these pre-judgments and presumptions.

For even as new experiences precipitate new understandings, they can alter our consciousness in radical ways, which then demands a renewed faith. For 'on the one hand, there is an interpretation of the faith conditioned by one's view of reality and on the other there is a view of reality nurtured by one's interpretation of revelation.' (Libano, 1982: 15) In other words, *while it is true that faith does not 'create' reality, it does make for a 'definition of the situation' that is real in its effects. And vice-versa, our experience of reality affects our faith understanding*. (Thomas & Thomas 1928: 571-2)

Religious traditions that have stressed 'orthodoxy' (right belief) tend to focus more on the content of faith, whether this be the intellectual content of the belief or the moral one of the commitment. The first focuses on intellectual truth, the second on moral goodness. However, such orthodoxies tend to neglect the act of faith, which as a constitutive dimension of our life represents precisely an internal critique, an intrinsic guarantor of a content of faith, which ought to fulfil our deepest human desires and hopes.

For this, a religious tradition must emphasise an 'orthopraxis' (right practice), where the focus is on the act of faith. For here the crucial emphasis is neither on belief in the true or the good, but rather a commitment to authentic human living, an existential engagement with, and a critical reflection on living. It is at this fundamental existential level that the reasonableness of faith must be sought. For it is at this level of living praxis, that truth must have meaning and value becomes meaningful.

And it is precisely here we suspect that the dialectic between faith and reason can be very fruitful, in testing and discerning the authenticity of one's faith, not so much in terms of its content, but rather in terms of its humanising our life. Hence the constant search for an ever deeper and more relevant 'orthopraxis' and 'orthodoxy', rather than an uncritical faith in a tradition, as also the continuing quest for a more adequate and pertinent 'rationality' beyond the rationalism of the Enlightenment.

Our hermeneutic suspicions can now become the points of departure for us to initiate and continue this dialogue across the apparent divide between faith and reason. But we must first be clear with regard to the horizons of understandings in which it takes place. Only then can there be a 'fusion of horizons' which can give the dialogue 'the buoyancy, of a game, in which the players are absorbed,' (Linge 1977: xix) as the later Wittgenstein had observed. And it will happen as in 'every conversation that through it something different has come to be.' (*ibid*.. xxii)

Gandhi's Faith-Reason Dialectic

Gandhi's praxis brings faith and reason into a dialectic synthesis in the context of a religious tradition. He is the epitome of a person who requires his faith to be reasonable in terms of making his humanity more authentic, just as he demands that his reason be truly faithful to this humanity as well. He brings together his religious belief and practice, even as he develops a powerful critique of rationalism.

Much has been made of Gandhi's religious sense and sensitivity, his popular religiosity and his 'inner voice'. But not enough has been said by way of examining the rational basis for this. Certainly we can see that Gandhi's 'inner voice', to which he gave such great importance in discerning and authenticating his life, was very much an experiential self-reflective reasoning. But then again he refuses to be overwhelmed by reason, simply because he is only too aware of its

limitations. Perhaps what rationalists have never examined is their own faith in rationality, and how this easily becomes another politically committed social ideology. Gandhi explicitly challenges modern rationalists to critically examine the 'presuppositions' and 'prejudgements' of their rationality, even as he interrogates the traditional and popular faith of his people on its humanising impact on their lives. But for both, the rationlalists and the faithful, human authenticity must be the measure for their self-critique.

A Radical Re-interpretation

Based on this praxis, Gandhi's attempted reform is a radical reinterpretation of his religious tradition. He locates himself as an insider to mainstream Hinduism, the *sanathan dharma* that he claimed to follow. In fact the radicality of his re-interpretation goes unnoticed precisely because of this. Gandhi does not reject, he simply affirms what he considers to be authentic, and allows the inauthentic to be sloughed off. However, beliefs and practices which he perceives as humanly perverse and socially oppressive he vehemently condemns and opposes.

For him, Hinduism was ultimately reduced to a few fundamental beliefs: the supreme reality of God, the ultimate unity of all life and the value of love (ahimsa) as a means of realising God in the pursuit of moksha. His profound redefinition of Hinduism gave it a radically novel orientation. Bhikhu Parekh sums this up thus:

'For him, religion culminated but was not exhausted in social service and it had a spiritual meaning and significance only when inspired by the search for moksha. Gandhi's Hinduism had a secularised content but a spiritual form and was at once both secular and non-secular.' (Parekh 1995: 109)

Thus for example one of the most remarkable and yet unremarked re-interpretations of Hinduism that Gandhi effected was that of the Gita. Here was a text intended to persuade a reluctant warrior on the legitimacy and even the necessity of joining the battle. Gandhi re-works its *nish-kama-karma* to become the basis of his *ahimsa* and *satyagraha*!

Of course there is always a possibility that such a two-way dialectic between faith and reason need not necessarily be a constructive or creative one! Thus V.D. Savarkar's Hindutva is a reinterpretation of Hinduism in an inexorably opposed direction to that of Gandhi's *sanathan dharma*. Savarkar reduces Hinduism to a

political ideology of cultural nationalism, that has awkward parallels to 'national socialism' elsewhere. His appeal is to upper castes, and religious elites to mobilise people on the basis of a homogenous communal identity. This negates the legitimacy of diversity and difference of other communities. Gandhi on the other hand strives for a mass-based moblisation across caste and religious communities to establish a *purna swaraj* for all especially the least and the last.

Thus there can be no reconciliation between Savarkar who wanted to 'Hinduise politics and militarise Hindudom', (Savarkar 1949) and Gandhi whose declared agenda was to politicise spirituality and to spiritualise politics! Savarkar's Hindutva leads to a Hindu rastra, where the traditional tolerance of a religious tradition morphs into an aggressive facist ideology. Gandhi's Hinduism opens to a secular state, which rather than distancing itself from all religious traditions – the Nehruvian dharma niraphskata – it privileges respect for all of them – sarva-dharma samabhava.

In the end, this is why he is vehemently opposed by the traditional Hindu elite, who finally recognised and felt threatened by the challenge he posed. Ashis Nandy's piercing analysis implicates us all. He points out that, Savarkar's faithful disciple, 'Godse not only represented the traditional Indian stratarchy which Gandhi was trying to break' (Nandy 1980:86); in a sense his 'hand was forced by the real killers of Gandhi: the anxiety-ridden, insecure traditional elite concentrated in the urbanised, educated, partly westernised, tertiary sector whose meaning of life Gandhian politics was taking away.' (*ibid*.:87)

But then again precisely because he presents himself as a Hindu in his interpretation of Indian culture, he was seen as too inclusive by traditional Hindus, and at the same time as not ecumenical enough by contemporary non-Hindus. Hence his appeals for Hindu-Muslim unity were rejected, by Muslims as being too Hindu, and questioned by Hindus for not being Hindu enough.

Yet for Gandhi the unity of humankind was premised on the oneness of the cosmos, which was a philosophical principle that was ontologically prior to diversity. This is precisely what an *advaitin* would hold. Hence for him unity in diversity was the integrating axis not just of Hindu, but of Indian culture, and indeed of all viable civilisations as well.

Thus the legitimacy of religious diversity was rooted in the fundamental Jaina principle of *anekantavada*, the many-sidedness of truth. Once this is conceded as foundational, then religious tolerance is a necessary consequence. But this was not to be a negative tolerance

of distance and coexistence, but rather one of communication and enrichment. Indeed, Gandhi would ground the dialogue between East and West in their religious traditions, since for him religious rootedness was precisely the basis for mutual learning.

