



# Contextualising Gandhian Thought

*Essays in honour of and by Ravindra Varma*

• Edited by  
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## **PREFACE**

It is quite befitting that as a part of Silver Jubilee celebrations of the Institute of Gandhian Studies, the Institute is bringing out this volume as tribute to its founder Chairman, Ravindra Varma. In fact, the Institute of Gandhian Studies or Gandhi Vichar Parishad in its present form was established at Wardha mainly through the efforts of Ravindra Varma with the active support and cooperation of his friend from the days of freedom struggle, Ramakrishna Bajaj, the then Chairman of Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation as a commemorative project of Jamnalal Bajaj Centenary Year. The Institute through its 25 years of functioning proved a worthy tribute to Jamnalal Bajaj whom Gandhi called as his fifth son. Ravindra Varma was the prime mover of the Institute for more than a decade and later the responsibility was handed over to Justice Chandrashekhar Dharmadhikari to guide the activities of the Institute. The demise of Ravindra Varma in October 2006 created a big void in the Gandhian academics and activism. On the first anniversary of his demise, Gandhi Vichar Parishad instituted annual Ravindra Varma Memorial Lecture programme as a tribute to the departed soul and to disseminate and contextualise the Gandhian thought in the modern world which he was trying all through his life.

This volume in honour of Ravindra Varma is divided into three parts. In the first part, a brief life sketch of Ravindra Varma is given in order to have bird's eye view of the contributions rendered by him in the dissemination and propagation of Gandhian Studies and also to the public life of the nation.

The second part is a collection of selected Ravindra Varma Memorial Lectures delivered by scholars of repute. The first article analyses the centrality of Gandhian ideas as a paradigm for civilisational encounter. It places Gandhi's *Sarva Dharma Samabhava* or equal respect for all religions as a model for developing a conceptual framework for a creative encounter between civilisations. The second article examines the significance of Gandhi's non-violence in the contemporary world of violence and hatred. The structure, nature and praxis of Gandhi's *Pancha Mahavrat* constitute the theme of the next paper. The concluding article underlines relevance of Gandhian methods in the ongoing non-violent struggles in different parts of the globe.

The third part of the volume includes the selected speeches and writings of Ravindra Varma. The first article in this section deals with common fallacies based on misinterpretations of some of the Gandhian concepts and methods of action. The subsequent articles examine the futile and the suicidal character of violent means and rediscovering the supremacy of the non-violent methods and Gandhi's idea of trusteeship as an answer to the problem of power as well as the means of transforming the very nature of power. The last article underlines the significance and revolutionary character of Gandhi's philosophy of *swadeshi*. These essays offers a unique contextualised study of Gandhian thought to address the challenges of modern world. This volume is definitely a valuable addition to Gandhiana. We are sure that this volume will be of great interest for students and scholars of Gandhian thought and peace studies as well as general readers.

We are grateful to Justice Chandrashekhar Dharmadhikari, Chairman, Institute of Gandhian Studies, Wardha for the guidance and the initiative in the production of

this volume. It was kind on the part of Bharat Mahodaya, Director of the Institute to carefully go through the manuscript and offer valuable suggestions towards its improvement. Our special thanks are also due to Ram Chandra Pradhan, Faculty of the Institute of Gandhian Studies and John S. Moolakkattu of Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam for their useful insights in the editing of the volume. We are also indebted to Manimala, Director of Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, New Delhi for her co-operation and encouragement. We also acknowledge the debt to Arunima Maitra for the support and assistance in the editing of the volume. We are grateful to Shrikant Kulkarni and Manohar Mahajan and other staff of the Institute for their unfailing support.

***Siby K. Joseph***

# **Ravindra Varma: A Brief Life Sketch**

***Siby K. Joseph***

Ravindra Varma was an outstanding scholar and activist who made substantial contributions to the study, propagation and understanding of Gandhian Studies and rendered invaluable service to the nation with total devotion and utmost commitment. It is a difficult task to summarise his public life which spans over six and a half decades.

He was born in a royal family at Mavelikkara in Southern Kerala, on April 18, 1925. He belonged to a most illustrious family which made substantial contribution in the field of literature and arts. His father Dr. Goda Varma was a well known linguist and Sanskrit scholar who played a key role in the evolution of Malayalam language. His maternal grandfather A. R. Raja Raja Varma was a great grammarian, translator and poet popularly known as 'Kerala Panini'.

He was a brilliant and industrious student and had his education at the Maharaja's College of Arts, Trivandrum and later at the Madras Christian College, Madras. At the age of seventeen, he left his college studies to take part in the Quit India movement launched by Gandhi in 1942. He was soon arrested and imprisoned. Afterwards he fully devoted his life for the cause of India's freedom and plunged into the vortex of the freedom struggle.

He played a key role in organising the students and youth of this country under student and youth wings of the Indian National Congress. It was under his dynamic leadership, the Indian students' politics during the struggle for independence was moulded. He served as the President of the All India Students' Congress for three years (1946-49). It was in recognition of his dynamism and organising ability that he

was elected to the Executive Committee of the International Students' Service - World University Service. (1945-46).

He was called upon to organise the Indian Youth Congress. He was national Secretary of the Indian Youth Congress (1949-51) and President, All India Youth Congress (1957). He also served as Secretary of the Indian Committee of the World Assembly of Youth (W A Y) for two terms. He was elected International President of WAY in 1958 in which capacity he served the cause of youth for over four years till 1962. As President of the WAY he travelled extensively in Asia, Europe, Africa, Latin America and North America and contributed substantially in bringing the youths of different parts of the world together. Ravindra Varma succeeded in imparting to the members of the WAY the ideals of democracy, freedom, justice and peace, and a sensitivity to the ugly nature of colonialism, which contravened these ideals. He was one of the founder trustees of the Indian Youth Centres in 1961 which took the initiative for the establishment of Vishwa Yuvak Kendra (International Youth Centre) in New Delhi in the late sixties. He guided the activities of the centre as the Chairman from 1996 till his death as a symbol of his commitment to youth work.

Ravindra Varma served as a member of the All India Congress Committee (AICC) from 1958-77 and was the General Secretary of the AICC (O) during 1971-74. He entered electoral politics in 1962 and was elected to the third Lok Sabha (1962-67) from Thiruvalla in Kerala. He was also member of the sixth Lok Sabha (1977-79) from Ranchi and seventh Lok Sabha (1979-84) from Mumbai North. During these terms as Member of Parliament he was member of various important consultative Committees for Ministries of External Affairs, Defence and Finance, besides being member of Privileges Committee and Rules Committee. He was also member of Government of India's delegations to a number of

Conferences including the UN. He was leader of the Parliamentary Delegation to People's Republic of North Korea and represented the Government of India in the 61st, 62<sup>nd</sup> and 63<sup>rd</sup> Sessions of the International Labour Conferences. He had the honour of presiding over the 63<sup>rd</sup> Session of ILO in Geneva in 1979.

Ravindra Varma played a leading role in the Lok Sangharsh Movement during the emergency (1975-77) and directed the underground movement against the emergency by travelling all over India and organising underground cells of resistance. He was arrested in Bombay in February 1976 and was detained in Thana jail until his release on February 24, 1977. He served as Union Cabinet Minister for Labour and Parliamentary Affairs from March 1977 to August 1979. He was also Chairman of the Second National Commission on Labour (1999-2002) constituted by the Government of India, New Delhi.

His association with the Gandhian Constructive Movement dates back to the days of Mahatma Gandhi himself. He was associated with the All India Spinners' Association and All India Village Industries' Association. After the assassination of Gandhi, some of his close associates felt the need for an institution to undertake the scientific study and analysis of Gandhian thought and methods for the benefit of the younger generation. That resulted in founding of Gandhi Vichar Parishad at Wardha in the early 1950s. Kaka Saheb Kalelkar was its Chairman and Shankar Rao Deo and Ravindra Varma were Secretaries. Later, in 1987, it was mainly through the effort of Ravindra Varma that the Institute of Gandhian Studies or Gandhi Vichar Parishad was established at Wardha. It was mainly due to the work and vision of Ravindra Varma that the Institute of Gandhian Studies achieved its present pre-eminence both nationally and internationally. He served as the Chairman of the Institute from its inception till May 2000.

Even after relinquishing the post of Chairman, he continued his close association with the Institute until his death. He was the Chairman of the Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, since the death of its founder-Chairman R. R. Diwakar in 1990. He guided the activities of the Foundation till his last breath. He also served as the Chancellor of the Gujarat Vidyapith, a University founded by Gandhi himself in the wake of Non co-operation Movement in 1920, from July 2003 till his death.

Ravindra Varma was instrumental in organising innumerable Gandhian study camps all over the country ever since he joined the national movement, targeting particularly the students and the youth, and delivered countless lectures on Gandhian themes all over the country and abroad. He was speaker of great originality and erudition. His writing and editing skills were outstanding. He drafted many important resolutions and various committee reports. He was editorial advisor to well known publication houses like Orient Longman and senior editor of Gandhi Marg, the quarterly journal of Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi. He authored a number of papers, tracts and books on various aspects of Gandhi's philosophy and methods. His important writings on Gandhi include *Gandhi: A Biography for Children and Beginners*, *Gandhi in Anecdotes*, *Spiritual Basis of Satyagraha* and *the Spiritual Perceptions of Mahatma Gandhi*. However, his works like Central philosophy of Gandhi, Gandhi and Mahayana Buddhism and others still remain unpublished.

He was an extraordinary altruistic personality and an ardent practitioner of Buddhism. He had great love and affection for all who worked with him in various organisations and who came in contact with him irrespective of their status. He passed away on October 9, 2006, following a cardiac arrest creating a large vacuum which cannot be easily bridged. He continues to remain as a source of inspiration for many who were associated with him in his eventful life.



## **Gandhi and the Encounter of Civilisations**

***M.P. Mathai***

I deem it an honour and a privilege to be called upon to deliver the first Ravindra Varma Memorial Lecture being organised by the Institute of Gandhian Studies/ Gandhi Vichar Parishad, Wardha and thank the organisers for giving me this opportunity. Varmaji, as Ravindra Varma was endearingly addressed by his friends, colleagues and students, was a typical creation of the Gandhian era. A versatile personality, Varmaji combined in him the finest qualities of both head and heart. A true patriot, but never a cultural chauvinist, he dedicated his life for the service of his country and there through of humanity. He suffered imprisonment not only fighting the British government during India's struggle for freedom, but also fighting the Indian rulers when they disclosed dictatorial tendencies and attempted to turn India into a totalitarian state in the 1970s. Varmaji will be remembered for ever for his outstanding contribution to the propagation of Gandhian ideals in the post Gandhian era, not only in India but across the world. His discourses and writings on Gandhian philosophy carried the stamp of his rare genius and have enriched Gandhian scholarship in an unparalleled manner.

I had the privilege of having known Varmaji intimately and working with him for nearly two decades in various Gandhian organisations, particularly in the Gandhi Peace Foundation. I could associate with him in the academic activities of the Institute of Gandhian Studies (IGS) right from

its inception and when he invited me to be a Visiting Professor here, I accepted it gladly. I would also recall here that along with two other friends I was able to edit and publish a commendable Festschrift Volume to commemorate the seventy fifth birth anniversary of Varmaji. I would conclude this personal note by reminding the management of the Institute that Varmaji, as its founder, had a great dream for the IGS. He wanted to develop it into an International Centre for Study and Training in Gandhian Nonviolence. The best tribute that the IGS can pay him, therefore, would be to try to translate that dream of Varmaji into reality.

Now, let me move on to the topic of today's lecture: Gandhi and the Encounter of Civilisations.

### **Background**

Though it might sound trite and banal, I may be permitted to begin by saying that we are living in a fast globalising world. The world, they say, is fast shrinking in size, probably becoming a sort of global village. It is indisputable that the world is getting reshaped right in front of our eyes and the speed of the process is really mind-boggling. There are extensive discussions on the New World Order, though there is little consensus on what it really is. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the communist experiment and the consequent ending of the Cold War international politics entered a new phase. The bi-polar world got turned into a uni-polar one and the U.S.A., became the unquestioned leader of the new configuration. The new initiative known as globalisation was launched which attempts to convert the entire world into an integrated economic market, forcing nation states to liberalise their laws to allow the laws of the market to operate in an atmosphere of unrestricted freedom. It is even theorized that the laws of the market are sovereign and they should be allowed to regulate not only the economic operations

of the market but also the whole gamut of human transactions. In the new arena of the global market, among other things, civilisations too are encountering one another. This, of course, is natural as the peoples of the world are coming together as never before. However, these encounters would become problematic depending on their nature. Civilisational encounters can be either positive or negative in the sense that it can be dialogical and peaceful or it can be confrontationist and violent. Human beings are the architects of civilisations and therefore, they can determine the nature and course of these encounters. As is well known, various theories and approaches have been formulated and developed on how civilisations are going to encounter one another in the emerging scenario of the contemporary world.

### **The End of History Hypothesis**

At this juncture it is necessary to recall the well-known thesis of the end of history introduced by Francis Fukuyama in 1992.<sup>1</sup> He argued that socialism, which offered the main intellectual alternative to democracy, has become discredited and failed. Therefore, democracies in future are going to be market-driven and capitalist. He argued that this process was going to be pretty smooth as there were no contenders in the field to challenge the march of capitalism; it was going to be a sort of *aswamedha*, to use a familiar Indian expression.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Clash of Civilisations Hypothesis**

Fukuyama's thesis, naturally, invited a wide range of responses. Among them the most notable and controversial was that from the Harvard political scientist Samuel P. Huntington who came out with his hypothesis of "the clash of civilisations" in order to explain the emerging human condition. Originally formulated in 1992<sup>3</sup> as a reaction to Fukuyama's thesis, the clash of civilisations hypothesis argued that in the post colonial world peoples' cultural and religious identities will be the

primary source of conflicts. The battle lines to be drawn will be civilisational, not ideological. “The fundamental source of conflict in this world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and dominating source of conflict will be *cultural*” (emphasis added), wrote Huntington. “The clash of civilisations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilisations will be the battle lines of the future.” He went a step further and predicted that there was going to be increasing and intense conflicts between the Western and Sinic-Islamic civilisations, particularly Islamic civilisations.<sup>4</sup> Huntington, through this analysis, tried to provide a theoretical justification for the American attempt for economic and military supremacy, arguing that it was necessary for the West and its leader the US to counter perceived threats from other civilisations, particularly the Islamic civilisation which was based on a system of values totally unacceptable to the West. No wonder, the arms buildup and the war on terrorism and consequent atrocities unleashed on innocent civilians, in utter disregard of the UN conventions, stand justified in the eyes of the West as legitimate steps to contain the perceived Islamic threat.

Huntington’s clash theory brought several important issues concerning the nature and course of the encounter between civilisations to light. It is obvious that no civilisation can exist in isolation from other civilisations. In fact, human civilisation evolved to its present level of maturity and complexity through a continuous process of interactions. So we can be wary of, but not beware of, civilisational encounters. In fact, in the dialectics of self comprehension and also of cultural self perception such encounters play a crucial role. It is obvious that one cannot comprehend oneself without ‘the other’.<sup>5</sup> There is no denying the fact that those encounters were not always smooth or peaceful. Sometimes they were conflictual in a negative, violent sense. But a critical look at

civilisational encounters would reveal that what really added to the development of human individuals as persons and as members of collectivities and directed the course of their evolution as a species towards the realisation of cultural goals were the creative and peaceful encounters of civilisations through which they learned from one another and enriched each tradition. It must be in the light of this indisputable historical experience that we explore and examine the underlying causes of the predicted violent clash between civilisations.

It could be seen that every great civilisation had developed its own paradigm i.e., philosophy and method of approach to civilisational encounters.

### **The Western Paradigm – Eurocentrism: Dominate, Devour and Destroy**

The Western paradigm was, and unfortunately even today *is*, that of *Eurocentrism*. The West (western civilisation) understood itself to be the most evolved civilisation of the world and looked upon the rest i.e., non-western peoples as not only not civilized but as mere or near savages. So, during the first colonial era following European enlightenment, the West justified their colonial project by using the rhetoric of ‘civilising’. The most illustrative example is what the British claimed to do in India (and, of course, in all their colonies elsewhere). They tried to propagate the view that India was not civilised and what Britain was trying to do was to civilise it. One may recall two such racist tracts, the English drama critic William Archer’s *Is India Civilised ?* and the American author Katherine Mayo’s *Mother India* which would attest to this.<sup>6</sup>

It took serious and concerted scholarly effort spreading over a really long span of time to demolish this myth. Gandhi was certainly one of the first and foremost to expose and fight this hideous civilizing project of the West and in his first book

itself – *Hind Swaraj* or *Indian Home Rule* - he offered a serious and insightful civilisational critique of the Western paradigm. He exhorted Indians to be rooted in their own culture and resist the civilizing project of European cultural chauvinists.

However, for the non-western world, the exorcism is not yet totally accomplished; the lie continues to be propagated that the West should continue to *civilise* (which in contemporary political discourse means to westernise) the rest, taking into active consideration their prevailing conditions. As stated by Hans Kochler “Non-Western civilisations were discredited as “irrational” in distinction from the “enlightened” European civilisation that supposedly had undergone a historical process of the “awakening of the critical mind” that was said to be missing in other civilisations. This subjectivist-colonialist approach to inter-civilisational encounters suited Western imperial interests at the time in the same way as it suits the ideological crusaders of Western “critical rationalism” – or “economic liberalism” – of our time. It has been reflected e.g. in European *Orientalism* as described by Edward Said, which combines both Western *naïveté* (in the sense of ignorance of other cultures) and cultural arrogance.<sup>7</sup> Huntington’s thesis is an open call to the West to proceed with this missionary project. He warns the West that as far as their values and interests are concerned there is an imminent threat in what he terms as the ‘Confucian-Islamic Connection’ wherein he foresees an emerging alliance between countries embedded in Confucian civilisation—China, Vietnam, the Koreas, Singapore and Taiwan – and the Islamic countries which include countries of Central Asia, North Africa, Southwest Asia, Afghanistan, Albania, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Pakistan etc.

There have been a wide range of critiques to this Huntington prognosis. Amartya Sen, for example, disagreed

with Huntington's 'solitarist approach to civilisations and his concept of an inevitable clash along civilisational lines' by arguing that people see their identities not in terms of singular civilisational affiliation but multiple affiliations in which civilisation is only one factor. "In our normal lives we see ourselves as members of a variety of groups", wrote Sen.<sup>8</sup> Paul Berman in his book *Terror and Liberalism*<sup>9</sup> questions Huntington's civilisational clash hypothesis. Berman is of the view that in today's world there are no monolithic civilisations (in other words there are no Western or Islamic civilisations *per se*) and hence distinct cultural boundaries, as conceptualized by Huntington, do not really exist. In fact, Huntington failed to take note of the fact that it is possible to be *modern* without getting *westernised*. Edward Said, the well-known literary theorist and public intellectual responded to Huntington's thesis through his essay *The Clash of Ignorance*<sup>10</sup>. According to Said the arguments of Huntington that each civilisation is 'fixed', self enclosed and has a special psychology and destiny betray his ignorance of the true dynamics of civilisations. Said points out that Huntington's attempt is an example of an 'imagined geography' where civilisations are portrayed within the clash framework as perpetual rivals in order to legitimize a certain politics.

In February, 2002, a self-styled non-partisan think tank, under the auspices of the Institute for American Values, issued an open letter entitled "What We're Fighting for: A Letter from America". Signed by sixty American intellectuals like Patrick Moynihan, Francis Fukuyama, Samuel Huntington, Robert D. Putman, Amitai Ezioni et.al., the letter tried to offer the American justification for launching the fight against what they called "the terror of radical Islamicism." In the Preamble of the letter they affirm five fundamental truths that 'pertain to all people without distinction', viz,

1. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.
  2. The basic subject of society is the human person, and the legitimate role of government is to protect and help to foster the conditions for human flourishing.
  3. Human beings naturally desire to seek the truth about life's purpose and ultimate ends.
  4. Freedom of conscience and religious freedom are inviolable rights of the human person.
  5. Killing in the name of God is contrary to faith in God and is the greatest betrayal of the universality of religious faith.
- and claim that they fight to defend themselves and to defend these universal principles. The signatories further affirm that “we are not your enemies but friends....In hope, we wish to join you and all people of good will to build a just and lasting peace.”<sup>11</sup>

Islamic responses to Huntington's clash theory and the above letter have been both extensive and devastating. One can summarise them as follows: The West is cultivating enemy stereotypes on the basis of alleged civilisational difference for the sake of advancing their (vested) economic and political interests which they euphemistically term as “New World Order”. The typical case today is the stereotyping of Islam as ‘the most dreaded’ threat to Western civilisation and its new mission of democratizing the rest of the world. As pointed out by several Islamic scholars ‘xenophobic tendencies in Europe and in the United States are being amalgamated with ideological perceptions of the Western heritage, revealing a kind of cultural and political paranoia in regard to Islam’. In short, Huntington is trying to provide a theoretical legitimization of American-led Western aggression against the world's Islamic cultures and also against China.

Responding to the American letter “What We’re Fighting For” one hundred and fifty Saudi intellectuals issued a



statement titled “How can we co-exist?”. Tagging the American appeal as ‘Yankee Fatwa’, the Saudi statement rejected the attempt to universalise Western values, particularly secularism in the sense of the separation of religion and the state. Under a sub title ‘Islam and Secularism’ it argues:

The signatories to the American paper focused on the necessity of the separation of church and state, and they considered this to be a universal value that all the nations of the Earth should adopt. We Muslims approach the problem of the relationship between religion and the state differently. Our understanding is to protect the will of the majority and their rights while also protecting the rights of the minority. Islam is a comprehensive religion that has specific laws addressing all aspects of life. It is difficult for a nation to be respected and taken seriously by its people in an Islamic environment without adopting the laws of that religion in general. State adoption of the religion does not mean an infringement on the particular needs of the minorities who live within it or their being forced to abandon their religion and embrace Islam. *The idea that there is no compulsion in religion is firmly planted in the Muslim mindset and is clearly stated in the Qur'ân.* (emphasis added) The separation of church and state that the American thinkers are calling to in their letter shows a lack of understanding of how religion acts as a formative basis for culture in Islamic societies. We see secularism as inapplicable to Muslim society, because it denies the members of that society the right to apply the general laws that shape their lives and it violates their will on the pretext of protecting minorities. It does not stand to reason that protecting the rights of the minority should be accomplished by violating the rights of the majority. We see that the real concern of a religious minority is the protection of its rights and not the

violation of the rights of the majority, since infringing upon the rights of the majority is not conducive to social stability and peace, whereas the rights of the minority in Muslim society are protected.