In cultural matters, however, he was an assimilationist, not in the sense that he would want other cultures to be assimilated to his own, but rather want all cultures to be enriched by each other without loosing their identity or dignity. Gandhi's cultural assimilation, then was opposed to political revivalists and religious nationalists, to Tilak and M.M. Malaviya, as also to Dayanand Saraswati and Savarkar. For Gandhi an open and understanding dialogue must precede not follow a free and adaptive integration. The basis for such a dialogic encounter would have to be a 'pluralist epistemology'. But already in his *Hind Swaraj* he was convinced that it would only bear real fruit when it was 'sunk in a religious soil.'

Thus an enriched diversity would then contribute to a more invigorated pluralism and an enhanced unity. This was precisely Gandhi's understanding of Indian culture and civilisation, and he had, indeed, grasped its fundamental strength and the secret of its survival. No one in this century has done more to affirm Indian culture than Gandhi. Yet even as he apparently idealised our ancient traditions, he was radically reinterpreting and reforming them, an unfinished task to which he can still inspire us. That precisely is his relevance for us today.

Beyond Orthodoxy

For Gandhi is a critical traditionalist whose critique does speak to critical modernity today. There is much in 'modern civilisation' he rejects, but not the liberative contribution of modernity: civil liberties, equality, poverty alleviation, religious tolerance, equal and open dialogue. Rather his effort can be interpreted as an attempt to integrate these positive elements with a liberative re-interpretation of tradition. In his unique way he sets up a creative encounter for this integration, even though some see him as radical and others as reactionary. With his critique from within the tradition, Gandhi becomes the great synthesizer of contraries if not of contradictions, within and across traditions.

His *purna swaraj* would harmonize rights and duties, head and heart, individual and community, faith and reason, economic

development and spiritual progress, religious commitment and religious pluralism, self-realization and political action. He brings together philosophical discourse and popular culture in enlightened renewal and social reform. Not since the time of the Buddha, some have argued, has such a synergy between the philosophic and the popular in our traditions been experienced. Thus Gandhi integrates the Upanishad and the Tulsi Ramayan in his religious synthesis. When it comes to bridges across traditions, Gandhi brings the Gita together with the 'Sermon on the Mount' and reads one into the other. In fact, if he has Christianised Hinduism he has certainly also presented us with a Hinduised Christian spirituality.

Precisely as a re-interpretation from within, Gandhi can so much the more effectively and authentically integrate into his synthesis elements from without. For as Nandy writes: 'Gandhi was neither a conservative nor a progressive. And though he had internal contradictions, he was not a fragmented self-alienated man driven by the need to compulsively conserve the past or protect the new,' thus 'effortlessly transcending the dichotomy of orthodoxy and iconoclasm,' (Nandy 1980:71) he reconciles meaningful tradition and reasonable modernity.

In the best traditions of this land, he combined both faith and reason. For faith and reason are implicated in each other. Blind faith or a fundamentalist, revivalist version of religion was totally unacceptable, for Gandhi. He would constantly critique faith to ascertain whether it was meaningful and reasonable in terms of basic human value commitments, and he would demand of reason the same fidelity to these values as well.

Moreover, he does this with a practical praxis, or rather an orthopraxis, which we have described earlier as an existential engagement with and a critical reflection on life. His '*Experiments with Truth*' were not so much experiments in a rationalist sense, they were his critical reflections on his real life experiences, an experiential, self-reflexive method, which is what praxis is all about. Thus Gandhi synthesises a critical orthodoxy with a meaningful orthopraxis.

Renunciation and Celebration

However, the ascetic dimension of Gandhi's integration at times loses the aesthetic one. A criticism of Gandhi's ashrams was that it grew only vegetables, not flowers! Growing vegetables represented

more than the Gandhian pre-occupation with vegetarianism and bread-labour. But that his ashram did not grow any flowers, would indicate a certain distancing from the aesthetic. He once asked: 'Why can't you see the beauty of colour in vegetables?' (Harijan,7-4-1946) Indeed, Gandhi surprised and shocked Tagore when he claimed he could hardly enjoy the glory and the beauty of a sunset when so many of his brothers and sisters were too burdened by their lives to welcome the sunrise!

But in rightly emphasizing the need for renunciation, certainly a message that our consumerist and self-indulgent world needs more than ever today, the Gandhian ashram seemed to miss out on the need for celebration, which our tired and alienated, dispirited and pessimistic world needs almost as much. We do need the self-renunciation Gandhi espoused, as well as his affirmation of selflessness. He urges on us the injunction of the Ishopanishad: *tena tyaktena bhunjithah* (enjoy the things of the earth by renouncing them). But we also need to celebrate the other, and the enrichment that comes from this encounter, to celebrate our world as conscious creatures who can wonder at its ineffable mystery and praise its surpassing beauty! This dialectic synthesis still waits for a Gandhian praxis.

III. Peace and Power

No society is integrated exclusively by consensus or coercion, and in no society would power be premised on just one or the other principle. However, even where there is coercion and competition there can still be a coincidence of interests, that make for some measure of cooperation, just as when there is consensus and cooperation there still could be a conflict of interests that makes for competition or worse.

Consensus would favour a more peaceful society, coercion would open to a more violent one. Whether a society focuses on building consensus for a peaceful society or strengthening coercion to contain violence will depend on your understanding and exercise of power in society.

Understanding Power

When force, as active aggression or as passive restriction, harms or destroys that which it is applied to, then is it concomitant with violence. Sometimes by extension the exercise of any vehement force is also called 'violence', though more precisely it is when force violates, that it constitutes violence. In this sense violence by definition cannot be justifiable, except when used in self-defense, to oppose and protect oneself from violation. This is counter-violence, rather than violence per se. Moreover, only when it is proportionate to the violence it opposes can this defensive use of force be justified. Such counter-violence is then instrumentally justified by a rationalisation in terms of its ends.

It should be quite apparent that peace is not reconcilable with violence. Certainly not with violation, since any peace brought about by such means would itself be an unjustifiable peace. Moreover, it is difficult to see how force can be a morally neutral means when used in a human context. To justify force in terms of the ends it is used for would instrumentalise it. But when force is used in a human context, it impinges on human beings who are ends in themselves. And even when it is used to protect the dignity of such human persons from being violated by other persons, or by impersonal structures, such violence can only be thought of as a preliminary for peace, not something compatible with it.

More pertinently, the exercise of such 'justifiable force' or 'counter-violence' cannot be uncritically accepted, since the exercise of violence in a human context involves more than just the victims and the violators. For our capacity for violence too easily engulfs all around. There are no non-combatants in wars today, just as there are no bystanders in a general revolution. All around are somehow implicated. However, if peace itself is not compatible with force and violence, how does one protect such a peace against the use of the violent forces, when these threaten to engulf it, not just from without but from within as well? Here we must understand that if peace implies the absence of force and violence, it does not mean a negation or the absence of power. However, we need to understand what kind of power is compatible with a stable peace.

Power is still mostly understood after the classic definition of Max Weber, as the capacity to impose one's will against resistance:

'In general, we understand by 'power' the chance of a man or of a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action

even against the resistance of others who are participating in the same action.' (Weber 1968: 926).

This is an understanding of power as domination, as 'power over', that implies a zero-sum game in which there must be losers in order that they may be winners. In this understanding violence will necessarily be implicated in any exercise of power, in fact here 'violence is nothing more than the most flagrant manifestation of power' (Arendt 1969:35) C. Wright Mills draws the logical consequence of a politics based on this: 'all politics is a struggle for power; the ultimate kind of power is violence.' (Mills 1956:171)

One cannot help but notice the Hobbesian assumption underlying such a notion of power. In the 'war of all against all' such an understanding makes for good survival sense. For if the final integrating principle of society is coercion, then the powerful must prevail and impose a minimum consensus for a viable social order. It is precisely this power as domination which corrupts, and when absolute, corrupts absolutely!