Even at the risk of being charged with quoting at length I am citing three more paragraphs which offer explanations relating to two basic Islamic positions:

We believe that Islam is the truth, though it is not possible for the entire world to be Muslim. It is neither possible for us to force others to think the way we do, nor would Islamic Law allow us to do so if we were able to. This is a personal choice in Islamic Law. The thing that we have to do is explain the message of Islam, which is a guidance and a mercy to all humanity. However, we are not heedless of the necessities brought about by the present state of humanity and of the need to remove the obstacles that prevent people from properly understanding the message of Islam so they can, if they choose, adopt it of their own free will.

The Muslims have the right to adhere to their religion, its values, and its teachings. This is an option that it will be difficult to try and withhold from them. Nevertheless, what we present is a moderate and balanced understanding and go forward to propagate it, and the West shall see that it is very different than the notions that they have about Islam. This is if the West is truly willing to afford us, our religion, and our abilities proper recognition, or at least willing to study the facts of our religion and our values in a rational and objective manner.

Islam is not an enemy of civilization, but it rejects utilizing the notion of civilization for negative ends. Nor is Islam an enemy of human rights and freedoms, but it rejects transforming freedoms and rights into a tool for conflict just as it rejects relying upon a limited cultural vision as if it is a universal law that must be generally applied to all, forcibly if need be. Continuing to insist upon this vision, even if it is depicted as religiously tolerant is no less extreme than what goes on in those radical religious groups.<sup>12</sup>

This response really elevated the debate to a higher level and was followed by a number of serious reflections and rejoinders.<sup>13</sup> Of course, Islamic response was not limited to the intellectual plane only; unfortunately it spilled over to the verbal level vituperation, riposte and violent retaliation manifested as terrorism. It has been propagated that what the West characterised as Islamic terrorism vindicated Huntington's clash theory and consequently the West launched their war on terrorism allegedly to protect non-Islamic civilisations from the perceived threat of Islamic terrorism. The world has, thus, been entangled in a quagmire of violence from which there appears to be no escape. This provides a very clear indication of where the chauvinistic - domination mode of civilisational encounter would lead the world to.

The United Nations Organisation also took serious cognizance of the emerging situation of violent clash between the West and the Islamic world. In a meaningful response to the situation the UN launched an initiative called Dialogue Among Civilisations to promote better understanding between the different civilisations of the world. The year 2001 was declared as the Year of Dialogue Among Civilisations (DAC). Another initiative called Alliance Among Civilisations was proposed in the 59<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the UN in 2005 "intended to

galvanise collective action across diverse societies in order to combat extremism, to overcome cultural and social barriers between mainly the Western and predominantly Muslim worlds, and to reduce the tensions and polarization between societies which differ in religious and cultural values”.<sup>14</sup> Subsequently the International Progress Organisation (I.P.O.) based in Innsbruck, Austria, conducted several consultations on inter-civilisational dialogue and published scholarly papers on the theme for promoting inter-civilisational understanding.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Indian Paradigm – Respectful Acceptance and Assimilation**

As is well-known, India is the seat of a hoary civilisation which has consistently attracted universal attention over the centuries. The flow of cultural and spiritual pilgrims to India has never ceased. India has, thus, been the meeting ground of various cultures and civilisations. So it was imperative for India to develop a paradigm for the encounter of civilisations. There is evidence to believe that sages and seers of ancient India reflected over the question deeply and evolved a paradigm. It has been succinctly stated in the Rig Veda (which is considered to be the most ancient text of Indian culture) as follows: *ano bhadra krtavo yantua vishwataha*, “let noble thoughts come to us from all sides”. As the above the Rig Vedic line declares India was always ready to listen, to learn and to assimilate into its collective psyche the best from other cultures. It is also clear from its long and unbroken cultural history that India was more than tolerant to other cultures; it was respectful of what was new and valuable in them and enriched itself by assimilating them. There is a deeper philosophic reason underlying this eclecticism. The most basic premise of the Indian approach to truth and reality is that though truth is one and indivisible there are different paths and approaches to it; *ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti* - truth is one

but the wise talk about it differently - says the Upanishad. In Jainism the same idea is formulated as *anekantavada*, the many sidedness of truth which naturally justifies different approaches to it. This being so, India did not (and could not) take a fundamentalist position regarding truth, religion or culture. That is precisely why Indian culture is eclectic and non-fundamentalist; it never tried to be universalistic. It always respected pluralism as a given aspect of reality, willed by the Sovereign Law or God. The vital significance of the respecting and accepting this diversity of approach to reality has been further underlined in the Upanishads where it is stated: *mama satyam, mamapi satyam, mameva satyam yuddham*, which may be translated as 'my truth, my truth also, but my truth only is war'. If you make an absolutist claim with respect to your truth, religion or culture and try to universalise it you are sure to invite war is what the Upanishad is warning us against.

It is in the context of the clash theory of Huntington and against the background of the Western and Indian paradigms of civilisational encounter that we have to examine Gandhi's approach to the same question.

### **Gandhi as a Paradigm for Civilisational Encounter**

Gandhi had the opportunity to live in three different continents – Asia, Europe and Africa – and had, perforce, to encounter different cultures and religions during his eventful public life. How did they impact him and to what extent? While probing this question it is important to note, right at the beginning, that Gandhi had made his basic position unequivocally clear thus: "I do not want my house to be walled on all sides and windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. I refuse to live in other peoples' houses as an interloper, beggar or slave."<sup>16</sup> It has been rightly pointed out that Gandhi is a typical product of Indian

culture. Lin Yutang's assertion that such a phenomenon as Mahatma Gandhi could be possible only in a country like India and not possible in the Western world affirms the rootedness of Gandhi in the Indian cultural tradition. Gandhi himself has personally acknowledged his indebtedness to Indian culture and Hindu tradition. What is unique about Gandhi's approach to culture and tradition is that he never accepted anything as such. He was very discriminating and measured everything on his own yardstick and accepted only such ideas that measured up to his specifications. Also it could be seen that though Gandhi was proud of his religion and culture there was no trace of parochialism or chauvinism in his approach. He was very open to what he considered to be positive in Western culture. He has recorded his deep indebtedness to Western seers and thinkers like Leo Tolstoy, John Ruskin and Henry David Thoreau. He wrote in his Autobiography: "Three moderns have left a deep impress on my life, and captivated me, Raychandbhai by his living conduct, Tolstoy by his book *Kingdom of Heaven Is Within You*, and Ruskin by his *Unto This Last*." He has also acknowledged his deep indebtedness to other religions and their scriptures, particularly the New Testament of the *Bible* and Jesus, the Buddha and Prophet Mohammed. Though the *Gita* was the ultimate moral dictionary for Gandhi, he put Jesus' Sermon on the Mount on an equal pedestal with the *Gita*. In short, in the intellectual and moral evolution of Gandhi the great traditions of the East and the West played their due roles. It may be said that in Gandhi we can identify a synthesis of the best from both the East and the West. Commenting on the impact of the West on Gandhi and Lenin Arnold Toynbee in his monumental work *A Study of History* wrote: "A Gandhi and a Lenin find it impossible to take spiritual action without being moved by the spirit of Western civilisation."<sup>17</sup> Such testimonies attest to the openness of Gandhi to the positive aspects of civilisations, irrespective of whether they were Eastern or

Western and his total lack of parochialism.

Let us come to certain specifics. The most serious criticism raised against Indian culture was that it was too otherworldly and less life-affirming. This was probably because in the Hindu view of life *moksha* or salvation in the sense of complete liberation from the cycle of birth and death was posited as the ultimate goal of life and therefore, the material dimension of existence or what is generally termed as this worldliness was, by and large, ignored. This also led to a kind of fatalism resulting in social stagnation and a number of ensuing social evils. As a proclaimed *Sanatani* Hindu Gandhi shared the Hindu view that *moksha* is the ultimate goal of life. But he did not accept the life-negating fatalism associated with it. On the contrary Gandhi's approach to life was one of life-affirmation and world-affirmation. This, in fact, was one of the many ideas that he accepted from Western culture. Though Hindu philosophy affirmed *advaita* or monism according to which all creations are the manifestation of the Ultimate Reality i.e., God, Hindu society was hierarchically organized and there were social discrimination and segregation. Unlike most Hindus Gandhi believed in social equality and was a life-long crusader for achieving equality at all levels. Gandhi himself has admitted his indebtedness to Western thinkers like John Ruskin in developing his social philosophy. The organisation of Gandhi's *ashrams* is another point at hand.

In the Indian tradition *ashrams* were havens of people who retire from active social life with the sole objective of seeking salvation or *moksha*. For Gandhi, on the contrary, *ashrams* were not spiritual retreats but centres of action where people who shared the same ideals lived worked together to transform personal as well as collective lives. They were also training centres where volunteers were trained for working for nonviolent social change. For developing this new model of the

*ashram* as a socio-political and moral laboratory Gandhi borrowed and incorporated ideas from the Christian monastic tradition. He has also recorded his indebtedness to the Trappist Monastery, he visited in South Africa.

In Indian social practice intellectual and spiritual pursuits were elevated to a very high pedestal so much so that any manual activity came to be looked down upon as menial that deserved to be shunned. Eventually those who were engaging in manual labour were generally segregated and those who did what was considered to be the most menial of physical labour, namely scavenging, came to be treated as untouchables. Gandhi gave a central place to manual labour in his own personal life and the life of *Ashram*. Bread labour was included as one of the Eleven Vows to be followed in the *Ashram*. He incorporated physical labour as an essential component in his scheme of education also. Gandhi has acknowledged his indebtedness to Tolstoy and through him to Bondareff for the importance he gave to manual labour. This was, of course, developed further by Gandhi, in keeping with his total philosophy of life, but the idea that all labour has the same value, he borrowed from John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*.

Thus, by synthesising the best from the Eastern and the Western traditions Gandhi emerged as a paradigmatic person in encountering cultures and civilisations other than one's own. It may also be said that with his life Gandhi disproved to the hilt the entrenched notion that "East is East and West is West and the twain shall never meet." The twain did meet in him, but in a unique but exemplary manner.

### ***Sarva Dharma Samabhava* as a Paradigm for Civilisational Encounter**

In this context it is relevant to examine Gandhi's concept of *Sarva Dharma Samabhav* or equality of religions also in order to show how it would serve as a model for



developing a conceptual frame work for a creative encounter between civilisations. Religion being one of the most fundamental defining features of civilisations and as the clash theory argues that religiously defined civilisational differences are going to determine the emerging conflict between civilisations, a positive/creative model for inter-religious relations as enunciated by Gandhi will certainly exemplify how civilisations could encounter in a healthy manner.

It is well known that Gandhi considered himself to be a religious person. He grew up in a atmosphere of inter- religious dialogue and encounter, which not only kindled his intellectual and spiritual curiosity but inculcated in him a deep sense of toleration and respect for all religions. Later in life he made religion the main subject of his study. He studied reverentially the scriptures of the major religions of the world- Christianity, Islam, Jainism, Buddhism and the Parsi faith along with those of his own religion, Hinduism. It must be mentioned here that Gandhi's study of world religions was not academic but existential; his objective was not gaining an intellectual understanding of the principles of those religions; what he tried to do was to assimilate their moral and spiritual principles and synthesise them in to his own religiosity.

After a reverential study of the major world religions Gandhi came to the conclusion that all religions were fundamentally equal. He understood that all religions arose as answers to the fundamental and perennial human quest for the meaning and purpose of existence. For Gandhi, as religions sought the same Truth, there was truth in all of them. But as religions came down to us through the instrumentality of human beings, in spite of the fact that they were God-given, they shared the inevitable imperfections that go with the human instrument. So, all religions have some error in them, argued Gandhi. As all religions were true yet imperfect, the question of

comparative merit or superiority did not arise. All religions were equal and therefore, there was no need or justification for leaving one's religion and getting converted to another. He rejected the claim of any religion to be superior to the others and also the practice of proselytisation as totally unjustified and unwarranted.

The question naturally comes up: If God is one, and belief in one God is the corner-stone of all religions why are there many religions instead of one religion- the Religion that Gandhi claimed to be his? Gandhi answered this question thus: "belief in one God is the corner-stone of all religions. But I do not foresee a time when there would be only one religion on earth in practice. In theory, since there is one God, there can be only one religion. But in practice, no two persons I have known have had the same and identical conception of God. Therefore, there will, perhaps, always be different religions answering to different temperaments and climatic conditions."<sup>18</sup> People in various parts of the world conceived and organised their own religions because they were necessary for the people to whom they were revealed. But Gandhi proceeded to add that he could foresee a time when "people belonging to different faiths will have the same regard for other faiths that they have for their own. I think that we have to find unity in diversity..... We are all children of one and the same God and therefore, absolutely equal."<sup>19</sup>

As all religions owe their original inspiration to one and the same God, all religions were fundamentally equal, according to Gandhi. He, therefore, believed in the essential truths of all religions of the world and insisted that we respect others religions as we respect our own. He also pointed out that "if we are to respect others' religions as we would have them to respect our own, a friendly study of the world's religions is a

sacred duty”.<sup>20</sup> So Gandhi called upon every one of us to do a reverential and sympathetic study of the scriptures of other religions. He said that it was the duty of every cultured man and woman to do so. Such a study, he believed, would certainly create an atmosphere of mutual understanding, sympathy and respect.

In this context Gandhi introduced another significant idea concerning inter religious encounter. We know and admit that there are certain ideas and practices in all religions that are not universally acceptable. Some of them are found to be even repugnant to human reason and morality. Gandhi’s idea relates to the right of a person to point out and criticize such defects. Gandhi drew a fine but crucial distinction between one’s right to criticise one’s own religion and other religions. While it was the right and perhaps even the duty of a person to point out the defects in one’s own religion with a view to purify it and improve it, his duty in terms of other religions must be of unreserved reverence. The responsibility of pointing out and correcting the defects in other religions must be left to the followers of those religions. One must try to set one’s own house in order rather than attempting to set the others’ right. Gandhi wrote: “But it is no business of mine to criticize the scripture of other faiths or point out their defects. It is and should be, however, my privilege to proclaim and practice the truths that may be in them. I may not, therefore, criticise or condemn the things in the Koran or the life of the Prophet that I cannot understand.....”<sup>21</sup> What Gandhi suggests is to do a reverential study of the scriptures of other faiths with a view to imbibing what is good in them so that we may better ourselves as a true believer of our own faith and thus make it better and nobler.

*Sarva Dharma Samabhava* or equality of religions was not merely a theoretical proposition for Gandhi. For him it was

a vow, an observance and an act of faith. He practised it assiduously in his life and thus obliterated the demarcating line between religions. Gandhi showed us how to live a creative religious life which, in fact, was a translation of the spirit of *Sarva Dharma Samabava* or equality of religions into demonstrable practice. The significance of this way of living one's faith in the multi-religious context of the contemporary world cannot be overemphasized.

It would be profitable to quote Gandhi again: "The need of the moment is not one religion but mutual respect and tolerance of the devotees of different religions. We want to reach not the dead level but unity in diversity. Any attempt to root out traditions, effects of heredity, climate and other surroundings is not only bound to fail but is a sacrilege. The soul of religion is one but it is encased in a multitude of forms. The latter will persist to the end of time. Wise men will ignore the outward crust and see the same soul living under a variety of crusts".<sup>22</sup>

What Gandhi proposed for religions is equally relevant for civilisations as well. And that is why I argue that the concept of *Sarva Dharma Samabhava* or equality of and equal respect for religions will serve as a paradigm for civilisational encounter also. If we want to overcome this artificially created distrust and rupture we must learn to respect and accept cultural diversity. Pluralism is to be accepted as a natural blessing which renders beauty and meaning to existence. Any attempt to hegemonise and create artificial uniformity is to be viewed as violative of the law of nature and therefore should be resisted for maintaining the equilibrium of modern multicultural societies and for ensuring human survival.

## **Notes and References**

- <sup>1</sup> . Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992).
- <sup>2</sup> . *Ashvamedha* (Sanskrit: अश्वमेध *aśvamedhá*; "horse sacrifice") was one of the most important royal rituals of Vedic religion, described in detail in the Yajurveda. The usual reason to perform *Ashvamedha*, the horse sacrifice, is to establish a king as the overlord of the world. A flawless horse is sanctified as the sacrificial horse. It is then set loose, with the armies of the king following it. Whenever this procession enters the realm of another king, that ruler either has to fight the army or has to agree to pay tribute. Once all the kingdoms have been conquered, the horse is brought back to the sacrificial altar. It is unclear whether it is slaughtered or set free.
- <sup>3</sup> . This hypothesis was originally formulated in a lecture at the American Enterprise Institute in 1992. It was published as an article in a journal in 1993 and later expanded the thesis in a book form. See "The Clash of Civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993. See also Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster 1996).
- <sup>4</sup> . This prediction was made long before the 9/11 incident added to its predictive value. Naturally the clash theory attracted worldwide attention and evoked and provoked numerous responses, particularly after 9/11.
- <sup>5</sup> . See Cultural Self-comprehension of Nations at <http://www.i-p-o.org>
- <sup>6</sup> . Gandhi characterized Mayo's book as drain inspector's report. Gandhi wrote: "This book is cleverly and powerfully written. The carefully chosen quotations give it the false appearance of a truthful book. But the impression it leaves on my mind, is that it is the report of a drain inspector sent out with the one purpose of opening and examining had confessed that she had come to India merely to open out and examine the drains of India, there would perhaps be little to complain about her compilation. But she declared her abominable and patently wrong conclusion with a certain amount the drains of the country to be reported upon, or to give a graphic description of the stench exuded by the opened drains. If Miss. Mayo of triumph: 'the drains are India'".
- <sup>7</sup> . See Hans Kochler's paper "Philosophical Foundations of Civilisational Dialogue" presented at Third Inter – Civilisational Dialogue, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 15 – 17 Sept., 1997, at [http:// www.-i-p-o.org](http://www.-i-p-o.org)
- <sup>8</sup> . Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006).
- <sup>9</sup> . Paul Berman *Terror and Liberalism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003).
- <sup>10</sup> . Edward Said, "The Clash of Ignorance", *The Nation*, October 2001.
- <sup>11</sup> . See [http:// www.usinfo.state.gov](http://www.usinfo.state.gov)
- <sup>12</sup> . See [http:// www.islamtoday.net.n.d](http://www.islamtoday.net.n.d)
- <sup>13</sup> . For example see Salim Rashid (ed.), *Clash of Civilisation: Asian Responses* (Karachi, New York: OUP, 1997), David Blankenhorn, Abdou Filali – Ansari et.al (ed.) *The Islam/ West Debate* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), Meir Litvak, *Middle Eastern Societies and the West: Accommodation or Clash of Civilisation* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2006).
- <sup>14</sup> . See [http:// www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)
- <sup>15</sup> . See the site of International Progress Organisation [http:// www.i-p-o.org](http://www.i-p-o.org)
- <sup>16</sup> . Quoted in R.K.Prabhu and R.Kelkar (compiled) *Truth Called them Differently: Tagore-Gandhi Controversy* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1961).
- <sup>17</sup> . Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History* Vol. VIII: Heroic Ages; Contacts between Civilizations in Space (Encounters between Contemporaries) (London: Oxford University Press, 1954).
- <sup>18</sup> . *Harijan*, Feb.2, 1934.
- <sup>19</sup> . *Ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> . *Young India*, September, 2, 1926.
- <sup>21</sup> . *Harijan*, March 13, 1937.
- <sup>22</sup> . *Young India*, Sept. 25, 1925.

## **Gandhi's Non-violence: Some Reflections**

*Usha Thakkar*

### **I**

I consider it a great privilege to be invited by the Institute of Gandhian Studies to deliver the third Ravindra Varma Memorial Lecture. I take it as an opportunity to pay my tribute to Shri Ravindra Varma whom we respectfully and fondly called Varmaji. The subject I have chosen was very close to his heart and he in his own way had made significant contribution to its propagation and practice. Contemporary times are facing unprecedented challenges. It is at this juncture that a fresh look at Mahatma Gandhi's ideas and work is essential to guide us. Bapu was an independent thinker who presented his own vision of non-violence and basic values of human life. At the same time he drew on various streams of the philosophies of the East and the West. A mistaken belief persists that violence can end conflict or that war can bring salvation to the world. Gandhi showed the non-violent way, lived and demonstrated its success. In the view of the growing scourge of violence in the world even affecting our day to day life, it is all the more appropriate to do some fresh thinking and reflection on Gandhi's non-violence. The originality and the freshness of Gandhi's mind are illustrated nowhere better than in his principles of non-violence as he moulded this ancient concept into a powerful weapon to resist the evil of exploitation and injustice.

The contribution made by Mahatma Gandhi in the realm of theory and praxis of non-violence in the modern world is seminal. He never claimed any originality in this respect and

maintained that his principles were ‘as old as hills’. However, in an unprecedented way he has revolutionised the concept and working of non-violence. As an activist votary of non-violence he has shown its efficacy in dealing with evils of exploitation and injustice that have plagued humanity in its political, economic and social fields.

### **Various dimensions of Non-violence**

Gandhi believes that non-violence is not a cloistered virtue to be practised by the individual only for his own peace and salvation. Rather it should be taken as a rule of conduct for the entire humanity. He considered non-violence as the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is noted that prior to Gandhi non-violence was taken as a virtue to be practised mostly at the individual level. But it was Gandhi who revolutionised the concept by taking it to level of common masses. For Gandhi non-violence was not merely a personal virtue, but a social virtue to be cultivated and practised by all. In his own words, “The religion of non-violence is not meant merely for the *rishis* and saints. It is meant for the common people as well. Non-violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute.<sup>1</sup> It is evident from the above that Gandhi took the concept of non-violence to the cosmic level.

Gandhi believed that as limited beings, we cannot grasp truth in its entirety. The problem arises when people claim that they own the whole truth, and hence they would be justified in imposing it on others, without any restraint. To avoid such an undesirable situation, Gandhian non-violence seeks to ensure dialogue as a basis of mutual trust between conflicting parties. This would help them to understand truth in its relative terms. Gandhi had tremendous faith in the method of dialogues. All his life, he worked through dialogues with everybody including his own self. His philosophy provides space for persons from different strands of life to come together and open up for



dialogues for finding alternatives. As he puts it, "I very much like the doctrine of the manyness of reality. It is this doctrine that has taught me to judge a Mussalman from his own standpoint and a Christian from his...My *Anekantvada* is the result of the twin doctrines of *Satya* and *Ahimsa*."<sup>2</sup>

In Gandhi's view, moral, social and political truths could not be discovered by sitting and meditating in a cave but through open and free dialogue among the parties with their own understanding of the truth. Gandhi through the process of *satyagraha* seeks to change and reconcile both the outlook and behaviour of opponents. Thus Gandhi's non-violence is a programme for transformation of relationships and not a mere strategy for peaceful change. It also includes constructive work as an active and transformative force.