In this context peace can never be a reality. It can only be simulated by a forced imposition of some measure of consensus by some rules of the game, to contain the inevitable conflict and competition implicit in such an understanding of society lest it go out of hand and lead to the destruction of the players themselves; in which case there would be no winners but all losers. But at the very most this can achieve a balance of power, which all too readily becomes a balance of terror. Such a precarious balance can be the basis for only a precarious peace.

However, there is another understanding of power that is more functional and has been articulated by Talcott Parsons, which is more institutional and structural (Parsons: 1969) as efficacy or capacity In this sense, power as efficacy is 'power to' to achieve or effect something. Thus the social expression of such power concerns persons rather than things. Thus empowering a group is to enable it to 'not just act, but to act in concert,' and then such power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence as long as the group keeps together. (Arendt 1969:44)

Such multiple capacities need not be in any inherent contradiction with each other, though they may well need to be controlled and coordinated, if they are to complement, and not conflict with each other. The underlying assumption here is that of consensus as the fundamental principle of integration which makes

for cooperation between persons and groups rather than competition or conflict.

Pursuing Peace

Peace necessarily implies the negation of violence, not only unjustified violation, which is obviously the very contradiction of peace, but also what is sometimes considered as justifiable force. For even with defensive force and counter-violence, there are moral ambiguities involved that rarely make for an acceptable or stable peace. But peace does not imply the absence of or the negation of power. Although power as domination, *power over*, even when it is considered just and legitimate can at best lead to a passive and negative peace, a peace that can only be as precarious as any balance of power must inevitably be. Rather an authentic understanding of peace would be premised on enabling, *power to*, as enabling oneself with others cooperating for the common good. This makes for a strong and stable peace.

The ancient Romans premised their *pax Romana* on their preparedness for war: 'si vis pacem, para bellum' (if you want peace prepare for war). The later Augustinian notion of peace as the 'tranquillity of order' is more positive but still a rather passive understanding. Surely peace must have a more positive content. A stable peace must be 'the fruit of justice'. A just social order necessarily implies freedom if it is to be compatible with human dignity. Moreover, if the dialectical tension between freedom and order is effectively and constructively resolved, then we would have a third element in our understanding of peace that is harmony. This is a treasured Asian value.

These three elements, justice, freedom and harmony, must still be to put them together in a social order for peace. This will demand both, an ideology of tolerance and a myth of peace. At this profound level, peace can be an end in itself, as in fact salvation myths have expressed. This is the peace that is reflected in popular greetings: pax shalom, salam, shanti, ... that needs to explored as a foundation for a brave new world.

Gandhi's Peace Discourse

Gandhi's ahimsa and satyagraha refine our understanding of peace and power. His swaraj and swadeshi provide a trenchant critique of our globalised neo-conservative capitalist social order. These cannot any more be dismissed in our coping with the violence we have perpetrated on ourselves, within societies and between nation-states. For the Gandhian discourse and praxis has foundational implication for any understanding in the pursuit of peace as justice and freedom, of and harmony. To begin with, one must affirm that Gandhi's approach is always holistic, for him the personal is the political, and the political is inclusive of the other dimensions of personal and social life, precisely because it is essentially a religious or rather an ethical struggle for a new and liberated society.

Thus Gandhi's understanding of non-violence, ahimsa, is not a negative concept. He insists that it must be a positive understanding of compassion and love, of empathy with all humans, even our enemies, and indeed with the whole of the cosmos. In terms of such a positive understanding, Gandhi sees violence, even in the sense of 'force', however justified, as always a violation of this love, compassion, empathy; a violation not just of persons but of the very structure of reality itself. For Gandhi, it is truth that is the ultimate reality, satya, and violence is always a violation of this truth. Ultimately such a violation cannot but betray the deepest truth of the violator himself. Indeed, for Gandhi God is truth, and more than that in the final analysis truth is God, satya, the ultimate reality.

The 'will to power' has been glorified and romanticised as an instinctual human drive. But to make power thus an end in itself unleashes its immense destructive potential all the more. Gandhi was acutely aware of this. The only force he accepts as ethical, is truth force or satyagraha. And even at the personal level his life-long quest was against any kind of domination. The only domination that Gandhi would accept was self-control or domination over oneself, swaraj.

Hence his quest for femininity, to be more mother than father, more feminine than masculine was to be more human. Ashis Nandy discusses this with great insight. Needless to say Gandhi in his personal life did not always succeed in his personal quest for self-control and non-domination. Certainly, there are difficult questions that can be raised regarding the young Gandhi, as a husband and a father in his family.

Yet his 'experiments with truth' never ceased. His satyagraha was essentially an appeal to truth, and to conscience. It did indeed have emotional and political implications, but if these were to be the determining characteristics of satyagraha then it would be manipulation and betrayal, one more manifestation of the perversion of power. For satyagraha as an instrument for change in Gandhi's own estimate had to be used with great caution and with much self-examination. What we have today is civil disobedience rather than satyagraha and often it has violent implications and consequences that Gandhi would never countenance.

The Gandhian notion of swaraj does correspond to the characterisation of peace we have earlier made. For Gandhi self-rule meant primarily rule over one's self as the foundation for living with others, in justice, freedom and harmony. But with swadeshi, Gandhi goes a step further by indicating the contours of such a society of peace, the self-reliance and neighbourliness of a little community, which would inevitably be a counter-cultural one today. Thus for Gandhi, justice, must be founded on equality and dharma; freedom on self-control and self-reliance; harmony on self-respect and self-realisation.

Gandhi's ahimsa and satyagraha, his swadeshi and swaraj are certainly not the last word in the continuing understanding of peace, it is rather a first sure and positive step. For peace must be a continuing quest, perhaps the most relevant and deepest quest for a new age. A quest that not only bonds each to the other, but embraces the whole of the cosmos as well, in one inclusive ecological community, beginning with the local village and neighbourhood, in ever-widening oceanic circles to include the whole world.

When nation-states are surely the greatest menace to international peace today, and as yet nationalism a most powerful mobilising ideology, we need more than ever the moral sanity of Gandhi. For him 'swaraj' was never mere independence, 'swatantra'. His 'purnaswaraj' meant comprehensive freedom, 'azadi', for all and especially the huddled mass of our peoples. Gandhi had intuitively realised 'that war could never bring power to the masses and therefore his intention in India was to devise an instrument by means of which the common people would gain power to build up a new life in freedom.' (Bose and Patwardhan 1967:19)

His patriotism was a rejection of imperialism as well as an in-built critique of nationalism. For Gandhi, as also for Tagore, 'the Indian freedom movement ceased to be an expression of only nationalist consolidation; it came to acquire a new stature as a symbol

of the universal struggle for political justice and cultural dignity.' (Nandy 1994:2-3) And so Gandhi would claim: 'My ambition is nothing less than to see international affairs placed on a moral basis through India's effort.' He was convinced that 'it is the duty of free India to perfect the instrument of non-violence for dissolving collective conflict, if freedom is to be really worthwhile.' (Harijan 31-8-1947, p.302) Indeed, 'if India reaches her destiny through truth and non-violence, she will have made no small contribution to world peace'. (Harijan, 14-4-1946, p.90) For 'unless India develops her non-violent strength, she has gained nothing either for herself or for the world. Militarisation of India will mean her destruction as well as of the whole world.' (Harijan 14-12-1947 p.471)

This was the discourse of Gandhi for the India of his dreams, but today cultural nationalism and religious fundamentalism, caste patriotism and class chauvinism have broken any tryst with such a destiny as we might have hoped for.

Modernity and Violence

There can be no negating the liberation that modernity has brought in our post-modern world to vast masses of people. But for all its much vaulted 'rationality' some would rather say because of it, modernity has failed to cope with the endemic irrationality of violence. Now after two world wars, and a global cold war, not to mention the many smaller hot ones that have been a continuing presence on this earth, we cannot help but realise that modernity has not effectively or ethically addressed the problem of violence, either at the individual or group level, and certainly not at the national or international one.

If Gandhi's ahimsa seems impractical, what are the alternatives we have trapped ourselves in? How would Gandhi, the apostle of ahimsa respond to our claim to be a deterrent nuclear weapons state? What all this has to do with the quality of life of our impoverished masses remains a question that must haunt us. If Gandhi was right that 'to arm India on a large scale is to Europeanise it,' (Hind Swaraj 1939: 59) then what would nuclear arms do? Americanise us? And this is an initiative being pushed by our cultural nationalists! But then in a globalised world, it is surely only the elite that will get to strut and fret upon this global stage, while the masses

of our people are a passive and manipulated audience to this macabre theatre.

The whole effort of the modern world in dealing with violence has been to control the other. But mastery over others has not meant less violence for ourselves. Only now we become the perpetrators, not the sufferers of violence. But this can only end in visiting the same violence on ourselves. Gandhi's attempt begins with controlling oneself, as the first source of violence one must master in order to fearlessly and non-violently win over the violent others.

Thus the modern world emphasised rights and privileged freedom, Gandhi foregrounded duty and the primacy of conscience. His concern was with 'socialising the individual conscience rather than internalising the social conscience'. (Iyer 1973:123) Certainly, Gandhi has much relevance to our present need to once again bridge this dichotomy between rights and duties, and integrate both in a more comprehensive freedom of choice and the obligation of conscience, in a humanist worldview and a more genuinely humane world-community. This is our only real chance for peace for the diverse communities of our society as also now for a globally interdependent world.

Ram Saumya and Oceanic Circles

We believe that Gandhi with his non-violence and satyagraha, his swaraj and swadeshi, has much to teach us about this peace that more than ever we realise must be the foundational myth of our societies today, for a brave new world tomorrow.

Gandhi did try to express such an ideal of peace with his secularised myth of 'Ramraj'. But this could not quite free itself from its religious context and so was not as universal in its appeal as Gandhi intended. Now it has been misappropriated to sanction the very opposite of what Gandhi stood for, Ram *rudra*, the warlike, not Ram *saumya*, the gentle.

But if Gandhi does not leave us with an effective myth of peace he does give us an image of society that can point us the way to a deeper mythical foundation for this peace. Gandhi's vision of the oceanic circles, centring on little communities and neighbourhoods, ever-widening and overlapping, reinforcing and inclusive, reverses the pyramidal image of a society, stratified by class and/or segmented by caste. It gives us a commanding image and symbol for peace on

which we can hope to base our new foundational social myth, our deep collective dream of peace.

But for this dream to even begin to become a reality, we must divest ourselves of a great deal of the cultural baggage we carry, the presumptions and pre-options we have been, and still are being socialised into. We must not allow our history to control our destiny, we must come to terms with our collective memories and allow our wounded psyche to heal. This would amount to a social metanoia, a collective change of heart, as a pre-condition for a dialogue with the 'other', and more importantly for the dialogue among ourselves, and even within our 'self', where this myth of peace must first be rooted. Gandhi died a beaten, broken old man. It is not he who has failed us, it is we who failed to live his ideals, and so betray our deepest most enriching dreams.

Critique to Dialogue

Gandhi's praxis is founded on a synthesis of his life and message. His 'experiments with truth' begin with himself first and then evolve into a people's movement. His faith is critiqued by reason, and his reason is sensitive to faith. Both are synthesised into a sensitivity that transforms his religious quest for *moksha* as liberation into his ethical practice of *nish-kama-karma* as selfless service, while his political ideal of ahimsa, non-violence is inspired by his religious ideal of satya and translated into the political practice of satyagraha.

There can be no doubt that Gandhi was an authentic 'organic intellectual', articulating and symbolically expressing people's aspirations. But he was no less a uniquely transformative leader, who changed persons and structures, and transformed a people and their culture, albeit for a while. Here was a yugapurush if ever there was one. If we are looking for a new synthesis for a counter-culture, we must take Gandhi as a dialogue partner in this project but first we must redefine and re-interpret him. We do believe that such an encounter will help us to re-examine and reconstruct ourselves as well.

It is certainly not our intention to idealise Gandhi into a new 'ism', neither a post- nor neo-Gandhi-ism. Being blind to his limitations and insensitive to the context in which he lived, cannot be constructive or creative. We need an open-ended critique of Gandhi,

not a close-ended 'ism', as seems to have happened with some of the official Gandhians. For Gandhi is, indeed, greater than their 'Gandhi-isms', and he will be more relevant than those of any others as well.

We do need an authentic critique of Gandhi. All true Gandhians would welcome this. But more than interrogating Gandhi, we need to allow him to question us. How would he interrogate us on our India today: a daydream or nightmare? What is our answer to our increasing levels of collective violence beyond moral attitudes and legal niceties that postpone rather than implement any real solutions? What do we have to say about the increasing inequality in our 'shinning India', especially to those below the poverty line other than continuing disputations on how to define it? On the good times, ache din, we are promising ourselves and pursuing with such frenzy? How do we respond to issues of gender justice and atrocities against women other than idolising women rather hypocritically? What stand do we take to the electoral manipulation of vote banks and patronage politics that perpetuate rather than address such communal divides other than use surveys to make more sophisticated projections? Are our Dalits and tribals any better off today after all the programmes planned for them, yet implemented more in the breach than in actuality?

In a globalised world, we all seem to be impelled to a kind of global culture that is ultimately based on Western civilisation which is in fact the dominant strand in such a culture. When Gandhi was once asked what he thought of Western civilisation, he said rather impishly, that it would be 'a good idea'. The challenge today for us in our globalising world is to find another, a better, a more integral, a more human ideal for our society, for our world today.

Gandhi has been severely criticised as impractical, as someone who took out an impossible overdraft on our human moral resources. But this is to claim that human beings are not capable of a metanoia, a radical change of heart that can open up new perspectives, not just for individuals and groups, but for entire societies and whole cultures as well. What we need are organic intellectuals and transformative activists who can articulate and precipitate such a social movement. The cascading crises that our society and our world is experiencing, only underlines more emphatically the need to find new ways of redefining ourselves and understanding our problems, before we can begin to respond to the situation.

Hence Panikkar (1995) calls for a 'cultural disarmament', i.e., the abandonment of our vested interests and non-negotiable positions, some of which are so much part of our culture and our

psyche that we fail to notice them. We need to de-mystify much in our modern world that has come to be considered as rational, progressive and scientific, while we fail to see how this rationality has become aggressive, the progress degenerated into regressive consumerism, while the technology has instrumentalised us all.

Tragically modern man with his loss of innocence in a de-mythologised world, has no longer any abiding myths. Today more than ever we need such bonding myths to sustain our world. Now myths are collective, never individual projects, and the 'myth of peace' is one in which we can all share. Certainly, it is one whose time has now come in our tired and torn, our broken, bruised world. But as yet we have no such common myth. Even the symbols and images we use for peace are quite inadequate or needlessly divisive: the dove with the olive branch or the steel fist gloved in velvet! The tragedy of modern humanity seems to be that it has too few creative and inspiring myths to live by and too many competing ideologies to die for. And so in desperation, we revive and cling to images and symbols that draw on the darkest recesses of our destructive potential.

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12.
INDIA IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: GANDHI'S DREAM, NEHRU'S VISION OR MODI'S NIGHTMARE ?