Gandhi had a cosmological vision of social relations based on his theory of unity of all life. According to him, all life is interrelated and interdependent. Thus happiness and suffering of any individual affects the rest. He believed that intolerance is also a form of violence and an obstacle in the way of progress. People are mutually dependent on one another, and no one could be sacrificed for the good of the rest. Everyone has to recognise this interdependence and act accordingly.

Gandhi's politics was revolutionary in nature. He presented the vision of an alternative society based on non-violence, mutual respect, harmony, and dialogues. He also shows that we can pursue dialogue in a constructive way if we concentrate on the means rather than ends. According to him, if we take care of the means, the end will take care of itself. He argues that "*Ahimsa* and Truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like two sides of a coin, or rather of a smooth unstamped

metallic disc. Who can say which the obverse is and which is the reverse? Nevertheless, *ahimsa* is the means and Truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our reach, and so *ahimsa* becomes our supreme duty and Truth becomes God for us. If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later.”<sup>3</sup> It is important to remember his well known observation on ends and means in *Hind Swaraj*. In his words, “The means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree; and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Non-violence as Love**

For Gandhi non-violence was “the largest love, the greatest charity”. This interpretation of non-violence as love naturally widens the meaning of non-violence. That is why Gandhi said “If I am a follower of *ahimsa*, I must love my enemy.”<sup>5</sup> One cannot limit Gandhi’s non-violence to mere non-killing as it would be a negative interpretation of his vision. The desire not to harm anyone is important but the intention behind action must be taken into account as well. A robber with a knife stabbing an innocent man is indulging in violence, but a surgeon using a knife on a patient is not committing any act of violence. On the contrary it is an act of service and love to save a patient’s life. Thus positive concept of non-violence includes promotion of well-being of others. Gandhi firmly believed that, “Love is a rare herb that makes a friend even of a sworn enemy and this herb grows out of non-violence... Love destroys ill will.”<sup>6</sup> Love is the ethics of caring. It is a powerful force which generates the empathetic understanding of the sufferings of others and extends help to overcome them. It is total and not a fragmented concept. It brings people together and changes one’s behaviour, attitude, and relationships. It enables people to understand each other better and live together peacefully.

Gandhi provides a political dimension to love. Political application of love opens new possibilities; seeks to transform

conventional political relationships based on power and self-interest, and makes love a way of a sharing common life. He equated *ahimsa* with compassion and the latter with active love. For Gandhi *ahimsa* meant both passive and active love, refraining from causing harm and destruction to living beings as well as positively promoting their well-being. Love implies identification with and service of all living beings. Its opposites are malevolence and selfishness.<sup>7</sup>

Love for Gandhi meant identification with and service of all sentient and non sentient beings. Selfishness means putting oneself over others and pursuing one's gains at the expense of others. Therefore, violence means inflicting harm upon others out of selfishness or ill will. According to Gandhi, "Non-violence in its positive aspect as benevolence is the greatest force because of the limitless scope it affords for self-suffering without causing or intending any physical or material injury to the wrong-doer."<sup>8</sup> One can convert the opponents by reaching out to them through self suffering. In Gandhi's words, "Suffering is infinitely more powerful than the law of the jungle for converting the opponent and opening his ears, which are otherwise shut, to the voice of reason."<sup>9</sup> It entails personal engagement and defies fatalism.

Gandhi nurtured self-confidence among his countrymen suffering from the humiliation and also coaxed them to take a critical look at themselves. His concept of non-violence as active love leading to service of fellow-men presented a radical departure from Indian traditions.

### **Non-violence as a Way of Life**

For Gandhi, the pursuit of non-violence is a way of life wherein constant self-examination and rigorous discipline are required. It demands the existence of virtues like humility, sincerity and selfless service to others. Non-violence is not just an idea but something like a scientific instrument that can be,

and has to be, applied in life. Non-violence is not like a garment to be put on and off at one's own will. Its seat is in the human heart, and as such it must be an inseparable part of our very being.

Gandhi lived his life experimenting with Truth. So whatever came across in his path got connected with him and had to go through the prism of his experience. In the process his ideas and work became inseparable from his life. Hence his words 'my life is my message' still remain relevant. For him Non-violence and Truth are the guiding principles of life and the fusion of Non-violence and Truth is crucial. Violence leads to more violence, falsehood and helplessness; whereas non-violence leads to more non-violence, truth and strength. Non-violence is the first article of Gandhi's faith and the last article of his creed. The violent person is at war with the world, and feels that the world is at war with him, whereas the non-violent person is at peace with himself and the world. The latter can therefore make difference, as he enjoys freedom and generates the capacity to change.

Gandhi has not compartmentalised life and has looked upon it as an integrated whole. In his scheme of things theory and practice remain inseparable. He was not an ivory tower theorist. He was always with the people, working with them, and for them. When a friend suggested that he should write a treatise on the science of *ahimsa*, his response was, "To write a treatise on the science of *ahimsa* is beyond my powers. I am not built for academic writings. Action is my domain."<sup>10</sup>

Gandhi devised methods of mass political mobilisation through the instrumentality of *Satyagraha* based on truth and non-violence. Throughout his life he successfully employed non-violent techniques like boycott, fasting, civil-disobedience, strike, and the like. He connected the modern idea of civil

liberties with the tradition of non-violence. Gandhi presented the vision of an alternative polity based on complete decentralisation. He looked upon state as a soulless machine and symbol of organised violence. His alternative system was based on his concept of oceanic circle which tries to reconcile the interest of the individual with those of the community by putting the former at the centre. His system will not be like a 'pyramid' in which the base is outweighed by the top.

Gandhi's method of *Satyagraha* was the exercise of the purest soul-force against injustice and oppression at all levels. It relied on truth, non-violence, value of suffering, faith in human goodness and fearlessness. For Gandhi it was not just a political weapon but a way of life. He kept on sharpening his focus on *Satyagraha* and innovated various techniques to cope with different situations. It is a method of conversion, based on non-violence and love. For him, "*Satyagraha* is a process of educating public opinion, such that it covers all the elements of society and in the end makes itself irresistible. Violence interrupts the process and prolongs the real revolution of the whole social structure."<sup>11</sup>

Violence is multi-dimensional and includes physical and psychological as well as structural and cultural violence. In the long run it does more harm than the good. The so called good it appears to serve is only temporary. It invades like a cancer eating into the vitals of the society. When people are full of hate and anger, violence is expressed in their social behaviour. Gandhi holds the view that attaining victory through violence inflicts harm to all concerned.

### **Non-violence of the Brave**

Gandhi states that his "creed of non-violence is an extremely active force. It has no room for cowardice or weakness. There is hope for a violent man to be some day non-violent, but there is none for a coward."<sup>12</sup> His criticism of the

coward is unrelenting. "I am not pleading for India to practice non-violence because it is weak. I want her to practice non-violence being conscious of her strength and power."<sup>13</sup> He abhorred cowardice more than violence. He declared that more than once that he would prefer violence to cowardice. His non-violence was meant only for the bravest of the brave who could resist injustice through the spirit of universal love that extended even to those against whom he was fighting. The courageous people empower themselves, even if the rest of the world sees them as poor and weak.

Gandhi retained his unflinching faith in the efficacy of non-violence till the end of his life. In the midst of growing violence in the country, he saw no hope for the aching world other than through the narrow and straight path of non-violence. It is to be noted that Gandhi was not in Delhi on August 15, 1947, to celebrate the independence of the country; he was with the victims of the communal violence in Calcutta. Readiness to sacrifice through fearless action was natural to Gandhi. To quote him, "Just as one must learn the art of killing in the training for violence, so one must learn the art of dying in the training for non-violence. Violence does not mean emancipation from fear, but discovering the means of combating the cause of fear. Non-violence, on the other hand, has no cause for fear. The votary of non-violence has to cultivate the capacity for sacrifice of the highest type in order to be free from fear. He cares not if he should lose his land, his wealth, his life. He who has not overcome all fear cannot practice *ahimsa* to perfection. The votary of *ahimsa* has only one fear - that is of God."<sup>14</sup> Thus fearlessness became the most powerful symbol of Gandhi's non-violence.

It is a fact that violence dehumanises all those who depend on it as they live in perpetual fear of others. Such people believe that the whole world is against them and as such

they continue to fight 'an imagined enemy' while ignoring 'the enemy within.' According to Gandhi nonviolent resistance with love for the evil-doer is the higher and better way to eradicate evil forever. To fight against violence with violence is to pit Satan against Satan and the end result will be the victory of Satan. It was on this basis that Gandhi called off the non-cooperation movement after the outbreak of violence in Chauri Chaura. In his own words, "The fact is that a votary of *ahimsa* cannot subscribe to the utilitarian formula. He will strive for the greatest good of all and die in the attempt to realise the ideal. He will therefore be willing to die so that others may live. He will serve himself with the rest, by himself dying...The utilitarian to be logical will never sacrifice himself. The absolutist will even sacrifice himself."<sup>15</sup> Thus according to him a *satyagrahi* has to follow the path of *sarvodaya* or welfare of all and not the utilitarian formula.

For Gandhi, the highest expression of courage comes with non-violent resistance to injustice. Non-violence instilled unprecedented courage in the suppressed people of India to challenge the authority of the mighty British Empire. It was effectively expressed by Jawaharlal Nehru in the following words, "...the dominant impulse in India under British rule was that of fear-pervasive, oppressing, strangling fear; fear of the army, the police, the wide-spread secret service; fear of the official class; fear of laws meant to suppress and of prison; fear of the landlord's agent; fear of the moneylender; fear of unemployment and starvation, which were always on the threshold. It was against this all-pervading fear that Gandhi's quiet and determined voice was raised: Be not afraid."<sup>16</sup>

### **Non-violence at the Practical Level**

Gandhi was aware of the fact that complete adherence to non-violence is almost impossible. The very process of living involves certain amount of violence, no matter how little

it may be. What we have to do is to minimise it to the greatest extent possible. In his own words,” Violence is needed for the protection of things external; nonviolence is needed for the protection of the *Atman*, for the protection of one’s honour.”<sup>17</sup> Therefore, he rejected the view that all killing was violence. His approval of killing of the suffering calf, frightening away the monkeys interfering with the crops in the *ashram*, loss of jobs for the British workers in Lancashire and serving to meat-eaters like Maulana Azad and Louis Fischer, and his approach to Hitler’s rule and the suffering of the Jews bring out the complexities of the issue. In an interview with Louis Fischer discussing the likely peasant movements in independent India, Gandhi did not rule out temporary violence. Thus, while all violence was bad and must be condemned, it was important to distinguish between its different forms and contexts.<sup>18</sup> For Gandhi, oppression of the weak, attacking the self-respect of the oppressed and willful insult of the powerless are also forms of violence.

Gandhi’s basic argument is that nonviolence is the most preferable way and violent alternatives are certainly inferior. As Terchek points out, Gandhi provides us with a critique of violence and offers a sustained theory of non-violence to resolve conflicts. For him, violence denies the integrity of persons and destroys the possibility of individuals, with their different conceptions of the truth, living together freely and peacefully. Gandhian nonviolence is a form of power that challenges the gamut of injustices and brutalities that inhabit the world and, he believes, is far superior to violence.<sup>19</sup>

Throughout his life, Gandhi propagated the message and the practice of non-violence. His practice of nonviolence was a conscious effort of translating his ideas into life. As he rightly points out, “I have been practising with scientific precision non-violence and its possibilities for an unbroken



period of over fifty years. I have applied it in every walk of life, domestic, institutional, economic and political. I know of no single case in which it has failed. Where it has seemed to have failed, I have ascribed it to my imperfections. I claim no perfection for myself. But I do claim to be a passionate seeker after Truth, which is but another name for God. In the course of that search, the discovery of non-violence came to me. Its spread is my life-mission.”<sup>20</sup> According to him life is to be guided not by violence, coercion or fear but by voluntary acceptance of duties, co-operation and compassion.

Though Gandhi had acquired unprecedented success, yet towards the end of his life there were unprecedented challenges arising out of partition of the country and communal violence. The brutal violence erupting on the partition of the country was a rude shock to him. He admitted with pain on July 17, 1947 that, “It is true that I had believed that our *Satyagraha* struggles were based on non-violence. Only lately I realised that it was not true. I admit my mistake.”<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, he retained till the end of his life the unflinching faith in the efficacy of non-violence.

Gandhi's non-violence is of vital importance for democracy. According to him, under democracy “the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest. That can never happen except through non-violence.”<sup>22</sup> For Gandhi democracy is the rule of unadulterated non-violence.<sup>23</sup> Non-violence nurtures the civil society by encouraging changes required for democratic norms. No democracy can survive without the freedom to express one's views freely without fear or freedom to practice one's faith, or equality in the eyes of the law. Gandhi recognises the importance of these important principles, and therefore, insists on non-violence. Gandhi's moral and political message is that non-violence cannot just be

a personal virtue; it must be a civic virtue. Gandhi encourages us to think as human beings and citizens.

Gandhi's non-violence is of vital importance for Indian democracy. Dipankar Gupta points out that Gandhi's non-violence reaches out to a high intellectual plane, for it presumes that only when one loses a rational argument that violence becomes a tempting option. This is the bedrock of the democratic temperament that Gandhi helped firm up. Without the freedom to practice one's faith, or the unbending equality in the eyes of the law, or the fundamental right to express one's views freely and without fear, no democracy can hope for political longevity. These foundational structures of our polity owe everything to Gandhi and to his insistence on non-violence. Gandhi's non-violence was a public ethic: it was about political conduct. By keeping guns and other blunt instruments out of purview, Gandhi privileged rational debate to win a point. No other Indian leader before or after him has hammered away at this basic political modality with as much unwavering commitment as Gandhi did. Gandhi's non-violence allowed the public discussion of issues that were vexing Indians on a national scale. It is through the medium of Gandhi that Indians could publicly discuss the relationship between classes, between castes and between communities, the place of women in public life and the interface between faiths. It is not as if a consensus was arrived at on any of these. But the fact that we could now talk about them helped us frame the basic rules of our Nation-State. Gandhi helped us think as citizens and that is what democracy is all about.<sup>24</sup>

Gandhi is important today, because there is revolutionary element in him. J. B. Kriplani brings this to surface when he points out that Gandhi set old ideas before people: and he transformed old ideas into revolutionary. Mahatma's non-violent method was much more revolutionary

than the bomb, because it was in harmony with the demand of the age. The way of the bomb lacked appeal, so it could not make people free of fear. His non-violent method proved more effective than the bomb method.<sup>25</sup>

Gandhi's work has inspired and will continue to inspire persons and societies to work for peace and justice. Leaders like Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Dalai Lama and Aung San Suu Kyi proudly acknowledge Gandhi's contribution. Gandhi's vision has helped movements that toppled dictators like Ferdinand Marcos in the Phillippines, Augusto Pinochet in Chile and the Communist dictatorships in Eastern Europe. Movements for environment, alternative science and technology, eco-feminism, human rights, exploitation, resistance to nuclear programme- all have directly or indirectly, knowingly or unknowingly drawn inspiration from Gandhi. In the world torn by strife and lured by violence, Gandhi continues to be a luminous ray of light. The United Nations has accepted that Mahatma's legacy of non-violence is of crucial importance to the world and has declared 2<sup>nd</sup> October (Mahatma's birthday) as the International Day of Non-violence in 2008. It is not necessary that non-violent struggles always yield immediate success. The path of this journey is slow and painful. Non-violence is difficult, but not impossible to practice. A comparison of 323 non-violent and violent resistance campaigns from 1900 to 2006 shows that non-violent resistance methods are likely to be more successful than violent methods and have achieved success 53 percent of the time, compared with 26 percent for the violent resistance campaigns.<sup>26</sup>

Gandhi had realised early in his political life that violence poses a formidable challenge. His well-articulated arguments against violence are found in his seminal work *Hind Swaraj*, written on the return voyage from London to Cape

Town in South Africa (November 13 to 22, 1909) on board of the *Kildonan Castle*. Non-violence, according to Gandhi, has its source in soul-force (*atmabal*), and violence in body-force (*sharirbal*). He uses a number of terms to describe the qualities of soul-force: love-force (*prembal*), truth-force (*satyabal*), compassion-force (*dayabal*), suffering-force (*tapbal*) and justice-force (*nitibal*). The soul is able to exercise these forces natural to it only when the mind is able to exercise control over itself and the passions. Ultimately then, the success of the ethic of non-violence depends on the state of the soul, the mind and the passions- in one word, on self-rule.<sup>27</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer elaborates that the guidelines given by Gandhi in response to the terrorism of the Indian activists in London in 1909 may be applied to the current situation. They are: stop a situation of violence in its tracks, address the issues leading to violence, and maintain the moral high ground. What is important is the fact that a non-violent response to terrorism is already an element of political discourse. It is not a new idea, but rather a strand of public thinking that deserves attention and, Gandhi might argue, respect.<sup>28</sup> It is time the world realises that the alternatives to coercion, violence, distrust and chaos is restoration of peace, faith and trust.

## Conclusion

Gandhi's teachings and practice of non-violence can help people to find their way in the contemporary tangle of violence and hatred. Gandhi's legacy is of paramount importance today, because Gandhi challenges efficiency and legitimacy of violence. His non-violence is a form of power that challenges the injustices and brutalities around us. His struggles were against injustice and oppression prevalent in the society and those of the state. He challenges us to think of what can be done in contemporary times in the areas stretching from personal to political. This task is not that easy. He himself had written, "For infallible guidance, man has to have a perfectly

innocent heart incapable of evil. I can lay no such claim. Mine is a struggling, striving, erring, imperfect soul".<sup>29</sup> This struggling, striving and powerful soul of Gandhi is urging us to strive for higher goals. Gandhi makes us rethink about the entire gamut of the issue of violence around us. His soul searching queries make us uncomfortable, prompting us to question the injustice and inequality prevailing in our society. It is now time to listen to his voice and tune it to our inner voice and start acting.

At the end once again I respectfully recall the memory of Shri Ravindra Varma and the insightful discussions I had with him about Mahatma's life and work. Mahatma's life and ideas instill hope in the suffering humanity. Let us decide to move towards the ultimate goal of non-violent society.

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## **Gandhi's Pancha Mahavrat: Structure, Nature and Praxis**

***Ram Chandra Pradhan***

I am deeply grateful to the authorities of Institute of Gandhian Studies (Gandhi Vichar Parishad) for inviting me to deliver Ravindra Varma Memorial lecture for the year 2010. No one is more conscious of my limitations for the job when I look at the list of my eminent predecessors. I feel honoured with a deep sense of humility that I have been given an opportunity to deliver the memorial lecture instituted in the memory of Ravindra Varma, an ardent patriot, a scholar and above all a true Gandhian. I bow down and do *sasthang dandawat* in his sacred and hallowed memory.

It is a difficult task for any scholar to select a new Gandhian theme in a *de-novo* way for any in-depth discussion. After lot of intellectual hiccups, I have selected the present theme. There are several reasons for it. In the first place, Gandhi was basically a man of reasoned faith. It was his undying faith that ultimately turned out to be in mainstay and provided substratum for all his actions both secular and spiritual. Hence it needs a deeper probe. Secondly I find that the attempt of every branch of social science to appropriate Gandhi within its narrow gaze undermines the symbiotic relationship between his life, thought and action. Thirdly, I am also conscious of the fact that the nature and structure of his faith has not been given the kind of attention it actually deserves. They have mostly concentrated on his secular ideas. Fourthly, I am firmly of the opinion that like *Panchashila* of

Buddhism, *Panch Yama* of Patanjali and *Pancha Mahavrat* of Jainism, *Pancha Mahavrat* of Mahatma create a new structure of faith. They are (i) God/Truth, (ii) Non-violence, (iii) *Brahmacharya* (iv) *Swaraj* and (v) *Moksha* and which is why I have selected this theme for the present lecture. In the course of my lecture I would be dwelling on Gandhi's views on all these aspects of his faith. I would also examine his critics' viewpoint and offer my own comments wherever necessary. I seek your indulgence in my prattle on such an important theme which deserves to be handled by a scholar who is more competent, and mature than me. With this brief introduction, let us move on to the actual theme: Gandhi's *Pancha Mahavrat*: structure, nature and praxis.

## I

### **Gandhi's Concept of Truth/God**

Truth is the key concept of Gandhian thinking. He not only equated God with Truth but in his later life he went to the extent of saying 'Truth is God'. In fact, truth is the cornerstone which holds the entire edifice of his life and thought. As such, the Gandhian concept of truth deserves a detailed investigation.

It is true that the Mahatma was not the first Indian sage or thinker to have underlined the centrality of truth and its pivotal power both in private and public domains. Interestingly, he had written a piece 'The Oriental Idea of Truth' in the April 1905 issue of the *Indian Opinion* in which he had forcefully contended Lord Curzon's assertion that truth was primarily a Western idea which was never central to the Eastern moral ethos. In that write-up he quoted several passages from the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Manusmriti, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, to substantiate his contention that truth was quite central to the Eastern thinking. Later on and in other context, he asserted the same ideas when he said that he had nothing new to teach and that truth and non-violence 'are as old as the hills'.



In fact since his South African days he had made truth and non-violence as an inalienable part of his faith. And it was during those days that he had developed the idea of *Satyagraha* and practised it as a major instrument of human liberation. As such, in both Phoenix Settlement and Tolstoy Farm, the primary basis of their inmates' life was nothing but truth. However, when he founded the *Satyagraha Ashram* at Ahmedabad in 1915, allegiance to truth was the first vow which every inmate had to take compulsorily. It was also made clear that the idea of truth goes much beyond its ordinary meaning and connotation of not telling lies. Simultaneously, it was also made clear to every inmate that his life would have to be governed by the law of truth, irrespective of the costs and consequences. Not only that, each one of them was to take Prahelad as his role model as he had opposed his father Hrinayakashyapu without any idea of retaliation or even rancour.

However, it was during the Non-cooperation Movement that he wrote a long piece viz. 'What is Truth' in *Navajivan* in 1920,<sup>1</sup> in which he explained its meaning as well as its wider ramifications. Therein, he pointed out that truth implies much more than just being truthful or refraining from telling lies. To dig out its deeper meaning, he pointed out that etymologically *satya* is a derivative from *sat* which means 'to be', 'to exist'. Thus, truth is free from the limitations of time and space, as a sense of eternity is attached to its deeper meaning. It is here that he explained the two facets of truth – absolute and relative. He was fully convinced that beyond our limited relative truth there is 'one, truth' which is 'total' and all-embracing. Besides, it is all pervading and exists as a 'royal and sovereign' principle. In Gandhi's view, the absolute truth is nothing but God. As such, it is both 'indescribable and 'unrealisable' for an embodied soul. He further asserted that even the purest of the pure could only 'visualise' it only by his sheer imagination. And thus, the God and the Absolute Truth are synonymous.

**Gandhi's Definition of God:** As an *advaitist* he did not believe in anthropomorphic view of God. He used several abstract terms to describe God such as 'supreme consciousness', 'cosmic power', '*satya*', etc. He was also firmly of the opinion that God is the essence of life', 'pure consciousness' the embodiment of omnipresence and omnipotence. The use of all these abstract terms was indicative of his firm faith in God being formless and attributeless. With these words as introduction, let us move to some of the Gandhian definitions of God. To quote his words:

'There is an indefinable mysterious power that pervades everything I feel it, though I do not see it.'<sup>2</sup> In the same piece of his writing, he further asserted that:

'I do dimly perceive that while everything around me is changing, ever dying, there is underlying all that change a living power that is changeless, that holds altogether, that creates, dissolves and recreates. That informing power or spirit is God.'<sup>3</sup>

God is not some person outside ourselves or away from the universe. He pervades everything..... immanent in all beings.'<sup>4</sup>

'Truth is God, nothing else.'<sup>5</sup>

God is not a person ..... 'The truth is that God is the force. He is the essence of life. He is pure and undefined consciousness. He is eternal.'<sup>6</sup>

It is clear from these definitions of God, offered by Gandhi, that he was quite close to the *Vedantic* concept of God. He not only rejected the Semitic concept of God being an external and transcendental authority but also the *avatarvadi* concept of God, quite popular among some sections of theistic tradition of India. However, three questions emerge out of these definitions which deserve greater clarification. One, why did Gandhi reverse his earlier position 'God is Truth' by 'Truth is

God'? Two, what is his view on *avartarhood* of God in the view of his above definitions? In offering various definitions of God did he break away from the basic *advaitic* tenet? Let us first examine the first proposition. It is interesting to note that it was during late 1920's that Gandhi came out with his new formulation that 'Truth is God' reversing the earlier one, viz., 'God is Truth'. He himself offered a number of reasons for such a reversal. In the first place, the new formulation of Truth being God was more in keeping with his recent spiritual experiences. He averred that the new maxim enabled him to see God 'face to face' as he felt that He pervades every fiber of his being. Secondly, it helps a spiritual seeker in the process of avoiding the general tendency of looking at God in anthropomorphic form. Thirdly, the new formulation takes God away from the narrow confines of religion. Thus, even an atheist could adhere to it as he could deny God but not the truth. Fourthly, though he accepted that there were other ways of approaching God – love being one of them. He asserted that love had many connotations including human passion which exhausts in a few moments. But '*sat*' (truth) is one that exists forever and that is why it literally captures the concept of God which alone exists. On all these counts, he felt satisfied on his new maxim of Truth as God. Gandhi brought his concept of God more in consonance with his *advaitic* position as Truth is the nearest approximation of *Nirakar Brahma*. Thus, it could be safely asserted that by offering various definitions, Gandhi did not break away from the *advaitic* position. In fact, the confusion arises because Gandhi while offering various definitions of God underlines different aspects of God. But that is quite natural as God is ineffable and any attempt to describe the indescribable is found to result in confusion. Another reason for confusion is that *advaitic* tradition did not put God in a straight jacket as perceived by many people. This tradition remains unbroken in the subsequent ages. Gandhi, though

primarily sticking to his *advaitic* position, was fully aware that most of the people needed personalised and quality-filled God to meet their intellectual and emotional needs. And that is why despite his commitment to *advaitic* position, he did not totally reject the need for a personal God. To quote him 'He is personal God to those who need his personal presence. He is embodied to those who need His touch'<sup>7</sup>. Not only that, he explained the need for a personal God in his own imitable style: 'But a full realisation of the Absolute is almost impossible for an embodied being. The Absolute is devoid of all attributes and, thus, difficult for man to imagine. Therefore, they are all worshippers of a personal God whether they are aware of it or not'<sup>8</sup>. Thus at the metaphysical level, Gandhi asserted the primacy of absolute truth as Shankara and other philosophers of *Advaitic* School have done earlier.

But as a practical visionary, Gandhi was aware that this idea of absolute truth/God could not be taken as a working principle by an average man in the street. Hence, he had simultaneously propounded the principle of relative truth. He was firmly of the opinion that the absolute truth may work as pole star, but in day to day life an average man has to perceive truth in his own light. Accordingly, relative truth is that truth which man perceives and pursues according to his own light and understanding. He denies that such an open-ended definition of relative truth might create a situation of perpetual conflict, chaos and confusion, as every man would be free to pursue his lonely furrow of relative truth. In fact, he favours the idea of every one pursuing his own relative truth. He avers: 'As long as I have not realised Absolute Truth, so long I must hold to my relative truth as I have conceived it. Relative truth must meanwhile be my beacon, my shield and my buckle'.<sup>9</sup> For the dogged pursuit of one's own relative truth he advances two major arguments. One, that relative truth is also of the same genre as the absolute truth. It could not be untrue as the

absolute truth is reflected in it. Two, no one could perceive absolute truth in its totality and in one go, it could be apprehended only in fragments, viz., relative truth. Hence, it is the duty of every man to pursue his truth in his own light. He was aware that in the course of pursuit of relative truth by different individuals, the possibility of conflict could not be totally eliminated. To avoid such a situation, he suggested a number of remedial measures. In the first place, he favours setting up of a certain moral value system for the seekers of truth. Thus such a man must cultivate non-violence, humility and other virtues in the depth of his being. Besides, he must get rid of anger, selfishness, hatred and other negative feelings quite common among average human beings. Not only that, a seeker of truth must transcend the pair of opposites like victory and defeat, success and failure, pain and pleasure, etc. And above all, a seeker of truth must be able to love the meanest creation in the world, as much as he loves himself. Thus, a seeker of truth must walk on the path of *sadhana*. This is nothing but a call for the transformation of personality of the seeker of truth in a slow and gradual manner. To avoid a situation of moral chaos and confusion, on account of the pursuit of relative truth by different individuals, Gandhi introduced the idea of *Satyagraha*. A *Satyagrahi* not only follows certain *Yama-Niyams* (disciplines), but also ever engaged in the task of purifying his soul. Besides, in the pursuit of his relative truth he not only adheres to non-violence but he also invites self-suffering in the process of appealing to the sense of goodness of the other person. He also believed that cosmos is governed by the eternal law of truth (*Rita*), hence, ultimately that relative truth would prevail which is in consonance with the *Rita* which is nothing but absolute truth.

### **Gandhi's Concept of Truth/God: A Critique**

Gandhi's concept of truth has attracted a number of critical points. In the first place, one could very well argue that

his concept of absolute truth is God centric and, as such, may not be of much intellectual and practical use for the class of non-believers. It could be further argued that even his later formulation of 'Truth is God' hardly solves the problem of non-believers. God remains a common and crucial factor in both of his formulations. Moreover, his concept of absolute truth is too abstruse and primarily based on faith rather than human rationality. It also creates an epistemological problem on how to find the most effective medium for the perception of truth/God. For Gandhi, of course, the 'inner voice' was the real means for such a perception of truth. As he put it, 'For me the voice of God, of conscience, of Truth or 'the inner voice', or 'the still small voice' mean one and the same thing'! Thus, in Gandhian scheme of perception of truth, intuition, inner voice and conscience plays a bigger role than the scientific method based on discursive reason. That is why, he insisted during his 21 days fast in 1932 and even his last fast unto death in January 1948 that they were undertaken on the prompting of God or the still small voice. This created an intellectual problem even for a close follower like Jawaharlal Nehru, who found it rather 'strange'. Such a view of perception of truth could create a difficult situation of confusion and chaos as any body could claim that his truth is a straight call from God or 'the still small voice'. One could legitimately ask who could work as the final arbiter in the case of too many truths claiming God or the inner voice as their ultimate source.

Such a criticism could be countered in several ways. One, that Gandhi never had any superstitious belief. Nor did he claim any supernatural power for himself. In fact, he always tries to strike a delicate but right balance between human faith and rationality. And that is why he always maintained that even the scriptural truth would have to be tested on the anvil of human rationality. In other words, he never wanted to make a fetish of either reason or faith. In this respect he was quite close

to the Indian intellectual tradition wherein the faith and reason were taken in continuum rather than in a dichotomous relationship. As he put 'Attribution of omnipotence to reason is also bad as a piece of idolatry, as at is in the world of stock and stone believing it to be God. I plead not for the suppression of that in us which sanctifies reason'!<sup>10</sup>

A similar critical point could be raised against Gandhi's concept of relative truth. The nitty-gritty of the critics' point is that if every body starts perceiving and pursuing truth in his own light, the possibility of perpetual conflict could not be ruled out. In such a situation, the need for a final arbiter would always arise and one would not find it in the Gandhian scheme of things, at least in the secular plane. Even Gandhian prescription of the stringent pre-qualification for the seeker of truth may not ultimately turn out to be of much practical use. Because, who could ultimately decide whose truth among adversaries is based on *sadhana* and whose truth is based on pure self-interest? In this scheme, it has to be left ultimately to the conscience of the individuals involved. However, two points could be made in favour of Gandhi's concept of relative truth. First, one could go a long way with Gandhi, when he asserts that the world is ultimately governed by the eternal principle of truth. Therefore, one whose relative truth would be found in consonance with that eternal principle would ultimately prevail. Two, at a more mundane level, it could be reasonably concluded that civil society would work as the final arbiter. In fact, the traditional concept of *Panch Prameshwar* has a lot of substance because social conscience could not be based on untruth. Thus any one who pursues truth for the sake of *loksangraha* would find wider social acceptance and not one who is working for the *lokvigraha*. This is so because no civil society would afford to allow untruth to prevail as that would ultimately endanger its own existence. And that is the meaning

of *Satyameva Jayate* – which is more of a piece of practical wisdom rather than of didactic teachings.

A third critical point is that, in a society if every member enjoys freedom to pursue his ‘relative truth’, the external authority including the institution of state would be undermined. This would create a situation of institutional vacuum resulting in utter chaos and confusion.

Once again it could be reasonably argued that when an external authority like the state enjoys unlimited power to work as the final arbiter of human fate, it creates more problems than it solves. And that is why, Gandhi never had much faith in the efficacy of external agency, more particularly in the institution of state. He never believed in the centrality of state, rather he always pleaded for minimal state. At the metaphysical level, he always took God and His laws as the final arbiter. On a more mundane level of individuals he looked at the civil society as the final arbiter of human affairs. Hence, his assertion that in a given society the larger the number of truth seekers the quantum of the external authority would be smaller.

To sum up, Gandhi’s concept of truth, while making an endless journey to the ultimate Truth, provides a practical opportunity for its immediate pursuit. Thus, while giving every one an opportunity to pursue his truth, it also gives a big leeway for the pursuit of absolute truth. It is clear that Gandhi never accepted the view that the pursuit of absolute truth meant only for the spiritual elite. He puts absolute and relative truth in continuum and not in dichotomous position. Further, in his philosophical perspective, the possibility of even common people reaching out to the absolute truth remains distinctly feasible. He was convinced that a seeker of truth when he reaches the ultimate peak of absolute truth, he releases immense spiritual power. This is so because his life, thought



and action are in tune with the cosmic law of truth. In the last phase of his life, this is what he was experimenting and even demonstrating his spiritual prowess in Noakhali, Calcutta and Delhi by moving millions.

## II

### **Gandhi's Non-violence: Theory and Practice**

Non-violence (*ahimsa*) is another key concept in Gandhian thought. For him, it existed both as a corollary of truth and an independent idea as well. He took truth as the end and non-violence as the means. Gandhi asserts 'as the means so the end'. Hence, non-violence never occupied a subsidiary place in his thinking.

It is true that Hinduism, and more particularly Jainism, had earlier propagated non-violence as one of the cardinal principles of human life. However, earlier preachers and prophets of non-violence had underlined it primarily as a tenet of individual action. Besides, they took it primarily in the form of 'non-injury' and non-killing. Moreover, earlier thinkers like Bhishma, Kautilya, and Manu had never ruled out the use of violence as a part of the statecrafts. Consequently, non-violence was supposed to be professed and practised only by saint and sages working primarily in the spiritual field. It was Gandhi who transformed it as an effective weapon of mass action covering even the field of politics and statecraft. Not only that, he brought it down to the reach and domain of the common man covering his day to day life, as much as his dealings with the state and other organisations. Thus, Gandhi's perspective came to be posited against the Machiavellian perspective on politics and statecraft.

### **Meaning and Dimensions of Non-violence**

In earlier days non-violence was primarily taken in the sense of not causing any physical injury to the other living

person. Gandhi expanded its meaning and added quite a few dimensions to it. To quote him:

‘In its negative form it (*ahimsa*) means not injuring any living being whether by body and mind. I may not, therefore, hurt the person of any wrong-doers, any ill will to him and bear cause him mental suffering. In positive form, *ahimsa* means the largest love, the greatest charity. If I am a follower of *ahimsa*, I must love my enemy or a stranger to me as I would my wrong-doing father or son.’<sup>11</sup>

On another occasion, he further dilated upon the meaning of *ahimsa* in the following words:

‘*Ahimsa* is not the crude thing it has been made to appear. Not to hurt any living thing is no doubt a part of *ahimsa*. But it is its least expression. The principle of *ahimsa* is not to hurt by evil thought, by undue haste, by lying, by hatred, by wishing ill of anybody. It is also violated by holding on to what the world needs’.<sup>12</sup>

It is clear from the above that for Gandhi *ahimsa* meant much more than non-injury to the other person. Any one taking *ahimsa* as a creed would have to go through a total transformation of his personality. He had to overcome certain human weaknesses like greed, fear, possessiveness and had to imbibe certain positive virtues like love, truthfulness, fearlessness, patience, forbearance and forgiveness. In other words, he will have to subdue and overcome his devilish proclivities and develop godly qualities. But such a person cannot remain cut off from social and political affairs. He had to work for what the *Bhagavad Gita* call *Lokasangraha*. One who is working for *Lokasangraha* could not lead a cloistered life but would have to plunge into the worldly affairs in the service of the poor and the deprived. In the process, he may have to confront even the mightiest of the perpetrators of injustice,

whether they are located in the institution of state or civil society.

He strongly pleaded for non-violence as an effective means for social and moral uplift. He advanced a number of arguments in favour of non-violence. In the first place, humankind from the time immemorial is gradually moving towards a non-violent social order. According to him, humankind might have ended itself by mutual butchery in the absence of non-violence. Secondly, he argued that non-violence is more in consonance with basic human nature than violence. Humankind is basically peace-loving specie. Thirdly, human experience teaches us that unless violence is met by non-violence its chain could not be broken. Fourthly, the only way the weak could defend themselves is the non-violent way, as they would be a loser in any armed struggle. In a non-violent resistance, all that they need is a stout heart. Fifthly, violence brutalises both the perpetrators as well as the victims. On the other hand, non-violence raises and strengthens the moral fibers of both the weak and the mighty. What is more, it might even melt the brutalised heart of the perpetrators of injustice. So, whether on the count of expediency or the moral principle, non-violence appears to be the only panacea for all the sufferings of the weak as well as for melting the brutalised heart of the mighty.

### **New Dimensions of Non-violence**

Gandhi added a number of new dimensions to the theory and practice of non-violence. These dimensions provided the theoretical basis for the concept of non-violence and also they worked as practical aid to its practice. Some of them were:

**Truth and Non-violence:** For him non-violence was closely linked-up with truth. In fact, he found them inseparable, describing them as ‘twins’ and the two sides of the same coin..

He looked at truth as the end and non-violence as the means. The implication of truth being the end was that non-violence was never to be taken as a tactical line, i.e., as the only policy to meet the exigencies of a situation or to cover up one's weaknesses. It has got to be taken as the creed, viz., the basic philosophy of life. At the same time he underlined the pivotal role of the means (non-violence), if properly tackled, could easily take care of the end (the truth).

### **Non-violence and Love**

Gandhi was firmly of the opinion that a genuine practitioner of *ahimsa* could proceed only on the basis of deep love in his heart. By linking *ahimsa* to love, he tried to underline the fact that the opposition to an adversary is not based on the feeling of enmity but rather with a deep desire to extend the 'cup of love' to him. Such a feeling of love was a prerequisite for the practice of genuine non-violence, lest it becomes a camouflage for hiding one's weaknesses as a matter of tactics. As for himself, Gandhi was so convinced of this feeling of love that he always hoped to hug the entire humanity with a loving embrace, if not in this life, then in other births.

### **Ahimsa and Fearlessness**

One of the seminal contributions of Gandhi was his repeated emphasis that *ahimsa* was not a weapon of the weak, rather it was meant for the brave and stout-hearted. That was one of the reasons that he differentiated non-violence from the concept of passive resistance, the latter had come to be identified as the weapon of the weak. And that is why he always maintained that non-violence could not be practiced by faint-hearted. In such a situation, he maintained, non-violence could only work as a smokescreen to hide one's cowardice and other weaknesses. He established a close linkage between non-violence and fearlessness. Hence, he pleaded with the practitioner of non-violence to give up all kinds of external

fears, viz. fear of disease, body injury, death, fear of dispossession and loss of near and dear ones as well as that of one's reputation. But this fearlessness (*abhaya*) must be imbedded in a deep feeling of love for the adversary which frees him from malice and hatred towards the perpetrator of injustice. He was so convinced of the symbiotic relationship between *ahimsa* and *abhaya* that he often repeated his off-quoted formulation that if he had to choose between 'violence and cowardice, he would choose violence'. It was this feeling of *abhaya* he wanted to inculcate in everybody who came into his contact or even among the general masses. He amply demonstrated this feeling of *abhaya* in the worst days of communal riots in Noakhali, Bihar Calcutta and Delhi during 1946-48. Not only that, during his South African days he advised his son, Manilal, if occasions were to arise, he should defend his father (Gandhi) non-violently if possible and violently if he fails to do so. Thus, it is clear that for Gandhi, non-violence and fearlessness are eternally wedded. This is what he called the 'non-violence of the brave'. He himself defined the *ahimsa* of the brave in the following words: 'If I succeed in curbing my temper every time, and though able to give blow for blow, I refrain, I shall develop the *ahimsa* of the brave'.<sup>13</sup>

### **Non-violence and Constructive Work**

Unlike the Marxists, Gandhi never believed in the maximal state to bring about the required social change. In fact, he always favoured minimal state and strengthening the fibers of the civil society. Besides, he found a symbiotic relationship between non-violence and Constructive Programme. He was firmly of the opinion that the common man could be empowered only through non-violent Constructive Programme. Further, his non-violence was not meant for a chosen few but it was primarily meant for the common man. Hence, for him the surest way to train the common man was to engage him in

constructive work. And that is why he always found a direct correlation between the quantum of constructive work in a particular area and the response of those people in non-violent struggle. For *Satyagrahis*, constructive work not only provided an opportunity for smooth entry into the larger society but also created for them a congenial atmosphere for work and rest, when the struggle was off. However, in the midst of the communal frenzy during 1946-47, he came to realise that the 'technique of unconquerable non-violence of the strong has not been at all fully discovered and practiced as yet'. He observed that what the Indian people had practiced was the 'passive resistance of the weak'. But even in those dark days he asserted that it was not *ahimsa* that has failed rather its practice has remained incomplete.

From the above discussion it is clear that there are two requisites for the *ahimsa* of the brave. One, that there should be no ill will towards the adversary, two, refusal to retaliate not out of fear or incapacity but with a willful decision neither to harbour ill will nor to submit to any act of injustice. This is what he practiced and preached all through his life and tried to inculcate the same feeling among the people.

Any study of Gandhi's non-violence would remain incomplete unless one examines the history of its application by him. As we have seen in the earlier part of the paper that it was under exigencies of the South African situation that prompted him to forge the weapon of *Satyagraha* – a major instrument for resisting all acts of injustices and racial discrimination.

In the *Hind Swaraj* his rejection of the violent method as the main instrument of Indian liberation became more pronounced. In fact, as we know that the writing of *Hind Swaraj* was inspired by his dialogue with Indian revolutionaries

in London. However, a close study of the *Hind Swaraj* would reveal that his plea for non-violent resistance was based more on practical grounds rather than purely on ideological ones.

Perhaps, the final settlement of the Indian issue in 1914, proved another milestone in the evolution of his faith in non-violence. He found in it a living testimony to the efficacy and effectiveness of non-violence. His relocation to India during 1915 and founding of the *Satyagraha Ashram* marked another turning point in the evolution of his faith in non-violence. From that point onwards, he started taking it more of a creed rather than mere policy matter.

Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad Mill workers' *Satyagraha* were Gandhi's major experiments in non-violent action. Rowlatt *Satyagraha* (1919) was the first major experiment at the national level. And its quick withdrawal in the face of major eruption of violence amply demonstrated his faith in non-violence. It was in the course of the Non-cooperation Movement that he wrote a long piece 'The Doctrine of Sword' in which he laid unprecedented emphasis on what he called 'ahimsa of the brave' and even went to the extent of saying that faced with an unenviable choice, he would prefer violence to cowardice. Subsequently, he wrote in a resounding tone:

"I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honour than she should be in a cowardly manner become or remain a helpless witness to her own dishonour."<sup>14</sup>

He reached another milestone on the road of ahimsa, when he translated and wrote a brief commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* in which he found a scriptural validation for his theory of non-violence. And the raid on the Dharasana salt depot in 1930, amply demonstrated the power of the non-violence of the brave when his followers faced unprecedented human brutalities

without raising a finger in their self-defence. Subsequently, after the withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience Movement in May 1934, and with the formation of the Congress Socialist Party, he broke off his organisational linkage with the Congress on account of the socialist's lack of faith in his principle of non-violence. In fact, it was during those days that one finds another paradigm shift in his thinking and practice of non-violence. He shifted to Wardha and founded the *Sevagram Ashram* to pursue his spiritual *sadhana* and village service in a vigorous way. He laid greater emphasis on his earlier understanding that one ideal *Satyagrahi* would be enough to achieve all that he wanted to achieve, including the downfall of the mightiest empire.