The Examiner, 2002, V.153, N.32, 10 Aug 2002, pp.8-9,18

Abstract

Gandhi's 'India of My Dreams' had given way to Nehru's vision of a multi-cultural, pluri-religious state. More than half a century after Independence will we go back to the terror of Partition, or will we be a nation in the unmaking or a community of communities in peace and harmony.

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Fifty years after Independence there is no gainsaying the failure of the social revolution envisaged by our nationalist movement, at least for the subalterns--the backward castes and especially the Dalits and tribals, Gandhi's last India -- for whom we have not as yet kept our tryst with destiny. Indeed, to speak of a crisis in the context of contemporary Indian society scene has become a tired, unhelpful cliché. We have been in a continuing and deepening multi-dimensional crisis for so long, we might easily slip into mistaking it for a normal situation. But this will not help us cope with a reality that is impinging on us with ever-increasing urgency.

All through our history the subalterns, the non-dominant classes of backward castes, Dalit and tribals, have presented real alternatives to Brahminic Hinduism. These have been viable for a longer period, like ancient Buddhism for more than a millennium, or a shorter one, like the non-Brahmin movement of modern India's renaissance. But

sooner or later they all lose their radical thrust and are reabsorbed into the dominant hegemony, which of course adapts and adjusts but eventually reasserts itself. Certainly, the most significant reason for its resilience is the hold the dominant groups had on the relations of production through the prevailing caste system.

None of the alternative identities and ideologies has been able to break this stranglehold. It would take a basic change in the mode of production to do this. Industrialisation and the green revolution, urbanisation and mass media were expected to precipitate a long-awaited and radical change. But this too remains postponed. For with the absorption of the non-Brahmin movement into the mainstream Congress party and the splintering of the Bahujans and Dalits into self-inflicted ineffectiveness, post-independent India came under the sway of, what has been aptly called, 'The Congress System' by Rajni Kothari.

This implied an accommodation of the upper savarna castes into dominant positions and an adjustment of the backward and avarna castes and tribes into subordinate ones. It was a Hindu reformism that contained religious militancy as long as the consensus held. It proclaimed a commitment to a 'socialist pattern' of society that stole the thunder on the left, even as it kept the loyalty of the right. It promoted a patriarchal paternalism that allowed dissent and disorder provided there was no threat to the status quo. It prided itself on a democratic politics, which was more plebiscitarian than participative. Yet it could be defensively authoritarian and selectively repressive, as with the Emergency in 1975.

In short, the Congress Raj in post-independent India got by with soft options while indefinitely postponing the harder ones. In Gramscian terms, it was not a case of pure domination, but rather a class hegemony that coopted and subordinated the concerns of other classes even while appearing to represent them in the larger interests of the whole society. It was in Gramsci's aphorism a "revolution' without a revolution.'

However, the underlying conflicts and contradictions could not be contained forever by the Congress system. The Gandhian ethical foundation it once could have claimed has been completely demolished by a blatantly amoral and cynical leadership, without any real mass following. The Nehruvian basis for the consensus has been gradually eroded by a manipulative and chauvinist politics, to the point of actual reversal from socialist self-reliance to a capitalist globalisation. The left is now somewhat orphaned in a unipolar world and labour unions have been put on the defensive in this country.

Finally, the Congress consensus came unstuck as the Nehruvian model of development was overtaken by the economic contradictions of its own creation that it could no longer contain: the conflict between an urban bourgeoisie and an increasingly powerful class of rich peasants and landlords. The massive investment in the urban-industrial infra-structure by the government was in fact an enormous subsidy to private business. The government-sponsored green revolution and other agricultural subsidies were critical factors for the dominant rural castes. But eventually, the unholy alliances between such interests could not cope with the increasing pressures: on the one hand, from an urban middle class demanding a higher standard of consumption from a liberalisation of the economy; and on the other, from the backward castes using electoral politics to demand a larger share of political power.

The repeated splits in the Congress at the national level in 1969 and again in 1978, not to mention numerous regional ones, presaged a corrupt and manipulative politics spearheaded by the self-destructing party itself. This alienated the middle classes and revived Bahujan politics in regional parties and national coalitions. Today judicial activism has become the champion of the middle class concerned with corruption, while Mandalisation has marginalised class-based politics and mobilised caste-based coalitions. In spite of the rapidly increasing economic inequalities, class-consciousness and conflict is muted and blurred, while caste loyalties and communal violence has become more virulent and more widespread.

The collapse of the Nehruvian consensus and the Congress hegemony has opened up great possibilities for protest and resistance movements, of peasant farmers and women, of ecological and civil rights' activists. But we would be naive not to be alert to other subversive possibilities as well. For all through the long history of this subcontinent, the dominant hegemony has not gone unchallenged, though as yet it has not been deposed. In fact, it shows an uncanny capacity with its 'Hindu method of absorption' to contain and marginalise any alien influence or threat to its survival within a 'Hindu rate of growth'. As economic growth gained momentum, Hindu nationalism seized on the continuing crisis to aggressively and unapologetically reassert itself, even to the point of challenging the once sacrosanct status of the father of the nation.

But the nationalist pretensions of Hindutvawadis have not gone unchallenged. Their obfuscating 'sound bites' hide more than they reveal: 'cultural nationalism', they say, but never are clear about whose culture they are talking about savarna and Brahminic, avarna

and Dalit, indigenous and tribal? How are the cultures of religious minorities, like Muslims, Christians, Zoroastrians, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists included here? Are subservient ones? Will linguistic minorities have a space for their language and culture? Pseudo-secularism is a broad brush used to paint all those supporting religious minorities. But are the human rights of minorities to be regarded as 'pseudo' or these as fundamental as these are for all our citizens. True secularism and tolerance is defined as 'justice to all and appeasement of none'. But is the protection of the weak, where it is genuinely needed to be regarded as 'appeasement'? And is positive action for the poor when they have no real equality of opportunity to be rejected as 'injustice' to the privileged? Today these anomalies and ambiguities needed to be confronted and unmasked for what they truly are: another effort of the dominant elite to impose their hegemony on a subservient people.

However, with the dominant 'culture of oppression,' there has also been a corresponding 'culture of protest' that evolved its own methods of resistance. Not that 'the weapons of the weak' were ever completely adequate to the violence of the strong, but they did keep alive a memory and a voice, that had the potential of evolving an alternative ideology and a new identity. For our people could not be completely homogenised, though they were rather effectively 'hierarchized'.

Rajni Kothari spells out the contemporary crisis in terms of an unresolvable dilemma:

'Right now India is in the throes of these opposite tendencies: of an exclusivist and monolithic definition of 'nation' and 'state' and the more inclusive model of a pluralist participant and federal political structure.'

For Kothari, 'neither the Nehruvian secularism nor Gandhian 'Ram-raj' could provide an Indian identity that was liberatory for Dalits and low castes.' On the contrary, the Congress became the party of the dominant rural castes and helped maintain both their cultural and economic dominance.

Thus the failure of the state to create and distribute resources adequately intensified conflicts and divisions that get articulated in religious, ethnic and regional terms. Thus it is in no small measure, the tremendous subaltern mobilisation of the backward and scheduled castes and tribes that has brought down the Nehruvian consensus and the Congress hegemony.

But the collapse has also revived Hindu nationalism in its more blatant and violent expressions. The upper castes and upper classes have seized upon this collapse to re-establish their hegemony

reinterpreting and reabsorbing the cultural revolt of the backward castes and Dalits into an updated Brahminic revivalist Hinduism of the Sangh Parivar, as once the Congress did with the non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra.

Thus in Maharashtra the Shiv-Sena, which began very much as a backward caste, though not a Dalit movement, has already taken over the Hindutva ideology. Though once identified with the displaced sons of the soil, it is now increasingly oriented to the middle class and dominated by the upper castes.