Thus, one finds that his faith in non-violence became more vibrant and vigorous. It was with this frame of mind that in 1939, even before the second world war broke out, he advised both the Jews and the Poles to offer non-violent resistance in the face of unprecedented brutality. He followed it up by giving the same advice to the Czechs and, subsequently, also to the British people. Despite all his sympathies for the British and his earnest desire for Indian independence, he was not willing to back the British in their war efforts, even for the sake of the Indian independence. And it was on his own initiative that he was relieved from the responsibilities of Congress leadership. Thus, we find that in the course of his life, there was a sea change in the nature of his faith in non-violence, which was assuming virtually an absolutist form. If one could recall his help to the British, both during his South African days and even during the First World War, and compare it with his attitude towards the Second World War, one can clearly see the difference. In the later period his faith in non-violence was so absolute that he was not willing to barter it away even for the sake of the Indian independence. Not only that, this absolutist nature of his faith was more reflected in his debate with two



Jewish intellectuals Martin Buber and J.L. Magnus who wrote 'Two Letters to Gandhi'. They asserted that Gandhi was mistaken in advising Jews to offer non-violent resistance, as there was no practical feasibility for it in the then prevailing situation in the Nazi Germany. Anthony Parel finds that Gandhi's advice to the Jews for the non-violent resistance even went against two of his basic pre-requisites for the same. (a) he did not have enough information on the German situation in general and that of the Jews in particular as was his earlier wont, (b) by demanding voluntary and heroic non-violence from the general Jewish masses, he was putting up a tall order, which could be practiced only by exceptional individuals and not by the common masses. However, Parel ignores Gandhi's basic argument that even if the non-violent resistance in the German situation would not make much material change, at least the Jews and the Czechs would be saving their honour and humanity. And even the possibility of the impact of the outraged feeling of the world community could not be completely ruled out. Perhaps, a more glaring contradiction came, when in the face of a distinct possibility of the Japanese invasion on India, he expressed his willingness to allow the British and American forces to remain posted in India provided the Indian independence was accepted by them even in principle. A similar contradiction emerged when he launched the Quit India Movement. He refused to withdraw the Movement on account of widespread eruption of violence in the country. Not only that, he even declined to censure, let alone condemn, the socialist leaders like Jayprakash Narayan and others, who were openly working for violent methods to free the country from the clutches of the British imperialism.

But the final test for his absolute personal faith was yet to come. Once the War ended and there was a change of government in Great Britain, things moved very fast towards the transfer of power to the Indian hands. A serious attempt was

made to keep India united, on the eve of freedom. But it failed on account of several reasons. The Indian Muslim League launched 'Direct Action Day' in August 1946, which led to massacre in Calcutta. Soon it spread to Noakhali and Bihar and, subsequently, major parts of the country were engulfed in communal riots. Gandhi found himself in an unenviable situation. His dream of freeing India and keeping it united came to a naught. He faced the greatest challenge of his life when his entire life's work was coming to a cropper. But as was his wont, he neither lost his faith in non-violence nor was he caught in the slough of despond. He had to acquit himself and his faith by demonstrating its efficacy amidst communal frenzy and fire. He moved from place to place, viz., Calcutta, Noakhali, Bihar and finally to Delhi to extinguish the communal fire and frenzy. And he not only demonstrated his unshakeable faith in non-violence, but also its efficacy in the public domain of Calcutta, Noakhali, Bihar and Delhi. Finally, he achieved martyrdom on 30 January 1948, in the process of fighting the communal fire. And that turned the real proof of his being a true apostle of peace, non-violence and communal harmony.

### III

#### **Brahmacharya: Gandhian Theory and Praxis**

*Brahmacharya* was another key concept of Gandhi, which, at least in its practice, turned out to be the most controversial of his ideas. For him it was the foundation of all his ideas as its practice alone equipped him with moral and spiritual prowess to pursue his life-work with rare guts and determination. It was the mainspring of all his strength and perseverance.

#### **Gandhi and Brahmacharya**

The idea of *Brahmacharya* had gripped Gandhi even much before the idea of *Satyagraha*. Perhaps the seed was

sown during his spiritual interaction with Rajchandra in the last decade of the 19th century when he had several occasion to discuss with him both in person as well as through correspondence. Perhaps his study of the New Testament particularly the life of Jesus Christ might have been another source of inspiration. He was toying with idea for some time before he took a vow of *brahmacharya* in 1906, in the wake of his experience of an Indian Ambulance corps, particularly while nursing the Zulu rebels including their women and their extreme suffering and utter helplessness. In the wake of this soul-touching experience, he reached two conclusions which stayed with him all through his life. One that only non-violent resistance could be effectively offered against the stronger party in terms of physical prowess. Two that only those who are pure in heart could resist the strong and for that *brahmacharya* was a necessary pre-condition. Perhaps, it was also a practical need for him as the kind of public activities he was engaged could have been hardly consistent with the role of full time house holder. This is also supported by the fact that in his major lectures on Hinduism in 1905, there was no mention of *brahmacharya* as a concept or as a practice, nor had he insisted on celibacy in his scheme of *Phoenix Settlement*, wherein he even encouraged its members to get married.

Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that 1906 was the turning point for his thought on *brahmacharya*. This idea as developed in *Hind Swaraj* (1909), wherein he asserted that chastity was necessary for the firmness of mind as sexual indulgence bred cowardice and loss of stamina. It was during the last years of his stay in South Africa (1913) that he developed his ideas on *brahmacharya* in a more matured way. It was during his serial writings on health in the *Indian Opinion* that he pleaded that chastity not only promoted good health but also led to spiritual growth. It was during this period that *brahmacharya* for him came to mean more than mere sexual

abstinence, the real idea was to eliminate the very thought of sex from the human mind. He gave two major arguments in its support. One, that *virya* was the main source of physical and mental power and any kind of sexual indulgence resulted in the loss of that power. Two, such an indulgence was the root cause of other evils like envy, hypocrisy, anger and hatred. This idea was further strengthened when he founded *Satyagraha Ashram* in 1915, as one of the eleven vows to be taken by the inmates of the *ashram* was the vow of *brahmacharya*. Every inmate was to lead the life of a celibate whether married or unmarried. This was the apogee of his views on *brahmacharya*. Not only that, he went to the extent of saying that a married couple willing to undertake a vow of celibacy should behave as if they are not married. In other words, they must not engage in sexual activity even for the sake of procreation. And that is why, no marriage was to take place in the *ashram*, and if any marriage becomes unavoidable, it could be celebrated outside the *ashram*. Subsequently, his idea underwent various changes including his definition of *brahmacharya*. Later, he agreed to the celebration of marriage but on his own condition and under his own guidance. He even devised his own *saptapadi* underlining mutual support and moral living. It was mid-1930s that he was willing to soften his stand on rigid *brahmacharya*. Perhaps, this was the result his long debate on birth control with Margaret Sanger followed by his discussion with Vinoba Bhave, himself a life-long celibate. Consequently, he was willing to accept that a couple cohabitating for the sake of procreation, but not enjoyment, could very well be accepted as *brahmacharis*. Thus, his attitude to marriage changed, as he took it as a 'natural thing' and sex urge a 'noble thing' but only for the sake of procreation. This was followed by his changed stand on the abstention from the sexual relationship in respect of a married couple. Reversing his earlier stand on the issue, he felt that for a couple, mutual consent was necessary for such a

decision.

However, in the case of child widow, he always stood for their remarriage unless she preferred to be a *brahmacharini*. In the case of child widow, he refused to accept her as widow. She had not been married with her consent, as she was too young for it. Hence, her marriage is as good as invalid and she could very well remarry. In subsequent years, he expressed his willingness to support widow marriage of any women who was desirous of re-marriage. This was also his way of putting man and woman on equal footing. His logic was that if a widower was free to marry, the same right could not be denied to a widow.

The spiritual aspect of *brahmacharya* was further underlined in 1920, when Gandhi came to the conclusion that a *brahmachari* was not only 'a seeker of truth' but he alone was competent to know God. Subsequently, he went to the extent of saying that 'a full and correct meaning of *brahmcharya* is search for *Brahman*'. Thus, there was a major breakthrough in the Gandhi's concept of *brahmacharya*, as he upgraded both its level of seeking and its ultimate fruit. Starting from physical control of sex desires, he moved to the idea of total control of all human passions. And its aim shifted and extended from mere mental and physical health to the ultimate goal of self-realisation and God-realisation. Another major dimension which was added during the same period was that the sky was the limit for the power generated from the strict observance of *brahmacharya*. In the process, 'the senses become *atman* oriented and the power that is generated could pervade the entire universe'. In short, the new definition of *brahmacharya* marked a departure from individual to cosmic power and from physical and mental wellbeing to God-realisation. This shift is so marked that his words need to be quoted:

‘.... There are laws for knowing the great living force which we call God but it is self-evident that it requires hard labour to find out those laws. That law in short is termed *brahmacharya*. *Brahmacharya* is the method of tapping into the power that is Brahman, the very essence of life, the energy that sustains the world’.<sup>15</sup> To achieve that state of self-purification one has to observe all the disciplines and *brahmacharya* could not be in isolation from other disciplines. As he put it, *what is brahmacharya*? It is the way of life which leads to *Brahma* (God).<sup>16</sup>

Elaborating on his new conception of *brahmacharya* he wrote on 17 March 1947, when he was faced with a crisis on this very count. He defined *brahmacharya* as follows:

One who never had any lustful intention, who by constant attendance upon God has become proof against conscious or unconscious commission, who is capable of lying naked with naked women, however beautiful they may be, without in any manner whatsoever sexually excited: such a person should be incapable of lying, incapable of intending or doing harm to a single man or woman in whole world, is free from anger and malice and detached in the sense of the *Bhagavad Gita*. And only such a person is a real *brahmachari*.<sup>17</sup> It is evident from the above that the colour and complexion with which the concept of *brahmacharya* which started with Gandhi in 1906, has undergone a sea change in 1947, the last phase of his life. It had become a symbol of total dispassion and self-actualisation. Besides, it had become a springboard for acting in the phenomenal world with a spirit of a real *Loksangraha*.

From 1906 onwards, till the end of his life Gandhi made several experiments with his ideal *brahmacharya*. Towards the end of his life, it reached its zenith when he took it at the level of *yajna*. Of course his experiments created some

misunderstanding even among his close associates. He was so convinced of his principle that he refused to give any ground. During his Noakhali sojourn he believed that he had successfully fulfilled all the eleven vows including brahmacharya which he had taken at Satyagraha Ashram. In a ringing voice he told Manu Gandhi: "I have successfully observed the eleven vows undertaken by me. This is the culmination of my striving for last sixty years"<sup>18</sup>

#### IV

#### **Gandhian Concept of Swaraj**

The idea of *Swaraj* was so basic to Gandhi's thinking and action that the only book he ever wrote (the original was in Gujarati) and himself translated in English. he called this work *Hind Swaraj* (Indian Home Rule). Let us see how he conceptualised *Swaraj* therein. Two chapters of *Hind Swaraj* (chapters IV and XIV) are specifically devoted to (a) conceptualizing *Swaraj* and (b) how it could be achieved for the Indians. A close perusal of these chapters reveals that Gandhi is not out to offer a hackneyed definition of *Swaraj*. In the chapter on '*What is Swaraj*' he offers a critique of the prevailing notions of *Swaraj*, propagated by revolutionaries and the extremists. He rejects the 'revolutionaries' view that only physical expulsion of the British could suffice to serve the purpose of *Swaraj*. Nor does he accept the 'Extremists' view of *Swaraj*, as they wanted the British to go but not to banish the institutions created by them lock, stock and barrel. He raises a question mark against the liberal view of *Swaraj* in terms of 'self-government' patterned on the British colonies like Canada and others. Rounding up the discussion, he rejects one and all the prevailing notions of *Swaraj* when he says: 'we want English rule without the Englishman, You want the tiger's nature, but not the tiger; that is to say, you would make India English, and when it becomes English, it will be called not *Hindustan* but *Englistan*. This is not *Swaraj* that I want'.<sup>19</sup>

In Chapter XIV of the *Hind Swaraj*, he moves a bit further in defining the *Swaraj* of his conception. The primary unit of that *Swaraj* would be the individual man who has to experience that *Swaraj* first within his own being. As he comments:

“If we (the individuals) become free, India is free ..... It is *Swaraj* when we learn to rule ourselves. It is, therefore, in the palm of your hands. Do not consider *Swaraj* to be like a dream.... The *Swaraj* that I wish to picture before you and me is such that, after we have once realized it, we will endeavour to the end of our lifeline to persuade others to do likewise. But such *Swaraj* has to be experienced by each one for himself.”

<sup>20</sup>So far the definition of *Swaraj* is concerned, he leaves us at that, presumably because he takes it for granted that it subsumes the goal of political independence which was to be founded on the self-rule of the individuals. The next question he takes up is how *Swaraj* is to be attained. He rejects Garibaldi's violent ways of bringing Italy from Austria tutelage as that has not solved the problems of the common Italians. In India the situation is much more unfavourable, as it is almost impossible to arm thousands of Indians for an armed struggle against the British – a task that is next to impossible. But even if it is made possible, India would lose its soul as it would be Europeanised in the process. Besides, in the Chapter XVI he establishes a close and direct relationship between ‘ends’ and ‘means’ by pointing out that one cannot get a rose through planting a noxious weed. In other words, there is as much direct connection between ‘means’ and ‘ends’ as between the ‘seed’ and the tree. So, he rejects the ‘brute’ force as the basis of any just action, as nothing good would come out of it and pleads for the use of ‘soul force, or love force’ at times, also described as ‘passive resistance’. Subsequently he goes on to define ‘passive resistance’ as a method of securing rights by personal sufferings. In the process, he makes a simple but



profound statement. 'If man will only realise that it is unmanly to obey laws that are unjust, no man's tyranny will enslave him'. This is the key to self-rule or home rule. He further elucidates his basic formulation that passive resistance is the 'weapon of strong' as it requires greater courage than armed resistance. Hence, a man 'devoid of courage and manhood' could never be a passive resister. He takes passive resistance as 'many sided sword' which neither rusts nor it could be stolen. On the top of it, it blesses both the parties involved in a dispute. He also lays down the basic principles for a passive resistor who would have to follow perfect chastity, voluntary poverty and truthfulness. Towards the end of the book, he makes it clear that real home rule is 'self-rule' and the real path leading to it is passive resistance; and that *Swadeshi* is an integral part of the way.

We have deliberately made a detailed presentation of the Gandhian view of *Swaraj* and the royal road of passive resistance leading to it. It is these seed-ideas on *Swaraj* he later on elaborated and dedicated his life to bring *Swaraj* to everybody's door step. We also find a firm commitment on his part at the end of the *Hind Swaraj* wherein he makes a solemn pledge to dedicate his life to that end.

In the subsequent period of his life, he defined *Swaraj* in more specific terms when he said:

'*Swaraj* is a sacred word, a vedic word, meaning self-rule and self-restraint and freedom from all restraints which independence often means'.

However, he was equally insistent about national independence as he strongly believed that 'every nation is fit to manage its own affairs, no matter how badly. But it was this dialectical process of 'self-government, freedom from strong external control and self-rule, the freedom from the baser

passions, at the individual level which he sought to integrate in his concept of *Swaraj*. In fact, he strongly believed that 'outward freedom would be in direct proportion to internal freedom'. Besides, he also underscored the point that 'self-government' would mean the continuous effort to be independent of government, whether it is foreign or national'. In short, Gandhian *Swaraj* is just not a theory of government but a 'self-rule' of individuals with strong roots in his *advaitic* vision and symbiotic relationship between God, man and society (*Brahma, Jiva and Jagat*).

### **The Spiritual aspect of Swaraj**

It is clear for the above that for Gandhi, *Swaraj* was much more than the mere end of the British colonial rule. Based on his *advaitic* philosophical position the entire edifice of national independence would have to be built upon the solid rock-bottom of 'self-ruling' individuals. And here Gandhi was not using 'self' in the sense of 'empirical self' as understood in western intellectual tradition. Here, the self was being used for *Atman* made of the same stuff as the universal self. When an individual internalises and realises such a deeper meaning of *Swaraj* in the depth of being, he is enriched and endowed with a feeling of fearlessness, self-purification and a unity of all beings. This is the first step towards *Swaraj*. For according to Gandhi, *Swaraj* of the people was nothing but the 'sum total' of the 'self-rule' of the individuals.

As to why 'self-rule' of the individuals was the necessary foundation for the 'self-government' of the people; he advanced a number of arguments. In the first place, the extent of external *Swaraj* to be achieved by the people would be in proportion to the 'inner *Swaraj*' achieved by the individuals. Hence, every fighter for freedom would have to go through a process of self-transformation. As he himself said :

‘*Swaraj* has to be experienced by each one of us for himself. One drowning man will never save another. Slave ourselves, it would be mere pretension to think of freeing other’.

The second argument advanced by him in this connection was that *Swaraj* amounts to a government of many and if they are ‘immoral and selfish’, it would lead nothing but ‘anarchy’. Hence, laying the foundation for *Swaraj* in terms of ‘self-ruling’, individuals was of primary consideration. And that is why he identified *Swaraj* with *Ramrajya* – the sovereignty. *Ramrajya* for Gandhi meant the rule of *dharma*, rule of justice. And above all, it meant self-rule of an individual upon himself. He also identified it with a Biblical saying that ‘the Kingdom of God is within you’.

He was much more concerned with the cultural domination by the British and the mental slavery of the Indian elite. For him mental and cultural slavery was much worse than more physical slavery. And that is why he insisted on self-rule of the individuals which once achieved would not only successfully demolish the political slavery, but would work as the real foundation of the new social order, free from domination, oppression and exploitation. But he was not oblivious of the fact that for the ‘self-rule’ to be conceived and practiced on a mass scale, would be needing a conducive socio-political environment. Hence, the end of British was prerequisite for the people to acquire and enjoy their freedom in its full dimensions. Not only that, his concept of *Swaraj* was closely linked-up with his concept of *swadeshi*. *Swadeshi* stood for empirical demonstration of what *Swaraj* tried to conceptualise at the ideational level.

Gandhi visualised *Swaraj* as a multi splendored and multi dimensional concept. His idea of *Swaraj* encompasses

both 'self-rule' at the individual level and the national independence. Besides, it also encompasses freedom of the people in social, political and economic terms. One could summarise his contributions in this regard on several counts.

A major contribution of Gandhi lies in his successful attempt to strike a fine balance between sacred and secular needs of the individuals with those of society. This has been viewed in the context of the emerging crisis in the realm of political theory, as reflected in its failure to reconcile the freedom of individuals with that of collectivity. The institution of state in any garb has failed to acquit itself with any bright record in this arena. In economic field, a big challenge has been thrown up—how to reconcile the market forces with those of the state. This has led to the emergence of a number of theories both in liberal-democratic and Marxian perspective. The liberals have been talking of 'participatory democracy' and Marxist of people's democracy. The emergence of liberalisation and globalisation is an attempt at convergence of these conflicting perspectives in the economic field. However, the problem of striking a fine balance between the liberty of citizens with their commonweal has turned out to be elusive till date. The real strength of the Gandhian ideas in this respect lies in virtually making a successful attempt in this regard. He tries to reconcile the conflicting demands of the individual, civil society and state by basing all this on the solid of 'self-ruling individuals. What is more, he gives it a concrete form by linking it with *swadeshi*. In the process, he connects individuals with his immediate surrounding making them responsible and accountable to his immediate neighbourhood. It has also to be remembered that Gandhi's individuals are radically different from self-seeking self-defining individuals of the liberal-democratic system on the one hand and soulless cog in the collectivity like those in Marxism, Fascism and Nazism. They are fired by the idea of their divinity, on the one hand, and their

firm faith in the unity of all beings. And it is such individuals who would be the real fulcrum of inter-connection between individuals, civil society and state. Thus, he avoids as much the chances of hypocrisy and double speaks on the part of the individuals as that of raising a collective *Leviathan* in the name of the commonweal of the collectivity. Thus he rules out any chance of snatching or suppressing other's freedom in the name of commonweal. As he puts it:

‘Individual freedom alone can make a man voluntarily surrender himself completely to the service of the society. If it is wrested from him, he becomes an automation and society is ruined’.

Another strength of the Gandhian concept of *Swaraj* lies in the fact that it successfully avoids both the extreme of localism on the one hand and complete homogenisation in the name of liberalisation and globalisation. Such balanced and nuanced view may pave the way for a genuine universal culture without making individuals, groups, regions and nations losing their inner and local cultural moorings. This in itself is a major theoretical contribution. Gandhi's insistence on the ‘self-ruling’ individuals presents a practical problem, how to judge whether any individual is ‘self-ruling’ or not. This being a part of one's inner-experience, no effective and objective touchstone could be evolved to measure it. This leaves a large scope for hypocrisy, double speak – a big gap between the precept and practice.

## V

### **Gandhi's Theory and Practice of Moksha**

*Moksha* was another key idea which transformed Gandhi's entire life, thought process and the work. In fact, it was the *raison d'être* of his entire being. What was more, he had his own distinct view on the theory and practice of *moksha*. As such, it deserves a detailed investigation and analysis.

It goes without saying that the concept of *moksha* was not a new discovery of Mahatma, it has always been a basic idea covering the entire panorama of religious and philosophical tradition of India. It was not just one of the four *purusarthas* (*dharma*, *kama artha* and *moksha*) rather it was taken to be the ultimate *purusartha*, the culminating point of all other *purusarthas*. We, therefore, propose to take a bird's-eye view 'of the concept of *moksha*' in the Indian tradition, before taking up the Gandhian contribution to it for consideration.

### **Moksha in the Indian Tradition:**

In plain language, *moksha* or *mukti* stands for the release or being freed. As a religious term, it symbolises the release from the bondage of the law of *karma*. In more tangible and practical terms, it symbolises release from the ceaseless transmigration of birth, death and rebirth. In short, it means the freedom from the *avagaman*. However, *moksha* was never a static concept, it went on getting embellished in the course of the Indian religions and philosophical history. For instance, in the vedic age, it was not that all-pervading human goal. It was primarily *bhukti* and not *mukti* which remained as the primary concern of the people of the vedic age. Presumably, it was during the *Upanishadic* age that *moksha* came to be taken as the basic aspiration of the people. It was during this period that the two key concepts of *Atman* and *Brahman* came to occupy the pivotal position in religious and philosophical thinking. Subsequently, *moksha* became the most sought-after goal of human existence in the entire Indian tradition including Jain and Buddhist religious thinking. In fact, it came to be identified as the *param purusartha* – the ultimate goal of human existence. And that is why elaborate references were made to *moksha* in some of the major scriptures like the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, the *Manusmriti* the *Brahmasutra*, the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. In the subsequent period, *moksha* became a dominant theme in all six philosophical

systems of India, *Sankhya* – *Yoga*, *Puwa-mimansa* *Uttar-mimansa*, and *Nyaya-Vaisheska*. In all these places, the *moksha* stood for being liberated from the bondage of action as well as from the endless chain of transmigration.

However, it was the Vedanta school with different shades that laid the maximum emphasis on *moksha* as the supreme attainment. Adi-Sankaracharya, Ramanuja, Madhava and Vallabha along with numerous *bhasyakars* underscored the centrality of *moksha* as the ultimate goal of human existence. Initially, *moksha* was supposed to be afterlife affair. However, among the other scriptures, it was the *Bhagavad Gita* which introduced a new concept of being *mukta* even while remaining embodied. No less enthusiastic were the two protestant branches, Buddhism and Jainism about the centrality of *moksha* in human life. Both of them being agnostic did not take God as the reference point for *moksha*. Buddhism underlined cessation of desire as the way to *moksha* which it called *Nirvana*. *Nirvana* marked a transcendent state in which the individual is free from desire and the sense of selfhood and thereby free from the sense of suffering. Thus, being freed from the effects of *karma* one is totally freed from the cycle of death and rebirth. It is more like extinction of the flame of a lamp rather than the merger of the *atman* with the larger and ineffable eternal entity like *Paramatma* as was emphasized in some of the *Vedantic* schools. Jainism underlined the complete self-purification as a path leading to the state of *kaivalya* a pristine nature of human personality after being totally rid from human impurities and imperfections. In Jain tradition that is possible only through right knowledge, right faith and right conduct, known as *Triratna* (three jewels). One could safely conclude that despite the nuanced shades of differentiation, the common, substratum ground among all these religious and philosophical traditions could be traced and delineated to a great extent three points. They are:

- (i) The basic idea that runs through all these different tradition was that *moksha* was nothing but liberation from *sansara* (the phenomenal world) and its entanglements and ultimately from the cyclic order of birth, death and rebirth.
- (ii) The road to the state of *moksha* goes through *karmayoga*, *Jnanyoga*, *bhaktiyoga* and *Dhyanyoga* or their veritable mixture. The different systems underscored pivotal role of one of the paths in keeping with their religious and philosophical perceptions.
- (iii) *Moksha* came to be identified as the *param purusartha* – the ultimate goal of human existence.

### Adi-Sankaracharya on Moksha

Gandhi called himself as *advaitvadi*. Hence to understand his views on *moksha*, a brief discussion of the Adi-Sankaracharya view of *moksha* would be quite in order. The real foundation of the *advait vedant* was that the *atman* and *Brahman* were of the same genre. Hence, the discovery of the real nature of the *atman* brings *moksha* at the doorstep of the seeker. As to what stands between the *mumukshu* (the seeker) and the realisation of *moksha* is the veil of *avidya*—(ignorance) which superimposes and covers the real nature of the *atman*. The most classical illustration is given by a rope being taken as the snake primarily because of the ignorance. However, the veil of *avidya* is to be removed? In Adi-Sankaracharya view, right knowledge is the only effective means to tear off the veil of *avidya* and attain *moksha*. According to him *bhakti* and *karma* could ply only a subsidiary role in man's search for *moksha*, because, they could not lead him to the pristine state of liberation from the cycle of rebirth. Right knowledge could lead to real illumination which alone could dissolve the residual effects of the past *karma*. How to attain the right knowledge? In



Adi-Sankaracharya view *vairagya* (non-attachment to the worldly pursuits) a guru (preceptor) and study of scriptures alone could lead one to the right knowledge, which alone could lead one to the state of *moksha*.

### **Gandhi's Critique of the Traditional Indian Thinking about Moksha**

Like many other traditional Indian religious and spiritual concepts, Gandhi critiqued, as well as embellished and enriched the concept of *moksha*. He primarily found a number of basic problems with traditional Indian thinking on *moksha*. He came to realise that although theoretically *moksha* continued to be on top of the Indian spiritual aspirations, but it was no longer a living concept. As such, it had ceased to inspire, ignite human activities in day to day life. The people take it to be too distant a goal to be taken as an integral part of day to day life. Two, old and traditional ashram life (*brahmacharya*, *grihastha*, *vanaprastha* and *sanyasa*) had already closed to be a living and vibrant institution. Thus, there is no consistent movement from one stage of ashram life to its next stage. In fact, the entire life pattern of an individual is no longer being informed by his search for *moksha*. Search for *moksha* had come only to be associated with the last stage of the *ashram* life viz., *sanyasa* which in itself was no longer a vibrant institution. In fact, in the *sanyasa* stage of human life; it was suffering from the worst kind of insipid and dependency syndrome.<sup>21</sup> Three, Gandhi was not happy with the fact of *moksha* assuming vertically an other-worldly character. In other words, the people had come to believe that it could be attained in the post-death period. Gandhi's dissatisfaction with other-worldly character of *moksha* arose from the fact that *moksha* had become a distant goal or what Anthony Parel calls 'an achieved state of affairs' and not as a lifelong pursuit. Gandhi was aware that no embodied soul could attain *moksha* in its all perfection, but even that requires lifelong engagement and

pursuit of a lifelong moral and spiritual struggle. In his views, the *moksha* could not be postponed the last stage of life, viz., *sanyasa* rather it should be integrated in the day to day life pattern of an individual. Fourth, as a votary of the common man, he was firmly of the opinion that the pursuit of *moksha* could not be reserved for a select few. Hence, for him, participation in the phenomenal world and pursuit of *moksha* was not only in consonance, rather, that is, only way to test its efficacy. In fact, he went a step further and even expressed his strong disenchantment with their isolated style of life of yogis and their gross indifference to the problems of the mundane world. As he puts it:

‘The truth is that those whom the world knows as yogis are not really yogis; nor what the world describes as four modes of liberation or spiritual enlightenment are such in fact. These phrases are used merely to deceive the world’.<sup>22</sup>

It is clear from the above that Gandhi was never irreverent to yogis on a personal level, but he remained skeptical about their contributions to the solutions of the mundane problems, as they usually remained cut-off from the hustle and bustle of the phenomenal world. He did not repose his faith in the concept of *jivanmukta* either. He had his own arguments in favour of such a formulation. One, that so long as one remains embodied, some violence is found to be committed and even an iota of violence could deprive one from the attainment of *moksha*. Alternatively, if one is totally devoid of egoistic attachment, then the body could hardly survive. And that is why he strongly believed that no one could attain *moksha* so long as one is embodied. Thus, he avoided both the extremes: that of yogis claiming to be *jivanmukta* with this very body and the claim that pursuit of *moksha* is an affair of the last phase of one’s life. He took *moksha* as a life long pursuit while participating in the mundane affairs.

## Gandhi's Contribution to the Concept of Moksha

It is clear from the above discussion that Gandhi was not fully satisfied with the traditional views on *moksha* – particularly its world-negating approach. He has his own views of *moksha* both on conceptual as well as the pursuit level. On the conceptual plane he made several significant contributions to the ongoing discourse on *moksha*.

First Gandhi's concept of *moksha* is rooted in his basic *advaitic* faith in unity of all beings and his equally firm faith in pure and stainless *atman* residing in every human heart. This *atman* is true self and pure self, but when embodied, an empirical self is super imposed on it. This *atman*, true self, is nothing but a spec of divinity in its purest form; while the empirical self is grossly involved in mundane affairs. Ordinarily, it is the empirical self that dominates human heart and true self remains hidden and might go even in the realm of *vismriti* (unawareness). Therefore, the real challenge for a spiritual seeker is to pierce through the empirical self and reach out to the true self. But reaching out to the true self is easier said than done. One has to go whole hog in this process of self-transformation, ultimately leading to self-realisation. This is another name for *moksha*, self-liberation or whatever name one gives to it. It is awareness that every soul has partaken from the same source of divinity. It is at that stage that one realizes what I have called in my book on *Gita (samanarya yoga)* '*akatva* and *samatva*' – *akatra* being the realisation of the unity of all beings and *samatrva* being a rare mental state of equality and equanimity. Such a realisation is nothing but *moksha*, but such a state of mind might lead one to a state of total 'desirelessness' and thereby 'total inaction or what is traditionally called a state of *nivriti*. As against *nivriti* there is a concept of *pravriti* which underlines the fact of the involvement in the mundane affairs of the phenomenal world.

Where Gandhi makes a departure and makes distinct contribution is that following the footsteps of the teacher of *Bhagavad Gita*. He reconciles and even transcends the debate on *pravrits* vs *nivriti*. He pleads for working out for *moksha* by integrating *nivriti* in *Pravriti* through introducing the twin concepts of 'selfless action (*niskama karma*) and non-attachment (*anasakti*). It is through such a process that one reaches what the *Gita* calls the state of *sttiprajnata* the real stability of mind. This is nothing short of *moksha*.

But Gandhi did believe that attainment of perfect *moksha* is not possible for an embodied soul. Hence, he also supported the one aspect of the traditional concept of *moksha* that it could be attained only after *sharirpat* (death). As he put it: 'As a Hindu, I believe that *moksha* is freedom from birth by breaking the bonds of flesh by becoming one with God' <sup>23</sup>His faith in the unity of all beings and in the cosmic interdependence at the deepest level, prompted him to arrive at the conclusion that no individual could constitute an island by himself and, as such, his every act of omission and commission is bound to affect the other people. One practical implication of such *advaitic* world view is that the people must love and serve one another. Hence, for Gandhi, service to the fellow-beings is bound to be an integral part of our pursuit of *moksha*. Two, as per his *advaitic* faith, every individual is endowed with a soul which is pure in its pristine form. Hence, every individual, irrespective of his location and profession in the society is quite competent for the pursuit of *moksha* as his avocation. In other words, every man on the street, not only the elected few, is equally qualified for the pursuit of *moksha*. In this respect, Gandhi views were nearer to Ramanuja rather than Adi-Sankaracharya. Unlike Shankara, in whose view *shudra* were not entitled to work for their *moksha* Acharya Ramanuja opened the gate of *Bhakti* for everybody irrespective of his/her position in *varnaashram dharma*. So did Gandhi, But Gandhi's

*advaitic* faith in unity and inter-dependence of the people and his equally firm faith in the phenomenal world did not take him to the path of socio-political economic collectivism with its concomitant belief in a totalitarian ideology. This was so because he was equally a firm believer in the autonomy of the individual, which in his views deserves to be respected and not violated. Thus, at the conceptual level, Gandhi's contribution in respect of *moksha* was his world affirming egalitarianism. In other words, he predicated the pursuit of *moksha* on two basic premises: (a) there is no other world than one in which we live. As such, we have to work for its betterment and (b) that *moksha* would have to be pursued not as an independent but as an integrated whole along with the other *purusartha* of *artha kama* and *dharma*.

Another major contribution of Gandhi in respect of the concept of *moksha* is his insistence on political work being in consistence with the pursuit of *moksha*. In this respect, he differed fundamentally from two stalwart of the generation preceding him: Tilak and Vivekananda. Vivekananda with all his concern for *daridranarayan* was not in favour of a realised soul for the participation in politics. In fact, he was opposed to it. Gandhi rejected both these formulations. He strongly believed that politics is like the 'coil of snake' covering the entire social framework and, hence, need for even a realised soul to grapple with it. As he puts it:

'Every one has realised that popular awareness could be brought about only through political activity. If such activity was spiritualised it could show the path of *moksha*'<sup>24</sup>

He made equally distinct contributions to the praxis of *moksha*. As we have seen Gandhi rejected the esoteric, mystical world negating and spiritually isolationist attitude to *moksha*, but his world and life affirming attitude did not take away much neglected scope of morality from the realm of worldly

affairs, particularly political pursuits. Many people including Lokamanya Tilak had believed that politics and morality were two mutually exclusive things. Tilak believed that politics was meant for worldly people and not for *sadhus*. Hence, one's response to the other's challenge would decide the nature of the former. In other words, as would be the challenge, so would be the response. Such an attitude gave a big leverage and freedom in the hands of the respondent. In support of his contention Tilak had interpreted *Gita* (Chapter IV: 11) to underscore the point that even Lord Krishna's response to the other would depend on the nature of the other's challenge. But Gandhi interpreted the same stanza in his own imitable way to say that since all ways are Krishna's way, hence He accepts every one, whichever way he approaches him. Thus, Gandhi underscored the point that notwithstanding his world affirming philosophy, the need for strictest adherence to 'honesty' and 'fair-play' could hardly be overemphasised. Thus, the pursuit of *moksha* and worldly affairs were brought into consonance rather than in a dichotomous relationship as was usually believed.

In other words, the major contribution of Gandhi was that he made it possible the pursuit of other three *purusartha* consistent with that of *moksha*. That is why Gandhi often said that he need not go to a cave in Himalaya as he carried a 'cave' in his own heart. The next fundamental question Gandhi grappled with was that out of three paths viz. *bhakti*, *jnan* and *karma*, which one would lead to the state of *moksha*. Traditionally, there had been a debate on which of the three is the best way to reach out to the state of *moksha*. Adi-Sankaracharya favoured, *jnana marg* Ramanuja and other medieval saints were for *bhakti*, while Tilak had argued for *karmayoga*. Gandhi was certain that the traditional path of *bhakti* which was nothing more than unrestrained exhibition of emotions was not the right path for the pursuit of *moksha*. For him the road to *moksha* would have to pass through *jnan* and

*karma*. But his preference was for *karmayoga*. He found a reaffirmation of his views on *karmayoga* in his spiritual source book, the *Bhagavad Gita*. He interpreted the *Gita* to bring all three paths in consonance as the practice of *Karmayoga* was not possible without *bhakti* and *jnan*. Nevertheless his preference was for *Karmayoga*. But Tilak had also pleaded for *Karmayoga* backed by *bhakti* and *jnan*. Where did Tilak and Gandhi differ in their interpretation of the concept of *karmayoga* in the *Gita*. What departure did Gandhi make? Gandhi was aware that 'action' leads to bondage. Thus, the real challenge was to find a way out from the dilemma of inaction and bondage. How to pursue worldly action which does not lead to bondage? Gandhi again found a way out in his interpretation of the *Gita*. He found a key in the concept of *anasakti* (non attachment) to open the lock and find a way out from *karma* bondage syndrome.

He strongly believed that it was *asakti* (attachment) particularly for grabbing the fruits of one's action which leads to bondage. So, once this *asakti* is taken out, and then *karma* is turned into *karmayoga* which frees one from the bondage accruing from action. And it is his emphasis on *anasakti* that differentiates his concept of *karmayoga* from that of Tilak. Gandhi, while emphasising the primacy of *karmayoga* did not totally reject the importance of the two other paths of *bhakti* and *jnan*. In fact, he integrated all the three paths in such a way that they did not appear mutually exclusive; rather he found them mutually supporting. On the basis of his deep study of the *Bhagavad Gita* he found that the three ideal men of the *Gita*, viz., *karmayogi*, *jnani* and *bhakta* in a way, are one and the same. As one has to realise knowledge regarding the unity of all beings in one's own being without which one could hardly walk on the path of *moksha*. Similarly, faith in God was absolutely necessary for the relentless pursuit of *moksha* as without this faith one may not be able to walk steadfastly on the

path of *moksha*. Thus the reconciliation all the three paths of *jñans*, *karma* and *bhakti* as a means for the attainment of *moksha* was one of the major contributions of Gandhi as it brought 'sacred' and secular in continuum and not substituting one for the other.

However, the real challenge was how to engage oneself in the pursuit of *moksha* while carrying on with day to day activities. In this respect, he underlined need for self-discipline as an effective means for pursuing *moksha*. He strongly believed that though *atman* is ever pure and never gets stained, but in the embodied soul, there are both Godly and devilish tendencies inherent in it. In fact, they are continuously striving for supremacy. Thus, the real challenge is to establish the supremacy of godly tendencies by subduing the devilish one. And that requires rigorous self discipline to subdue the demons of *kama* (lust) *krodha* (anger) *lobha* (greed) and *moha* (delusion) and imbibing some of the Godly tendencies like love, compassion and service-spirit. However, unlike the traditional yogi, for a *karmayogi* it could not be an all-consuming passionate pursuit of *sadhana*. Through self-discipline one has to reach a state of equanimity (*samata*) and *anasakti* (non-attachment) so that the pursuit of *karmayoga* becomes natural and spontaneous. Moving further on the same road, one has to perceive the feeling of unity of all beings in the depth of his being. Not only that, a mental state of stability and equanimity would have to be achieved and strengthened through imbibing living faith in God. And constant prayer will have to be resorted to feel the presence of God in one's being and, thereby, intensify the process of self-purification. All this will lead one to *atma sakshatakar* (self-realisation) which would ultimately lead to the 'vision of the 'Supreme' which alone could finally stabilise his position in the 'self'. But the danger of spiritual 'fall' would be always lurking there, hence constant effort and vigilance would be required to retain the



position already attained. As he observed in his letter to Jamnalal Bajaj:

‘*Moksha* is liberation from impure thought. Complete extinction of impure thought is impossible without ceaseless penance. There is only way to achieve this. The moment an impure thought arises confront it with, pure one. This is possible with God’s grace and God’s grace comes through ceaseless communion with Him and complete self-surrender’<sup>25</sup>

To sum up, it is evident from the above discussion that *moksha* was the ultimate goal of Gandhi’s life. All his involvement in the mundane affairs including his participation in the national struggle was part of his larger concern for *moksha*. He was firmly of the opinion that his national service was a ‘part of his training for freeing his soul from the bondage’. For him the road to salvation passed through the incessant toil in the service of his countrymen. Thus, for Gandhi’s quest for *moksha* consisted as much as in building-up a society of free individuals as much as in attaining a state of complete self-purification and self-realisation. Both of them reinforced each other. And as he himself said that all his endeavour was directed to that end.

## VI

### **Gandhi’s Pancha Mahavrat : A New Integration.**

Gandhi in his own imitable way made a valiant effort to resolve this tension by providing a new basis for the relationship between the man and the phenomenal world. He laid this foundation primarily on his *advaitic* understanding of God, man and the world and their symbolic relationship. In the process, he rejects the Western view of egocentric man getting totally immersed in the phenomenal world in the search of ever eluding satisfaction and happiness. At the same time, he was not persuaded to repose his faith in one of the dominant Indian philosophical view of total rejection of the phenomenal world

which puts man in a state of total freedom by freeing him from the vagaries of the world as well as from his lower passions. Gandhi not only rejected these two extreme views but also put forward his own perspective on the issue. This he does by offering his own concept of a man, though essentially rooted in his *advaitic* vision. According to him, there is a true self in every human being though apparently envelopes in his phenomenal personality. The tragedy of man is that his true self remains masked and hidden. Hence, the real challenge for him is to unmask and rediscover his true self which bears nothing but a spec of divinity in himself. However, he does not totally reject the empirical man, and concedes that both Godly and devilish tendencies are inherent in human heart. To quote his words: ‘We were perhaps all originally brutes, and I am prepared to believe that we have become men by a slow process of evolution from the brute’.<sup>26</sup>

But his *advaitic* faith in the divine nature of man prompts him to believe that there is a distinct possibility of man moving towards his spiritual perfection through his *sadhana* and penance. He was even willing to concede that complete perfection might be beyond human reach. But as man has partaken quite a bit of divine nature, it is possible for every man to retrieve and discover his true self. Accordingly, no man is beyond redemption. This is partly because man is endowed with reason, discrimination and free will. But this endowment might prove insufficient causal factor to bring about the real inner change. Hence, there is the need for personal *sadhana*, self-effort for spiritual emancipation. As he wrote: ‘And that absolute transformation can come by inward prayer and a definite and living recognition of the presence of the mighty spirit residing within’.<sup>27</sup>

Gandhi rejected the western concept of egocentric empirical self. But he goes beyond even the Indian tradition in

this respect and carves out a distinct niche for his thought on the issues involved. He neither accepts the dominant Adi-Sankaracharya *vedantic* view which recommends total disentanglement from the vagaries of the phenomenal world for the seekers of salvation. Nor did he accept the other view that observing four staged *ashram* and *varnashrama dharma* could lead one to the other shore of salvation. Thus, his real strength lies in the fact that he steers clear from traditional controversy about *pravriti* and *nivriti*. He came to believe that neither the renunciation of the phenomenal world nor in the blind pursuit of *varnashrama dharma* could take the man to the other shore. He argues that *varnashrama dharma* must be transcended by *sadharna dharma*. But he even moves a step further. For him the real challenge before man is to find the transcendental centre in his own being which is a search for God Himself. Not only that, even the phenomenal world is nothing but the manifestation of God. As Gandhi wrote that, 'from the imperishable unmanifest down to the perishable atom everything in the universe is an expression of the Supreme. And which is why everything in the world deserves our utmost reverence'. As he put it:

'We may not know God, but we know his creation. Service of His creation is the service of God'. Such a firm faith in the unity of all being has several implications for Gandhi. In the first place, it demolishes the citadel of humanism created by the European renaissance that the man is supreme and every other animate and inanimate being in the cosmos is meant for his comfort and consumption. Gandhi argued that such a living faith in the unity goes beyond the universal brotherhood of men as it excluded all types of exploitation including those of the other species.

The second implication is that every one must be treated on equal footing and every kind of inequality is ruled out in such a perspective.<sup>28</sup> The third implication is that whether the

world is real or unreal, one can not remain indifferent to the sufferings of the fellow beings.<sup>29</sup> In short, without going into the philosophical debate about the reality and/or unreality of the world he accepts its existence and gets committed to work for the alleviation of other sufferings. As to the question of action in the phenomenal world, he finds a solution in the concept of *anasakti* and *nishkam karma* which takes away the sting of bondage from the action. For every selfless action in the cause of the people does not cause any stain to the doer as it is nothing but an action in the nature of *loksangraha*. Hence, it is the renunciation of the fruits of action and the feeling of doership which is important and not the question of reality or unreality of the phenomenal world.

To sum up, Gandhi found God, man and the world of the same genre. A firm faith in God is the first and foremost step in this direction. But Gandhi's God is not of anthropomorphic nature but as a substratum of the entire cosmos and all its creatures. Thus, a man endowed with such a philosophical outlook finds God in everything and everything in God. Thus, he transcends the traditional debate about *pravriti* (involvement) and *nivriti* (renunciation). He adopts a renunciation in respect of the fruits of his action and active involvement in the phenomenal world. Such a man goes through certain types of *yama-niyamas* in an attempt at self-purification and to strengthen his will to love and serve every creature of the world and ultimately to attain the goal of self-realisation. It is with such a worldview and his firm faith in God and in the perfectibility of man that Gandhi loved and served the world all through his life. It goes without saying that *anasakti* is the lynchpin of such world view. In one word, Gandhi, vision of God, man and the phenomenal world is an integrated one in which all three are in harmony and in continuum.

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## **Gandhi and Contemporary Non-violent Struggles**

***John S. Moolakkattu***

I am thankful to the Director and Dean of Studies of the Institute of Gandhian Studies for inviting me to deliver the fifth Ravindra Varma memorial lecture today, on the death anniversary of Varmaji, as he was endearingly called by everyone. My association with him was intermittent and brief, but had an intensity of a rare kind, which could be attributed to the special affection that Shri. Ravindra Varma had for me. I was persuaded by him in 2006 to take up the editorship of *Gandhi Marg*, the Quarterly Journal of the Gandhi Peace Foundation. But he did not survive the year, leaving me with the sole responsibility of editing the journal, with several issues behind schedule and with not enough good quality papers at hand to fill the columns. Many had seriously thought that the epitaph of the journal was about to be written. I was able to keep the journal afloat thanks to the inspiration that I derived from Ravindra Varma.

I am therefore highly honoured to deliver this lecture instituted in the name of the Founder, particularly at a time when the Institute is celebrating its Silver Jubilee year. In the last years of his life, Shri. Ravindra Varma had expressed the desire to develop the Institute as an International Centre for Research and Training in Nonviolence, possibly with some kind of affiliation to the United Nations. He did not live to see the UN declaring Gandhi's birth anniversary as the international day for nonviolence in the following year, nor the

creation of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Research in Peace Education and Sustainable Development as a category 1 Institute of the UNESCO in New Delhi five years later. However, Shri. Ravindra Varma's efforts have not been in vain and the Institute of Gandhian Studies has now grown into an institution of high visibility, making significant contributions to Gandhian Studies and establishing collaborative links with like-minded organizations both within and outside the country.