We want to urge that viable and effective subaltern alternatives in identity and ideology can successfully counter this together with other resistance movements. The non-Brahmin movements of Phule and Ambedkar have given us a lead. What is imperative is not to allow the key issue to be marginalised, that is, the one of equity and justice which underlies the quest for identity and dignity of a people, of their collective self-image and self-worth. What we need then is more effective and real equity, that will allow for diverse identities without inequality, whether socio-cultural or political-economic.

This would imply a negation of the idea of a unilinear social evolution within a single national tradition in our civilisation. Popularist nationalism, religiously or otherwise inspired, advocates precisely such a collective destiny for a people. There are dangerous authoritarian and even fascistic connotations in such a perspective, that too easily go unsuspected and un-interrogated.

What we are urging might seem to be a 'utopia', a 'nowhere' society. But we could someday be able collectively to remake our own mythomoteur, our founding myth, into one more adequate to our new worldview. And we know for liberation seekers history can be made to follow myth!

But for this we need first to break out of the prison of our present consciousness and transcend the categories that constrain us there so we can imagine another kind of community and invent a newer set of traditions. We are not claiming that subaltern alternatives have all the answers for such an enterprise, but they do represent a challenging horizon of revolt and revolution, which can fuse with others to construct the identities and the ideologies we need for this brave new world.

Clearly what we need now is a 'paradigm shift' away from the co-option of the 'Congress model'. The Hindutvawadis have their alternative. What have we to propose? Do we have an adequate challenge, or will we fall back on tired old cliches? The Gandhi's 'India of My Dreams' had given way to Nehru's vision of a multi-cultural,

pluri-religious state. But with the horrors of the pogrom in Gujarat receiving such unabashed and cynical support of the political party in power, we seem to be now a trajectory from Gandhi's dream, through Nehru's vision cascading to Modi's nightmare! Unless of course we all collectively reverse this in time. More than half a century after Independence will we go back to the terror of Partition, or will we be a nation in the unmaking or a community of communities in peace and harmony. Historical destiny is finally made by historical choices, and we still have the freedom to choose!

13.
GANDHI: TURNING THE SEARCHLIGHT INWARDS

Economic and Political Weekly, 2016, Vol. 52, No. 34, 20 May, pp.33-35,

Abstract

Book Review, *Mahatma Gandhi: Nonviolent Power in Action*, by Dennis Dalton; New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

Introduction

Our response to Gandhi oscillates between idealising him and pillorying him. In 1931, Harold Laski paid him this tribute: 'No living man has, either by precept or example, influenced so vast a number of people in so direct and profound a manner.' (p. x). Yet Winston Churchill made this assessment of Gandhi in that same year: 'a seditious Middle Temple lawyer now posing as a naked fakir…' (p. 64) Today, Gandhi's ideas are still a critical influence in our world, while even after Britain's 'finest hour' Churchill's imperialism has been buried by history rather hurriedly. For better or worse we ignore Gandhi as our risk.

India today seems adrift. We need to critique and come to terms with Gandhi's relevance in responding to our situation of spiralling violence and unsustainable inequalities on the Subcontinent. His countrymen publicly honour him as 'the father of the nation', while in practice they ignore his legacy, damning it with prejudiced criticism, or worse with hypocritical praise. Yet paradoxically Gandhi's nonviolence seems to be coming back to his country from others who found him to be critically relevant in their national quest: Martin

Luther King, Nelson Mandela, the Dalai Lama, Aung San Suu Kyi and others, while it is relegated to the margins, in the very place where it was first nurtured and fine-tuned into an effective praxis for liberating his people from colonial rule.

Gandhi called his people to be true to the ethical values and commitments premised on their dharma with his dramatic public fasts. And he the challenged British to be true to their professed democratic liberalism with his nonviolent satyagraha (truth-force). He thus created ambiguities among his followers, even for Congress stalwarts like Nehru, who never quite understood him but could not ignore his appeal. Furthermore, he precipitated an acute frustration among his colonial opponents, like Viceroy Irwin at the time of the Salt March, who never quite knew how to confront or contain him effectively, even though they did not underestimate the threat he posed to their Raj. In fact much of the resentment Gandhi generated in his opponents, both among his own people and the colonial rulers was precisely because of this.

Inevitably there are a myriad contradictory opinions on Gandhi and at times it takes an outsider to give us a more balance perspective on a multifaceted and much-contested person. Denis Dalton's critical and appreciative account does this very ably. He traces Gandhi's thinking on nonviolent power through its evolution and situates it for us in its contemporary context: from passive resistance in his early beginnings in South Africa, to a more carefully nuanced active nonviolence, and finally its development into a nonviolent struggle, with his satyagraha for swaraj in India. Thus the exclusiveness of what he called 'passive resistance' in South Africa he now saw as duragraha (brute force), which with its violence was adharmic. This he carefully distinguished satyagrapha and its inclusiveness premised on ahimsa, which was dharmic.

Dalton is emphatic about the praxis of Gandhi being premised on the necessary bond between these three: swaraj, satyagragha, ahimsa. These three key concepts set the context for his understanding of freedom – defined as freedom for not freedom from, and power – defined as nonviolent and tolerant. However, he interpreted these in the light of his own 'experiments with truth', even as he draws on the core of his own tradition to project his understanding of them. Gandhi distanced himself from a prevalent understanding of swaraj as home-rule primarily. This would merely mean the replacement of the white sahibs by brown ones. For him, the enlightened self-restraint and discipline of the self-realised sage defined the truly free man. (p. 3) His earliest articulation of swaraj as self-realisation, of individuals

first and then of society as a whole, would add up to the purna swaraj of the nation. The way to such swaraj had to be satyagragha, which meant voluntary self-sacrifice, not *duragraha* as a violent means to the goal. Again, for Gandhi ahimsa was the highest dharma, hence to be dharmic, ethical truth-force had to be the nonviolent.

Many of Gandhi's ideas and ideals are already presaged in 1909 in his Hind Swaraj, which Dalton accurately calls 'A Proclamation of Ideological Independence'. (p.16) Gandhi did not want a word of his original monograph to be changed. However, though the text is framed in the context of a dialogue between the editor and the reader and intended to be persuasive, it does become controversial and polemic at times. Dalton rightly sees a certain exclusiveness there in Gandhi's 'simplistic categorisation of Indian and Western civilisation respectively as 'moral and 'immoral', 'soul force' and 'brute force' (p. 20). Later, in his more mature praxis, Gandhi 'modified his judgments of modern Western civilisation, parliamentary democracy, and modern technology', (p. 21) though those who have failed to notice this still think unfairly of him as obscurantist.

Gandhi's changing positions on caste are more complicated, but to see him as an inveterate stalwart of varna-ashrama-dharma is more than an oversimplification still held by many Ambedkarites. For Gandhi social reform was essential for swaraj. At first, he denounced untouchability as contradictory to the sanathan dharma, though at this time, 1916- 1921, he still upheld the prohibitions of interdining and intermarriage. (p 49) He rejected 'jati' as divisive but favoured varna-ashrama-dharma as promoting social harmony to avoid the real danger of class war. However, in imagining that the varna system could be non-hierarchical Gandhi proved to be quite unrealistic. This was the sticking point for Ambedkar and his other critics: some thought he had not gone far enough, others felt he had gone too far. Freedom and equality as a sine qua non for purna swaraj still seems to be a receding horizon even though our Constitution has abolished untouchability and guaranteed all Indians fundamental freedoms and basic equalities. We have forgotten Gandhi's Daridranarayan and his last and least India.