The theme that I like to dwell on today is contemporary nonviolent action. There is an abundance of literature relating to nonviolent action. At the turn of the millennium, Shri. Ravindra Varma had organised an international seminar on the experiences of nonviolent action worldwide and their implications for the future. The topic of today's lecture would also be in the similar line.

Events in the early part of 2011 as well as the last two decades show that more and more people are turning to nonviolence as a means of expressing grievances and resolving conflicts. Regions that were generally seen as impervious to nonviolent action have also turned round. But the very idea of a revolution is still centred on violence, which is a legacy of the French revolution. Because repressive regimes relied on violence, the sincerity of persons opposing such regimes was measured on the degree of willingness they have to eliminate their enemies by employing violence. Employing violence was a kind of self-sacrifice for a greater cause informed by loyalty, duty and discipline. The notion of violence was presented as redemptive, a virtue attributed to the violence of good guys against the violence of the bad guys. The Just War doctrine was often presented in virtuous light, on the presumption that those undertaking it are the good guys.

Advocates of violence for social change would also advance the reason that human nature is inherently evil. Politics



therefore becomes one that has to factor violence into it as there is no other choice. Nonviolence, for Fanon, is responsible for sustaining the violence of the oppressors, which can only be tackled through counter violence. Fascism tells us that violence has a dramatic effect on spectators. It is also seen as progressive and playing a midwifery role – like the suffering that the mother is allowed to undergo before the baby is born.

We can refer to three types of violence, based on the typology that Johan Galtung has suggested. The first is personal violence, which is direct harm inflicted on the human body including killing. Then comes structural violence, which is any form of oppression where direct violence may not be present, and the victims may have internalized such oppression. The third is cultural violence, which consists of attitudes and beliefs that justify or normalize both personal and structural violence.<sup>1</sup>

Why is violence bad? It is bad because it shuts the door for dialogue as it is based on an unflinching belief in the rightness of one's cause. Secondly, violence brutalizes not only the victims, but also the offender. Thirdly, it can lead, on many occasions, to counter-violence as violence has a tendency to reproduce itself. Fourthly, the effects of violence are most often irreversible. Fifthly, violence privileges force and the professions based on force such as the police and the armed militia, whether of the government or of the rebels. Finally, violent revolutions are less participatory as they are based on the strength of the able-bodied alone.

Nonviolent action is known by various names. In the fifties of the last century, Chief Albert Luthuli of South Africa described his brand of nonviolence as *defiance campaigns*. In Kwame Nkruma's Ghana, it was known as *positive action*. In Latin American countries, it is understood as *non-submission*

and in the Arab world it is presented as *sumud* or steadfastness. In all these cases, it is not the equivalent of passive opposition, but an active form of engagement. In the literature and in practice, terms such as “nonviolent struggle,” “people power,” “civilian-based defense,” “nonviolent conflict,” and “strategic nonviolent conflict,” are all common.

Nonviolent action is any form of public action aimed at rectifying injustices, resisting invasion and bringing about desirable social changes through peaceful means. It is both a method of conflict expression and conflict transformation with enough space for both dialogue and resistance. One can say that it reinforces the bases of democracy. In nonviolent action, you have some control over what you do. The effects of your actions are reversible. It is an active method of asserting the power of masses, one of withdrawing consent of the people upon which all oppressive structures are built.<sup>2</sup> It is participatory in that everyone who is able to participate in the protest regardless of their agility and age is valuable. Nonviolent action has been generally divided into two, or perhaps even three categories.

The first is the Gandhian approach to nonviolent action, known commonly as the principled approach. In it nonviolence is adopted for its intrinsic worth as the most humane way of conducting and resolving conflict- one that will allow reason (debate) and qualities of the heart to express themselves optimally. In other words, it employs a mix of both the force of the better argument and the force of the heart or soul force in the Gandhian sense. The intention is not to defeat the opponent, but to bring him to your side since the opponent is seen as a part of your own self, through persuasion and suffering (if need be). The adherents of principled nonviolence are not obsessed with cost- benefit calculations or mere settlement of the issue, but are concerned with the possibilities

of integration beyond settlement. In terms of stages of conflict progression, it envisages steps such as conscientisation, nonviolent mobilization and transformation. Values of trust, separation of persons from their acts, not exploiting the weaknesses of the opponent are key ingredients of this approach. Nonviolent action becomes a kind of truth contestation or moral *jiu jitsu* where the relative truth held by one party engages with that of the other party with conviction and humility.

In contrast, there is the narrower application of nonviolent action, primarily as a strategy or technique purely because of its superiority in terms of costs and benefits. Those who subscribe to this view need not have a deep commitment to nonviolence as such, but a commitment to the technique only. They are not averse to seeing nonviolent action as almost like a battle short of use of weapons, and the intention is often to defeat the opponents and exploit their weaknesses. Gene Sharp who subscribes to this view calls it “strategy for imperfect people in an imperfect world”.<sup>3</sup> There is greater space for expressing anger. The effectiveness of a strategy is judged in terms of its ability to bring maximum pressure on the opponent as well as on his resources. Like Sharp most western scholars define nonviolence as not doing intentional physical harm to other people and employing nonviolent action as a cost-effective or pragmatic way of challenging oppression. But the problem with such narrow notion of nonviolence is that it does not take account of structural and cultural violence. I also see a third group, a sort of middle path, which, although is committed to nonviolence as a principle, is equally concerned with the consequences of nonviolent action or their effectiveness. I would place Johan Galtung in this category.<sup>4</sup>

In real life, it is not often easy to make such clear distinctions. As far as the adversary is concerned, one form of

nonviolent action may be indistinguishable from the other. There is also the argument that it is not possible for ordinary people to practise the highly principled forms of nonviolence and that they would find pragmatic nonviolence more appealing. A result-oriented pragmatic nonviolence can be a useful starting point for the development of more principled forms in future. The principled form may be held up as an ideal standard to reach, but will prove to be a fetter on actionists if such a standard is insisted upon from the start itself. Gandhi himself was aware of the possibilities of such progression in nonviolence. It may be noted that it is pragmatic nonviolence that is being increasingly sold in the West and in the many uprisings against authoritarianism that we see all around the world. Gandhi is seen through pragmatic lenses and Gene Sharp has been known for secularizing Gandhi and presenting him as a tactician par excellence to potential nonviolent actionists worldwide.

Marxists would see Gandhian nonviolence as reactionary, serving the interests of the oppressors. Violence, for them, is about defending life while nonviolence amounts to sacrificing life. The narrower nonviolent actionists would say that Gandhian type of nonviolence is confusing and far too religious for its easy adoption across cultural barriers. Some would say that one should distinguish between action directed against a foreign adversary and one's own seemingly legitimate national adversary. This was the bone of contention between Jayaprakash Narain and Vinoba. Vinoba said, in a post-conflict situation like India, there should not be nonviolent resistance, but nonviolent assistance through programmes like the Bhoodan. Feminist theorists would question the notion of withdrawing consent from patriarchy by saying that it is inapplicable in the case of women.

One can see four types of nonviolent action in contemporary world. There are **Pro-democracy movements or resistance against authoritarian/semi-authoritarian regimes:** examples include Portugal 1974, Argentina 1977-81, Iran 1978-9, Philippines 1986 (People Power movement) and 2001 (People Power II), Chile 1983-89, Poland 1983-9, Haiti 1985, Burma 1988 and 2007 (Saffron Revolution), China 1989, Czechoslovakia 1989 (Velvet Revolution), East Germany 1989, Hungary 1989, Mali 1989-92, Nepal 1990 and 2006, Thailand 1992, Serbia 2000, Georgia 2003 (Rose Revolution), Ukraine 2004 (Orange Revolution), Kyrgyzstan 2005 (Tulip Revolution). Maldives (2008), Iran (Twitter) 2009 Arab Spring (2010-11). The second focuses on **Demands for civil rights in a multicultural state.** Examples are Black people in the USA (1950s and 1960s) and South Africa (1950-1990). The third are **movements seeking national self-determination or resisting external occupation:** examples include India 1919-1945, Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968, Tibet 1987-9, Palestine 1987-93 (first intifada), Kosovo 1990-99, East Timor 1988-99, Lebanon 2005 (Cedar Revolution). Finally, there are **Livelihood-** related movements often against forces of international capital, often in complicity with the state, and their number is increasing. A notable example is the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People in Nigeria led by late Ken Saro-Wiwa

Since 1989 the conventional violent logic of revolution seems to have changed irrevocably in many parts of the world. Revolutions are now no longer what they used to be. The Georgian Rose Revolution in 2003 and the Ukrainian Orange Revolution of 2004 had only limited goals to restore some semblance of order in the polity which was realized through a carnival type action. This later led to the replacement of one set of leadership with another through elections. But the mobilization itself would have generated the self-confidence of

the people who partook in it, which has long-term effect on their ability to defend their freedom. These 'colour revolutions' however did not seek to build a new system, but only sought to restore constitutional order and some degree of probity in public life. What is significant after the 1989 movements was the rejection of violence as a means to revolution, which was a real break with the Jacobin-style violent revolutions of the past. Roberts calls this 'progressive substitution', which 'sees civil resistance in progressive substitution for the use and threat of force. . . . The hope is that it will replace reliance on force progressively in a succession of issue-areas'.<sup>5</sup> Through progressive substitution, it is hoped that the relevance of armed forces can be minimised. Stephen Zunes thinks that there is no correlation between decline in violence in the Third World and the emergence of a more tolerable domestic situation. Instead he thinks that the mode of expression of grievances has changed to one of using nonviolent means. This shift has been caused by the high costs of armed insurrection, realization of the greater efficacy of unarmed insurrections and awareness of the fact that armed revolts have had problems with creating stable post-revolutionary societies.<sup>6</sup>

The most recent series of nonviolent actions in the Arab world has demonstrated the efficacy of unarmed insurrection even in the Muslim countries. The self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, the young Tunisian who was forced to shut down his vegetable stall, served as the trigger for the initial protests. This was in some ways comparable to the self-immolation of Czech protester Jan Palach in 1969, over the Soviet invasion of his country. Protests in Prague marking the 20th anniversary of Palach's death proved a catalyst for the Czechs' 1989 Velvet Revolution. While the Arab Spring is aimed at overhauling the whole system, Hazare movement is concerned with an anti-corruption bill and the inclusion of the Prime Minister and the Judiciary in its jurisdiction. Whereas in

West Asia the protestors had no recognized leadership, the leadership and stature of Hazare played a key role in the Indian case. An indefinite fast undertaken by a person known for his integrity introduced a moral element of self-sacrifice, which was used as a source of public mobilization. One may question the propriety of having a super ombudsman in the country with the authority to investigate and prosecute officials suspected of abusing their public positions or whether it serves the country any good to undermine the very political institutions having an electoral mandate. The significance of the Hazare movement lay in its ability to bring the central government administration to its knees using the resources that a modern-day non-violent movement can marshal. It was the first time since independence that the government had to yield to pressure from a non-violent movement. Hence it has a demonstration effect on people who could potentially consider nonviolent action as a future mode of protest.

Participation of civil society leaders can be seen as a part and parcel of the democratic process and a bulwark against corporate lobbyists known for their ability to lobby for legislation advantageous to them. Although, on occasions, the Hazare movement resorted to practices that cannot be strictly described as nonviolent such as engaging in personalized attacks, the movement received unprecedented support from urban population especially the youth. The demonstrations in the Arab world also showed an explicit rejection of the Al Qaeda strategy of violence. This is the culmination of a trend that has been developing in the Arab and Islamic world for several years. While there was support for bin Laden and his methods in the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq, there has been a rapid decline from then on. The fact that some of the autocratic rulers in the Arab world could be removed by the sheer determination of unarmed people has inflicted a heavy

blow to violence, and Al Qaeda has been quick in releasing a video supporting the Arab Spring.

In Zunes's list of cases, 'most [of the unarmed insurrections] have not been exclusively nonviolent', but in each case violent incidents were "not the primary or most politically significant elements of the struggle".<sup>7</sup> In line with this, Schock argues that "it would be a grave mistake for social scientists to limit their analysis of nonviolent action to only those rare struggles that were completely nonviolent or to overlook or dismiss the power of nonviolent action in struggles where violence occurred".<sup>8</sup>

Nonviolent action has not always been successful. Failed movements include Hungary(1956), Czechoslovakia (1968), Tiananmen Square (1989), and Tibet and perhaps Burma where the banner is still held aloft by Aung San Sui Chi. Partially successful ones include the Palestinian first intifada and the US civil rights movement, which contributed to ending official segregation in the deep South, but did not change the economic and social discrimination suffered by African Americans.

Nonviolent campaigns do not guarantee that a spirit of nonviolence will continue to prevail once the struggle is over, especially if the activists adopt them for purely tactical reasons. In many instances, people's power fell short of achieving the type of social transformation that would lead to a more participatory society. There could be scenarios in which violence leads to desirable ends, often due to factors other than the application of violence per se. Hence should we not say that nonviolence is superior rather than saying that violence will always fail? Then there are also deficiencies of the consent theory in non-democratic non-Western societies. For example, China and Burma where political power is not just a straightforward relation between the ruler and the ruled will be



difficult candidates for nonviolent action. Based on his study of Intifada in Palestine, Andrew Rigby tells us that what Israel wants is to rule over the territory of Palestine and do not want the people of Palestine, thereby foreclosing the space for Palestinian resistance based on the consent theory.<sup>9</sup>

Every nonviolent action should be home grown- not imported from outside - although harnessing international support for it is necessary and immensely possible in our globalised world. External support was provided by the international community in the struggle against apartheid. Galtung talks about the “great chain of nonviolence”, to refer to such international links.<sup>10</sup> While one should plan for actions and learn from previous cases (both successful and failed), each action has to be sensitive to the local context. Salt may not catch the imagination of the public elsewhere as it did in India. Hunger strike common in India, may not have much appeal in other cultures. Using proxies for nonviolent action (on various grounds) may be acceptable in the West, but may not be so in other cultures.

There is need for greater engagement with believers in violence. The cause of nonviolence is better served through such debates. Planning for nonviolent actions, improving understanding of nonviolent action (many activists participate without knowing its potential or knowing Gandhi), making non-violence a whole system organising principle, transforming the sciences- especially social and political sciences – are necessary. We also need to be aware that there is the danger of nonviolent action being used for wrong causes as it becomes more popular. For example, in the US both abortionists and antiabortionists use nonviolent protest for achieving their demands or goals.

Reckless violence will lead people to think that the intention of such violence is to destroy society. But if we

protest in a manner that makes the spectators to think and use slogans that stir their conscience, the effect would be spectacular. Such movements are likely to get greater respect and publicity. Iranians shouting ‘Allahu Akbar’ rather than ‘down with Ahmadinejad’, nuns in the front of the movement against Marcos in 1986 are cases in point. Further, nonviolent activists need to be self-reflective, ever willing to correct themselves rather than being obstinate. They should not allow themselves to be co-opted, and should be self-financed as far as possible. There have been accusations that Ukraine and Lebanon revolutions were US-sponsored. Governments often see nonviolent actionists as anarchists. Therefore it is necessary that nonviolent movements rope in respectable people who cannot be designated as anarchists. I say this because in the US nonviolent activists are often called as low level terrorists. Every nonviolent action seeks support from elements in the government as well by appealing to the other roles of people, such as soldiers as fathers, uncles and friends. In every nonviolent movement, there will be some violent acts, which need to be isolated and their impact minimized to protect the overall character of the movement.

The Indian state’s response to nonviolent action is often ambivalent. Civilian protests in the insurgency-infested areas of Northeast and Kashmir are not seen as much different from the militant activities undertaken by known insurgents. In other words, a secessionist is a secessionist regardless of whether he or she employs peaceful means or violent means to realize the goals. When people sympathise with the plight of the marginalized in the heartland of India where the Naxalites have a strong presence, such expressions are often dubbed as pro-Naxal and therefore seen as no less subversive. What is remarkable is the fact that even Narendra Modi has come to believe in the power of nonviolence - a late realization by a power holder who is yet to apologise for the 2002 pogrom in

Gujarat. The movement of Medha Patkar against the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam was actually crushed, and with the dam already in place, new interests have been formed around it. When nonviolent movements for defending the lives of people are crushed, the state is giving a long arm to those who subscribe to violence to have a field day as we saw in Dantewada in 2010.

Anna Hazare's movement became a hit because it was organized around corruption, which had a lowest common denominator appeal across a cross section, which Medha Patkar's movement did not have. This also speaks about how a movement needs these days to be linked up with civil society in order to gain that stature. Same applies with respect to use of the media including the internet. Hazare himself had invited Irom Sharmila Chanu to join him in Ram Lila grounds, which she politely refused. Instead she asked him to come down to Imphal to join her protest. It is symptomatic of how a northeasterner will respond to protests in the mainland. For her the Armed Forces Special Powers Act itself is one of the foundational instruments for the perpetuation of corruption in the country. Whether Hazare and his followers would appreciate this position is a different story.

Individualised nonviolent action can at times arise from some kind of helplessness. In the case of Irom Sharmila Chanu, it was her way of responding to the masculine state by presenting her body in self-sacrifice to make the state relent. But even after 11 years, the state has not relented, but has nonetheless kept her body alive to prevent a backlash. It was seen by the Indian state as a challenge arising from the borderlands worthy of inattention at least for some more time. But the Hazare movement arose in the very heartland of India drawing the urban segments who play a major role in opinion formation in the country. The Indian government would also

have been nervous about an Arab Spring type movement taking place in the country.

After the *clash of civilizations* thesis and 9/11 there was a propensity in many parts of the world to associate Islam with violence, literally ruling out the possibility of nonviolent Muslim protest motivated by secular or religious factors. However, the concept of nonviolence is not foreign or new to Muslims. Khudai Khidmatgar of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan was a classic case of Islamic nonviolence, Calling his supporters as 'Servants of God', the red-shirted revolutionaries pledged not to spill one drop of British blood. It was a principled form of nonviolence. Ghaffar Khan told the unbelieving people: "There is nothing surprising in a Muslim or a Pathan [Pashtun] like me subscribing to the creed of nonviolence. It is not a new creed. It was followed fourteen hundred years ago by the Prophet all the time he was in Mecca."<sup>11</sup>

Gandhi may be a marginal factor in the Arab Spring, but oppression will continue to be resisted in the name of Islam, which will give it a special character suited to the Arab situation. The future of nonviolence lies not so much in following Gandhian ideals, but in interpreting ones' own culture and religion in a suitable manner and draw inspiration for nonviolence from it. Ghaffar Khan saw it in Islam, Martin Luther King Jr. in Gandhi and Christianity, Chief Albert Luthuli in the symbol of the Cross and the Dalai Lama in his Buddhist practice. The idea of *Ubuntu* in African cultures provides a powerful tool for African nonviolent action.

Should we focus only on negative nonviolence of the variety that was suggested by Sharp or address more structural and institutional forms of oppression and move in the direction of positive nonviolence? The negative forms have been criticized for being system supportive. Positive nonviolence

brings the self, other human beings and communities in an interlinked relational mode and at the same time not ruling out the possibility of nonviolent action campaigns against unjust laws, authorities, and institutions without breaking this relational framework. It requires courage in the face of repression, reconciliation with opponents, attacking oppressive systems rather than personally targeting the oppressors; accepting self-suffering and renouncing violence. Positive nonviolence of the Gandhian variety seeks to achieve deeper transformation.<sup>12</sup>

One of the strengths of the Gandhian type of nonviolent action is that it allows space for self-reflection by allowing time for withdrawal and constructive engagement. This constructive engagement enables people to be less agitated, and dispassionate. Agitation alone is unable to produce a new order. Therefore every agitation should be accompanied by a constructive element. This fact is often forsaken by many nonviolent movements. As Gandhi Said:. “[The] handling of civil disobedience without the Constructive Programme,...[is] like a paralyzed hand attempting to lift a spoon”.<sup>13</sup>

In Tunisia and Egypt women played a key role with 20 percent of the protesters being women, often coming with their husbands and children. Given the refusal of political rights to women in the Arab world, these movements are likely to have some positive impact in broadening of democracy in these countries. The Saudi government has now given women voting rights. Tunisia was the first to recognize gender parity in the election to the Constituent Assembly, which was also facilitated by the high literacy of women. Many women had participated in the Khudai Khidmatgar movements as well. Irom Sharmilla’s refusal to take food shows a rare kind of determination that has no parallels anywhere in India. Women

in Manipur have a tradition of fighting against oppression and from represents that embedded spirit.

Describing the experience of Indian women during the freedom movement Gandhi said in Rome:

“The beauty of non-violent war is that women can play the same part in it as men. [...] In a violent war the women have no such privilege, and the Indian women played a more effective part in our last non-violent war than men. The reason is simple. Non-Violent war calls into play suffering to the largest extent, and who can suffer more purely and nobly than women? The women in India tore down the *pardah* and came forward to work for the nation. [...] They manufactured contraband salt, they picketed foreign-cloth shops and liquor shops, and tried to wean both the seller and the customer from both. At late hours in the night, they pursued the drunkards to their dens with courage and charity in their hearts. They marched to jails and they sustained *lathi* blows as few men did”<sup>14</sup>

Do nonviolent movements undermine the political class and the constitutional bodies and create a new form of politics? I think it will depend on how resilient our political parties are. When the new social movements in Europe surfaced and posed a challenge to the established political parties, it had some impact on the parties themselves. They incorporated many concerns of the new social movements into their party programme. Will a similar impact have on Indian parties many of which have several parliamentarians with criminal records? The need for creating a system by which citizens engage with the government constructively as well as agonistically is very important. It is important here to make a distinction between agonism and antagonism. Nonviolent action is agonistic but not antagonistic. A small achievement is better than big unrealized

goals, if we take a cue from Gandhi's practice. It was always a small issue around which Gandhi always tried to address the bigger issues. Consider Zinn's statement:

We need devices which are powerful but restrained, explosive but controlled: to resist the government's actions against the lives and liberties of its citizens; to organize people to replace the holders of power, as one round in that continuing cycle of political renewal which alone can prevent tyranny.<sup>15</sup>

What if the young Kashmiris or northeasterners adopt the same tactics of the Arab Spring and Anna Hazare? Will the Indian state clamp down on such peaceful protests? These are questions that nonviolent actionists will have to answer. At least one has to distinguish between an armed revolt and a peaceful way of expressing grievances, however unpalatable the grievance may be to the authorities. The Arab Spring as well as the Hazare movement has reminded audiences around the world about the power of nonviolent action once again, and I think that the 'progressive substitution' about which Roberts spoke of will gather greater momentum in the years to come.