Dalton's account is fair and critical but needs to be taken forward. The Dalit litterateur and intellectual from Karnataka, D.R. Nagaraj has made an important contribution on the Gandhi-Ambedkar relationship and their legacies to the Dalit cause: one a socio-religious approach to change values, beliefs, attitudes; the other a socio-legislative one to give Dalits a new identity. Both can be

complementary for one without the other is unlikely to bring sustainable change to the enduring casteism in our society.

The 'Critiques of Gandhi from His Contemporaries' (Ch. 3) help to set the portrait of the man in sharper relief. In his analysis of Rabindranath Tagore's critique of Gandhi, Dalton concludes to more agreement than disagreement in the dialogue they initiated with their letters. Both prioritise personal freedom and are suspicious of power. Tagore's cautions on a chauvinist nationalism that easily turns fascist are well taken by the Mahatma, whose inclusive nationalism was not unacceptable to the poet who privileged internationalism. This was certainly a creative encounter. With M.N. Roy Gandhi was more distant. In his Marxist phase, Roy rejected Gandhi as a reactionary. He disagreed with Lenin who saw at least preparatory revolutionary potential in Gandhi's mass movement. Later as Roy abandoned Marxism for a 'Radical Humanism' he was more positive but the two never did seriously engage.

Much of what is presented in the first three chapters of this book is not new but by tracking the evolution in Gandhi's thinking and situating it in its contemporary scenario, Dalton sets the context for Gandhi's own praxis as it unfolds in the struggle he led from the front. Dalton next illustrates Gandhi's praxis with two case studies, 'The Salt Satyagraha' (Ch. 4) and the 'The Calcutta Fast' (Ch. 5). Both presentations are meticulously detailed and bring alive the historical scene for the reader.

In hindsight, the Dandi Yatra seems like a sudden stroke of political genius. But more than this the build-up to it, the planning and execution and managing its aftermath was a convincing demonstration of the vitality and success that Gandhi's satyagraha could attain at its best, demonstrating the people's nonviolent power against a powerful imperial state.

Gandhi's use of fasting as a means of nonviolent persuasion and appeal was controversial and many of his deepest admirers, like Tagore, were in profound disagreement with him on this, particularly with his fasts unto death. For Gandhi, these were ascetical practices (tapas) that generated spiritual power for his cause. Others saw it as cunning blackmail. But more often than not Gandhi used them effectively to move his quest for purna swaraj forward. However, to use it in the killings fields of the Partition riots in Calcutta seemed to be suicidal. It was a desperate attempt, a last resort in a city where the government had collapsed and the 'Terror' as the disturbances were commonly called had gone from August 1946 to September 1947 with no indication of subsiding. That Gandhi dared such a venture is

testimony on his fearless courage to risk all for a cause when needed. What Gandhi achieved there is something even his admirers seem never to have quite grasped, and his critics never been able to engage with seriously. It left Lord Mountbatten, the viceroy, marvelling at this 'a one man army' that proved to be more effective than his own government or military in bringing about some normality to 'Troubles', as it was called, of a murderous population.

In counter-posing Gandhi to Malcolm X and Martin Luther King (Ch. 6), Dalton points to similarities and differences that help to underscore the relevance of Gandhi beyond India. Malcolm X, like Gandhi, sought courageously to free his people from fear by word and example, but unlike Gandhi, he did not translate this into a mass movement. (p. 173) Perhaps the race situation did not give him time or opportunity to do so. Martin Luther King was admittedly inspired by Gandhi, but he used nonviolent protest as a method, a means for a political goal, not as a theory that defined self-realisation for himself or his people or his country. (p. 180) Perhaps his social context did not encourage him to dream beyond his own borders.

In summing up, Dalton rightly concludes that Gandhi's truest achievement is not the Independence of his country from colonial rule, but how he achieved it, or rather tried. (p. 197) This was not the swaraj Gandhi had struggled for all his life and died for. Yet even in his failure, his betrayal by his own, when he had to walk alone in his darkest hours, he still cast a long shadow across his country. Ultimately, it was his martyrdom that shocked his people out of their murderous madness for a time. But now his orphaned people today seem to have lost the plot he drew up for swaraj, which would be authentic only when it included social and economic reform, the abolition of untouchability and Hindu-Muslim unity. (p. 60)

Dalton ends with an 'Afterword to the 2012 Reissue' (p 201), briefly discusses Gandhi's relevance in our contemporary world of a 'clash of civilisations and terrorism and adds a useful update on the contemporary clash of civilisations and an 'Overview of Gandhian Scholarship'. (p. 212)

We all too easily interrogate Gandhi and end in hypocritical praise or carping criticism. But this allows us to escape the discomfiture of having Gandhi interrogate us, or turning the searchlight inward as he would urge his satyagrahis to do. Perhaps then we will come to the realisation that it was not the father of nation who had failed and orphaned us, so much as we who have failed him, failed to live up to the moral overdraft he took out on us. For more than what he did, it is what he stood for that has enduring significance. Judith Brown's

recent biography, *Gandhi: A Prisoner of Hope*, concludes with an evaluation of Gandhi 'as a man of vision and action, who asked some of the profoundest questions that face humanity as it struggles to live in community.' (p. 196). The challenge to internalise his legacy and bring it to bear on our individual and collective lives is something we need to continually rediscover and engage with, if ever we are to reach the purna swaraj of 'The India of his Dreams'.

14. REINTERPRETATION AND REFORM: GANDHI'S UNFINISHED TASK

Jivan, 28 September 2018,

Abstract

Gandhi radically reinterpreted and reformed our ancient Indian traditions and culture, but the task remains unfinished.

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Gandhi's attempted reform is precisely premised on his radical reinterpretation of it, so that a rejection of one must lead to the rejection of the other, as in fact we see happening today.

Gandhi locates himself as an insider to mainstream Hinduism, the sanathan dharma that he claimed to follow. In fact the radicality of his re-interpretation goes unnoticed precisely because of this. Gandhi does not reject, he simply affirms what he considers to be authentic, and allows the inauthentic to be sloughed off. For Gandhi Hinduism was ultimately reduced to a few fundamental beliefs: the supreme reality of God, the ultimate unity of all life and the value of love (ahimsa) as a means of realising God. His profound redefinition of Hinduism gave it a radically novel orientation. Bhikhu Parekh sums this up thus: 'For him religion culminated but was not exhausted in social service and it had a spiritual meaning and significance only when inspired by the search for moksha. Gandhi's Hinduism had a secularised content but a spiritual form and was at once both secular and non-secular.'

Thus, for example, one of the most remarkable and yet unremarked re-interpretations of Hinduism that Gandhi effected was that of the Gita. Here was a text intended to persuade a reluctant warrior on the legitimacy and even the necessity of joining the battle. Gandhi re-

works its *nish-kama-kar*ma to become the basis of his ahimsa and satyagraha!

Not that Gandhi's interpretation was accepted by all Hindus. Thus V.D. Savarkar's Hindutva is a reinterpretation of Hinduism in an inexorably opposed direction to that of Gandhi's *sanathan dharma*. Savarkar reduces Hinduism to an ideology of cultural nationalism. His appeal is to upper castes, and religious elites to mobilise people on the basis of a homogenous communal identity. This negates the legitimacy of diversity and difference in other communities. Gandhi on the other hand strives for a mass-based mobilisation across caste and religious communities to establish a *purna swaraj* for all especially the least and the last. Thus there can be no reconciliation between Savarkar who wanted to 'hinduise politics' and 'militarise Hinduism', and Gandhi whose declared agenda was to politicise spirituality and to spiritualise politics!

This is why in the end he is vehemently opposed by the traditional Hindu elite, who finally recognised and felt threatened by the challenge he posed. Ashis Nandy's piercing analysis implicates us all. He points out that, Savarkar's faithful disciple, 'Godse not only represented the traditional Indian stratarchy which Gandhi was trying to break' in a sense his 'hand was forced by the real killers of Gandhi: the anxiety-ridden, insecure traditional elite concentrated in the urbanised, educated, partly westernised, tertiary sector whose meaning of life Gandhian politics was taking away.'

But then again precisely because he presents himself as a Hindu in his interpretation of Indian culture, he was seen as too inclusive by traditional Hindus, and at the same time as not ecumenical enough by contemporary non-Hindus. Hence his appeals for Hindu-Muslim unity were rejected, by the Muslims as being too Hindu, and questioned by the Hindus for not being Hindu enough.

Yet for Gandhi, the unity of humankind was premised on the oneness of the cosmos, which was a philosophical principle that was ontologically prior to diversity. This is precisely what an *advaitin* would hold. Hence for him, unity in diversity was the integrating axis not just of Hindu but of Indian culture as well.

Thus the legitimacy of religious diversity was rooted in the fundamental Jaina principle of *anekantavada*, the many-sidedness of truth. Once this was conceded as foundational, then religious tolerance was a necessary consequence. But this was not to be a negative tolerance of distance and coexistence, but rather one of communication and enrichment. Indeed, Gandhi would ground the

dialogue between East and West in their religious traditions, since for him religious rootedness was precisely the basis for mutual learning.

In cultural matters, however, he was an assimilationist, not in the sense that he would want other cultures to be assimilated to his own, but rather want all cultures to be enriched by each other without losing their identity. Gandhi's cultural assimilation, then was opposed to political revivalists and religious nationalists, to Tilak and M.M. Malaviya, as also to Dayanand Saraswati and Savarkar. For Gandhi open and understanding dialogue must precede not follow a free and adaptive assimilation. The basis for such a dialogic encounter would have to be a 'pluralist epistemology'. But already in his Hind Swaraj he was convinced that it would only bear real fruit when it was 'sunk in a religious soil.'

Thus an enriched diversity would then contribute to a more invigorated pluralism and an enhanced unity. This was precisely Gandhi's understanding of Indian culture and civilisation, and he had, indeed, grasped its fundamental strength and the secret of its survival. No one in this century has done more to affirm Indian culture than Gandhi. Yet even as he apparently idealised our ancient traditions, he was radically reinterpreting and reforming it, an unfinished task to which he can still inspire us. That precisely is his relevance for us today.

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LIST WITH ABSTRACTS

1. RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS AND MASS MOVEMENTS: A COMPARISON BETWEEN AMBEDKAR AND GANDHI

Abstract: This paper attempts a comparison between Ambedkar and Gandhi—both of them with strong personal commitments which had crucial social expressions and distinctly religious as well as broadly social dimensions. Its purpose is to raise some soul-searching questions and initiate an honest dialogue in an area that is becoming increasingly strained and conflict-ridden in our society.

2. TOLERANCE AND DIALOGUE AS RESPONSES TO PLURALISM AND ETHNICITY: THE RELEVANCE OF A GANDHIAN DISCOURSE

Abstract: This study attempts to outline an area of concern and is a beginning rather than a conclusive statement. The inspiration for this venture has come from Gandhi, who by acting locally has challenged us to think globally, even when we think differently from him. This is not merely an intellectual 'search', but a spiritual 'quest' as well. The attempt here is to orient and focus our response to the increasing ethnification in our plural society.

3. GANDHI'S HIND SWARAJ: NEED FOR A NEW HERMENEUTIC

Abstract: In our present context of neo-colonialism, post-industrialism and post-modernism, themes of colonial imperialism, industrial capitalism, and rationalist materialism need to be re-appraised with a new hermeneutic. With his critique of modern civilization, Gandhi goes on to make an emphatic affirmation of Indian culture. Here are the major themes for our dialogic encounter: unity and diversity, swaraj, swadeshi, satya and satyagraha with their imperative of ahimsa or non-violence. In rooting such themes in Indian culture, Gandhi is not just re-interpreting and re-appraising our cultural heritage, he is refreshingly relevant to the cascade of contemporary crises, even as he poses a liberating challenge to a deeper self-realisation and the achievement of a more humane and humanising society.

4. GANDHI AND THE MYTH OF PEACE

Abstract: Our understanding of peace necessarily implies the negation of violence, not only unjustified violation, which is

obviously the very contradiction of peace, but also what is sometimes considered as justifiable force. An authentic understanding of peace would be premised not on power over, not on power as domination, but on power to, power as enabling. In this context, the Gandhian discourse and praxis has foundational implication for any understanding pursuit of peace.

5. INTERPRETING GANDHI'S HIND SWARAJ

Abstract: Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* (HS) is surely a foundational text for any understanding of the man and his mission. In dialogue with the text in its context, with the author and among ourselves, we hope to locate the text within its own horizon of meaning and then interrogate it from within our own contemporary understanding.

6. REVISITING GANDHI, RETHINKING 'NAI TALIM': AN APPROACH FOR NON-FORMAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Abstract: The principles of Gandhi's basic education or '*nai talim*': bridging the school with the world of work, imparting an activity orientation to the curriculum, and inculcating a sense of self-reliance. It is well served when the learner has both the freedom and the opportunities to learn in a supervised environment. These are further strengthened when classroom activities become the extension of home experiences.

7. AUTONOMY AS MOKSHA: THE QUEST FOR LIBERATION

Abstract: A review article of *Gandhi: Struggle for Autonomy*, by Ronald J. Terchek: Vistar Publication, New Delhi, 2000, pp. xiv+265

8. FAITH, REASON AND RELIGIOUS TRADITION: CELEBRATING GANDHI'S SYNTHESIS

Abstract: The first part discusses the dilemma between 'faith' and 'reason' in the context of religious tradition and concludes with a dialectical not a contradictory relationship between them. The second part attempts to illustrate this with Gandhi's religious understanding as a radical and relevant interpretation of beyond conventional orthodoxies.

9. GANDHI'S HINDUISM AND SAVARKAR'S HINDUTVA

Abstract: The present national crisis of violently conflicting communal identities represents a choice between the inclusiveness

of Gandhi and the exclusions of Savarkar. This paper argues that the future of our multicultural, pluri-religious people can only be even bloodier with the preclusions of Savarkar's Hindutva. Only Gandhi's sarva-dharma samabhava can possibly be an effective basis for a tolerance on which to premise a just inter-religious peace and harmony.

10. GANDHI'S INTERROGATION

Abstract: Book Review of *The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi* edited by Judith M Brown and Anthony Parel (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press), 2011.

11. CELEBRATING GANDHI'S PRAXIS: A SYNTHESIS OF HIS LIFE AND MESSAGE

Abstract: This presentation focuses on Gandhi's praxis in two problematic domains. The first on faith and reason discusses the dialect between 'faith' and 'reason' in the context of religious tradition. The second part on peace and power, reconceptualises the moral ambiguities involved as the basis of Gandhi political discourse.

12. INDIA IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: GANDHI'S DREAM, NEHRU'S VISION OR MODI'S NIGHTMARE ?

Abstract: Gandhi's 'India of My Dreams' had given way to Nehru's vision of a multi-cultural, pluri-religious state. More than half a century after Independence will we go back to the terror of Partition, or will we be a nation in the unmaking or a community of communities in peace and harmony.

13. GANDHI: TURNING THE SEARCHLIGHT INWARDS

Abstract: Book Review, *Mahatma Gandhi: Nonviolent Power in Action*, by Dennis Dalton; New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

14. REINTERPRETATION AND REFORM: GANDHI'S UNFINISHED TASK

Abstract: Gandhi radically reinterpreted and reformed our ancient Indian traditions and culture, but the task remains unfinished.