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# 1

## Five Fallacies - And the Future\*

### I

Some months ago, I had an opportunity to attend a meeting of prominent *Sarvodaya* workers from different parts of the country. The purpose of the meeting was to look at the General Elections that were due, and to exchange views on whether those who claimed to follow Gandhi had any special role or duty in the ensuing elections. The views that were expressed covered a very wide spectrum; some holding that those who followed Gandhi could have nothing to do with politics and elections, some holding that it would be dereliction of duty not to work openly for the removal of the party in power. Almost all those who spoke - with one or two exceptions - had no doubt that the Government had no faith in Gandhian values or in Gandhian concepts of development or in a non-violent society. They believed that the Government was taking the country on the path to ruin. Many of them recalled that the *Sarva Seva Sangh* itself, had, in an earlier resolution, described the Government and its policies as 'anti-people'. No one would want an anti-people Government to continue; but the question was whether one should not only wish that the Government disappeared; but also work to see that the electorate seized the opportunity and removed the Government by voting against it, by voting for the Opposition. Some held the view that to speak against the Government and to ask the electorate to reject the ruling party and vote for the opposition would be to enter the field of politics which was taboo for the followers of Gandhi.

There was no clear answer to the question: if they had

already characterised the Government as anti-people, why should they fight shy of saying so to the electorate? If the Government is anti-people, and they do not want anti-people regimes to rule in the name of the people, do they have no duty to tell the electorate to avail of the specific opportunity that the elections gave them, to remove an anti-people government from power?

I must confess I came away somewhat sad, and yet wiser; - sad at the power of clichés and fallacies to cloud clear thinking, and wiser about the reasons for our continued ineffectiveness in working for our declared goals. The object of this paper is to focus attention on some of these fallacies, while readily admitting that some of these subjects deserve a more elaborate discussion than is possible in a paper of this length.

## II

The first of these fallacies is about politics. To give the impression that Gandhi was against participation in politics, and wanted his followers (*Satyagrahis*) to shun politics is to misrepresent Gandhi most relentlessly. No one who has read Gandhi's writings in the original can find a shred of evidence to support such a view. Quite to the contrary, to the very end Gandhi insisted that politics was inescapable, unavoidable and essential to a seeker after Truth. To those who tauntingly described him as a spiritualist who had strayed into politics, who solicitously suggested that he should retire from politics and repair to a cave in the Himalayas, so that he might be a better saint, and Indian politics may be more effective, he replied that the people were his Himalayas; the question of his retiring to a cave did not arise; in fact, he carried a portable cave with himself.

This was not a piece of rhetorical flourish. Three distinct streams of thought converged to determine his attitude

to politics: his 'perception of God; his perception of Truth; his conception of *Dharma*.

(a) Gandhi did not regard God as a person. To him Truth alone was God. This God of his did not live in the clouds, but 'here' itself. God lived in His creation, and had to be sought for in His creation. Identification with God therefore meant identification with the whole of creation. This identification was possible only through love and service – even of the 'meanest' of His creation. Love and service cannot be confined to selected sectors of life. They have to encompass all aspects of man's life. Political activity or politics covers so many important aspects of life that it is impossible to ignore or exclude politics.

"Man's ultimate aim is the realisation of God, and his actions, social, political, religious have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God. The only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and be one with it. This can only be done by service of all. I am a part and parcel of the whole, and I cannot find Him apart from the rest of humanity ..... If I could persuade myself that I should find Him in a Himalayan cave I would proceed there immediately. But I know that I cannot find Him apart from humanity."<sup>1</sup> "... And as I cannot render this service without entering politics, I find myself in it"<sup>2</sup> (b) Gandhi believed that Truth is God, and nothing else is. Truth, which is God, cannot be compartmental, - present in some spheres of life, and absent in others; valid in some spheres, and irrelevant or inapplicable or invalid in some others. It cannot be Truth if it has no place in the major aspects of man's earthly existence and activity. A seeker after Truth has therefore to seek it in all aspects of life, identify it and live by it in all activities and fields of life. No spheres can be excluded. Thus the material aspect of man's life, his economic, political and social activity cannot be excluded. A *Satyagrahi* or votary of Truth, therefore, cannot keep away from political activity. In

fact, Gandhi's major contribution was that he proved the validity of Truth and Non-violence even in the most mundane of man's activities, the market-place as well as the force or political or public life. For him political activity thus became an instrument with which to seek and establish the regime of Truth.

(c) In his *Autobiography*, Gandhi identifies the goal of his life as *Moksha*, and *Dharma* as the means to attain it. *Moksha* is a comprehensive goal. It includes not only liberation from the cycle of birth and death, but also life as a free man in a free society, - *Swaraj* in the spiritual sphere as well as the mundane sphere. As true *Swaraj* was indivisible, so was true *Dharma*. It was the means that led to *Swaraj* in both spheres. To Gandhi, therefore, the goal was one and the same-freedom; and the means was one and the same-*Dharma*, as identified in the *Vratas*.

True *Dharma* cannot be compartmentalised. Unless it held sway, as the law and the guide in all' spheres of mundane life it was no *Dharma*. There is no field of man's life that is therefore outside the field of *Dharma*. "All that I do by way of speaking and writing, and all my ventures in the political field are directed to the same and ..." <sup>3</sup>

In the case of *Dharma*, Gandhi holds that (1) True *Dharma* is that which is equally applicable to all activities of life; (2) what claims to be *Dharma* - but ignores or shies away from everyday life and its relentless situations and activities is no *Dharma* at all; (3) A man who lives the life of *Dharma* and seeks *Moksha* has no escape from political activity. His aim should 'be to 'spiritualise politics'; and one cannot spiritualise politics by treating it 'as too unholy to be touched, or by staying out of it, and praying.

Now let us look at each of these statements:

(1) "I believe that from its very nature religion

(*Dharma*) embraces economic, political and other problems." (2) "The *Dharma* which is opposed to true economics is no religion - nor that which is opposed to true politics. Economics devoid of religion should be shunned, and political power uninformed with the spirit of *Dharma* is satanic. There is no such thing as *Dharma* unrelated to economic and other activities. Individuals and society both survive through *Dharma*, and perish without it." (3) To a person whose life is dedicated to *Dharma*, politics, economics, etc. are all aspects of *Dharma*, and he cannot leave out any of them. ...It is therefore inconceivable to me that I might some day give up politics, social service etc. for the sake of *Dharma*." <sup>4</sup> Thus, Gandhi says that a man of *Dharma* cannot exclude political activity. He himself had entered politics to make it "*Dharmamaya*". He said to Lord Montague, that "he could not lead a religious life unless he identified himself with the whole of mankind, and that he could not do unless he took part in politics."

In fact, he went further and said that a man of *Dharma*, was better fitted to take part in political activity because of his selflessness and fearlessness; and he, therefore argued that political activity was an essential duty of the *Sadhu*.

"If the *Sanyasins* of old did not seem to bother their heads about the political life of society, it was because society was differently constructed. But politics, properly so called, rule every detail of our lives today. We come in touch, that is to say, with the State, on hundreds of occasions whether we will or no. The State affects our moral being. A *Sanyasin*, therefore, being a well-wisher and servant par excellence of society, must concern himself with the relations of the people with the state; that is to say, he must 'show the way to the people to attain *Swaraj*'. Thus conceived, *Swaraj* is not a false goal for anyone. A *Sanyasin* having attained *Swaraj* in his own person is the fittest to show us the way. A *Sanyasin* is in the world, but he is

not of the world... He does without attachment the things we do with attachment ..." <sup>5</sup> Again, let us look at the advice Gandhi gave to a deputation of the Buddhist religious orders that met him during his tour of Burma. "Yours should not be merely passive spirituality that spends itself out in idle meditation, but it should be an active thing which will carry the way into the enemy's camp and set the spirit of Burma ablaze from one corner of the land to the others. It should burn out all the sloth in you and the impurity from your surroundings. You will not today hurt a fly. Such is your peaceful nature, but that is not enough; no 'phoongy' who does not feel hurt when a fly is hurt, and go out of his way to save it has a right to wear the phoongy's dress. You have renounced the world and taken to a life of religion. A person in your position would fear neither kings nor emperors, nor even the public. For what matters it to him, whether he gets even food and raiment or not? Walking always in the light of God, steadfast in his devotion to truth, he should stand four square to all injustice, impurity and wrong, wherever it may be found. Such is the internal strength I want you to cultivate." <sup>6</sup> In the face of all this evidence, one may answer that what he is warning against or condemning is "party politics"; but that is futile, almost retreat, when one is constantly 'condemning "politics", without any limiting adjective, thus creating the impression that all politics is too low and, selfish, and, therefore, taboo for those who want to follow Gandhi.

### III

The second fallacy concerns *Satyagraha*. To suggest that Gandhi's concepts of *Satyagraha* and the methods of struggle that he employed were meant merely to be used against the foreign ruler, or in a non-democratic society, is to betray a readiness to overlook, the patient, comprehensive and repeated statements that Gandhi himself made to explain his *Satyagraha*. One hears it said that the situation today is

different from what obtained in the days of Gandhi for two basic reasons: one, the country is free and no longer fighting a foreign government; two, today the government is a democratically elected government. It is, therefore, suggested that if Gandhi was with us today, he would himself have revised his methods of *Satyagraha*.

The two factors of change are cited to imply that *Satyagraha* as we knew it in the days of Gandhi is not relevant today, and it on that basis that it is suggested that Gandhi would have revised his methods. One thing must be readily admitted. No one, indeed, no one, can say what specific course of action or programme Gandhi would have advocated in any given situation today. But it should also be admitted that what Gandhi has said and visualised about the 'universality' of *Satyagraha* gives us some idea of what he might have said today. Gandhi himself discovered, innovated upon and demonstrated many forms of *Satyagraha* in South Africa and India, to meet the different situations that arose. If all that is being said is that one must choose the form that fits the situation that one faces, and new forms too may occur or may become necessary, one will find it impeccable (though not very new), although no new form has yet been added to the armoury by anyone.

But to go back to the question of the two factors of change, and whether they warrant change in the concept or methods of *Satyagraha*, let us look at what Gandhi told the Hunter Commission (appointed by the British Government after Jallianwala Bagh and the incidents in the Punjab). An Indian member of the Commission, Pandit Jagat Narayan, asked Gandhi these very questions, perhaps to give Gandhi an opportunity to justify *Satyagraha* on the ground that the Government was 'foreign', and did not have an electoral mandate, and it was therefore legitimate to resort to such extra-legal methods against it. Gandhi's replies are certainly unambiguous and revealing, whether one finds or does not find

a sense of premonition in them:

"(Q) Was it because you had no other weapon to fight a foreign and irresponsible officialdom that you started *Satyagraha*?

(A) Not quite so. I can imagine occasions when *Satyagraha* may have to be resorted to against our own ministers even after we gain full responsible self-government. And unlike the present foreign administrators our ministers cannot excuse themselves on the ground of their ignorance of the sentiment of the nation.

(Q) But after we have gained full freedom can we not dismiss such autocratic ministers?

(A) I am not so sure. English history gives us instances of ministers sticking to their posts even after they had lost the confidence of the people. I see no reason why the thing may not be repeated here. I cannot, therefore, rule out the possibility of occasions when grave errors committed by ministers responsible to the people cannot be remedied except by *Satyagraha*.

(Q) Such occasions would arise rarely when all the Government officers are Indians and the people are consequently law-abiding?

(A) It must, at the same time, be remembered that whilst English ministers have at least the benefit of ignorance on their side, unintentionally, our own ministers will have absolutely no such excuse. I have myself seen grave blunders committed by ministers of a Government chosen by the people, and they have behaved in a very irresponsible manner. The *Satyagrahi*, therefore, would never hesitate to resist injustice done by them."

The answers could not have been different, for: 1. *Satyagraha* is soul-force or truth-force or "*Dharma Bal*", and



soul-force does not discriminate between a foreigner and a fellow-citizen. (One has not heard of foreign souls and indigenous souls!) Gandhi, therefore, saw *Satyagraha* as a force or weapon that could be used to correct any individual, group or nation; used by any individual - child or adult. While in South Africa he, therefore, described *Satyagraha* thus: "Its equivalent... rendered into English means Truth-Force.... It is a force that may be used by individuals as well as by communities. It may be used as well in political as in domestic affairs. Its universal applicability is a demonstration of its permanence and invincibility. It can be used alike by men, women and children."<sup>7</sup>

Thus, Gandhi believed in the universality of the relevance and effectiveness of *Satyagraha* in all situations of injustice. *Satyagraha* is a Law of Universal application. Beginning with the family, its use can be extended to every other circle. It could be used not merely by an individual against another, a group against another, a group or individual against a Government, a nation against another, and an individual against a Government, but by an individual against society itself. "Such *Satyagraha* can be, ought to be practiced not only against a Government, (note - there is no adjective limiting the nature of the Government) but against society itself (if need be). It can often happen that a society is as wrong as a Government. It becomes one's duty then to use *Satyagraha* against society."<sup>8</sup> Describing Socrates as such a *Satayagrahi* against society, Gandhi says "we must learn to live and die like Socrates. He was, moreover a great *Satyagrahi*. He adopted *Satyagraha* against his own people. As a result the Greeks became a great people."<sup>9</sup> Mark the words - 'against his ownpeople'.

It may then be conceded that *Satyagraha* was conceived as a universal weapon, not merely for the 'foreign government'. But it may still be urged that the methods or forms of

*Satyagraha* (*Satyagrahi* action) that Gandhi used against the British were meant only for the foreigner or the ruler who had no electoral support. These programmes of action included picketing, boycott, non-cooperation, individual and mass civil disobedience, no-tax campaigns, etc. The burning of foreign cloth was one such programme, and it brought forth strong public disapproval even from illustrious and sympathetic Indians like the poet Rabindranath Tagore. One of Gandhi's closest aides, C. F. Andrews, was one of those who remonstrated that this programme might incite race-hatred and violence. Gandhi's reply clearly asserts that everyone of the programmes he proposed against the foreign ruler was such he could unhesitatingly use against members of his own family or nation, "I remain just as convinced as ever of the necessity of burning. There is no emphasis in the process of race-feeling. I could have done precisely the same thing in the sacred and select family or friendly circles. In all I do or advise, the infallible test I apply is, whether the particular action will hold good in regard to the dearest and nearest. The teaching of the faith I hold dear is unmistakable and unequivocal in the matter. I must be the same to friend and foe. And it is this conviction which makes me sure of so many of my acts which often puzzle friends."<sup>10</sup>

The fact that Gandhi looked upon *Satyagraha* as the sovereign and universally applicable method of seeking justice is borne out by his identifying it as the remedy open (1) to people if a Trustee acted against the spirit of Trusteeship; (2) to workers to secure from the employer; (3) to tillers to secure justice from landowners. None of these is a situation that to foreign rule or a society without an elected government. In fact, Gandhi reserved a permanent place for *Satyagraha* in his ideal village republic. "Non-violence with its technique of *Satyagraha* and non-cooperation will be the sanction of the village community."<sup>11</sup> This should make it clear that Gandhi

visualised *Satyagraha* as the universal and ultimate guarantee against injustice.

In fact, Gandhi believed that in any society non-cooperation against evil is a duty, and civil disobedience a birth-right. Let us take Civil Disobedience first: "Civil Disobedience becomes a sacred duty when the State has become lawless or which is the same thing corrupt. (Note: there is no limiting adjective 'foreign dominated'). And a citizen who barter with such a State shares its corruption and lawlessness." "I wish I could persuade everyone that Civil Disobedience is the inherent right of a citizen. He does not give it up, without ceasing to be a man. It is possible to question the wisdom of applying Civil Disobedience in respect of a particular act or law; it is possible to advise delay, and caution. But the right itself cannot be allowed to be questioned. It is a birth-right that cannot be surrendered without surrender of one's self-respect."

Now let us turn to non-cooperation. A major premise of *Satyagraha* is the distinction that it draws between the evil and the evil-doer. The *Satyagrahi* wants to eliminate the evil, not the evil-doer. He knows that evil cannot be eliminated by eliminating or suppressing the evil-doer. To him, the process of eliminating evil lies in (a) desisting from evil; (b) desisting from cooperation with evil; (c) weaning the evil-doer from evil through persuasion, and non-violent direct action.

(a) The *Satyagrahi* is a seeker after Truth. He cannot, therefore, practise evil or be a party to evil. He has to cease to do, he cannot do, what he wants his adversary to give up. (b) The *Satyagrahi* cannot co-operate with evil and be a *Satyagrahi*. "The business of every god-fearing man is to dissociate himself from evil in total disregard of consequences. He follows the truth although the following of it may endanger his very life."<sup>12</sup> This duty to dissociate from evil leads to non-cooperation. Non-cooperation may lead to retaliation by the evil-doer. He

may embark on repressive measures and violence to thwart cooperation and extract cooperation. The *Satyagrahi* has to bear the suffering that repression brings to resist the will of the evil doer. Thus resistance becomes an integral part of *Satyagraha*.

Here, one should refer to the view that *Satyagraha* should be assistance, not resistance. This can be a misleading play of words, particularly, if it gives the impression that there is no place for resistance in *Satyagraha*. Of course, the object of the *Satyagrahi* is the welfare of the victim, the evil doer and society. It is his love and compassion for all three that makes him fight. Gandhi did not fight shy of the word 'fight'. He said his fight came from his love. He fought out of love. He constantly engaged in proving that love and could go together, - that it was love that him to fight. In fact, if one says that love for victim as well as the evil-doer cannot be combined with fighting evil, one gives up the whole case of *Satyagraha*.

Then comes the question whether *Satyagraha* should take the form of 'assistance' when it is used, in a democratic society or against one's own people. All *Satyagraha* is assistance, but assistance through resistance.

The object of the *Satyagrahi* is undoubtedly to assist the evil-doer to see what is evil or wrong in his thought or action. It is clear that he will not give up his evil action unless he sees and accepts that the action in question is evil or wrong. How then does the *Satyagrahi* assist the evil-doer to see what is wrong in his ways? Will the 'assistance' include co-operation with the evil-doer in what the *Satyagrahi* regards as a wrong or evil act? If it does, is not a *Satyagrahi* himself guilty of being party to a wrong or evil act? How then can he consider himself a *Satyagrahi*? It is clear, therefore, that 'assistance' in enabling the evil-doer to see what is wrong in his action cannot include cooperation. Non-cooperation, therefore, is an indispensable

part of *Satyagraha*. It is both the moral duty of the devotee of truth to desist from being a party to evil, and an operational necessity to rouse the conscience or sense of discernment of the evil-doer.

There are occasions when resistance becomes the mode of assistance. When the *Satyagrahi* non-cooperates, he is resisting the will of the tyrant, resisting his effort to 'force' his will or view on him. Non-cooperation, thus, becomes resistance to tyranny, and the situation created by non-cooperation has two consequences: one, the non-cooperation of the *Satyagrahi* makes the tyrant realise that the success of his tyranny depends on the cooperation of the exploited, and, therefore, compels him to revise his stand in his own 'enlightened self-interest'; two, the suffering that the *Satyagrahi* undergoes appeals to the heart of the tyrant, erodes his intransigence and promotes introspection. Since assistance cannot include cooperation with evil, non-violent assistance can only be through non-violent non-cooperation and the suffering that becomes incidental to non-violent non-cooperation. To say that *Satyagraha* is non-violent assistance makes sense only if non-violent assistance includes non-cooperation and non-violent resistance. If this is so, to distinguish between non-violent assistance and non-violent resistance is to perceive a distinction without a difference, and to retreat from the Gandhian notion of *Satyagraha*.

The crux of the question then is Direct Action. It is Direct Action that constitutes resistance, or results in the need for resistance. Gandhi believed in Direct Action. He believed that it was impossible to achieve anything of fundamental value without Direct Action or readiness for Direct Action. In South Africa, he discovered that even prayers and petitions had no value unless they were backed by readiness for Direct Action. Gandhi says, "up to the year 1906, I simply relied on appeal to reason"<sup>13</sup> In answer to a question from Horace Alexander,

Gandhi later explained why he came to the conclusion that mere persuasion was not adequate, that Direct Action was required to shock people out of their prejudices and intransigency, to force open their minds when their ears were closed to all appeals of reason. Direct Action is open action, that often takes the form of physical action including physical confrontation and physical and mental suffering to the *Satyagrahi*.

Gandhi had a burning faith in Direct Action, and it was that made him different from the traditional *Rishi*, on the one hand, and the reformer and the constitutionalist on the other. Look at his answer to a critic: "But, my critic deplores Direct Action. For, he says, "it does not work for unity."

One can hear echoes of the same thought still! Gandhi continues, "I join issue with him, Never has anything been done on this earth without Direct action. I rejected the word 'passive resistance', because of its insufficiency and its being interpreted as a weapon of the weak. It was Direct Action, which told and told so effectively that it converted General Smuts to sanity .... It was direct action in Champaran which removed an age long grievance. A meet submission when one is chafing under a disability or grievance which one would have gladly seen removed, not only does not make for unity, but makes the weak party... angry and prepares him for an opportunity to explode. By allying himself with the weak party, by teaching him direct, firm but harmless action, I make him feel strong and capable of defying the physical might. He feels braced for the struggle, regains confidence in himself, and knowing that the remedy lies with himself, ceases to harbour the spirit of revenge and learns to be satisfied with a redress of the wrong he is seeking to remedy." He goes on to say that Jesus, and the Buddha, before him, were men of direct action. "What was the larger 'symbiosis' that Buddha and Christ preached? Buddha fearlessly carried the war into the enemy's camp and brought down on its

knees an arrogant priesthood. Christ drove out the money-changers from the temple of Jerusalem and drew down curses from Heaven upon the hypocrites and the pharisees. Both were for intensely direct action ....Buddha would have died resisting the priesthood, if the majesty of his love had not proved to be equal to the task of bending the priesthood, Christ died on the cross with a crown of thorns on his head defying the might of a whole empire. And if I raise resistance of a non-violent character, I simply and humbly follow in the footsteps of the great teachers named by my critic."<sup>14</sup>

Any attempt to 'purify' *Satyagraha* by 'exorcising' it of Direct Action will therefore lead us back from Buddha, and Jesus and Gandhi, and the other prophets who were men of action, to the recluses in the penance groves.

But Direct Action is not the first step. The first step is the identification of the ethical issues that the situation poses, taking a stand on the rights and wrongs of the issue. A *Satyagrahi* can not evade the issue, lest evasion results in acquiescence in untruth or evil. His stand has to be clear and unambiguous. It has to be open, since secrecy has no place in *Satyagraha*. Unlike those who believe in violent direct action, the *Satyagrahi* cannot observe silence on the issue, and prepare in secret for 'action', For the *Satyagrahi* both the preparation and the action are in the open. Gandhi has described *Satyagraha* as an open lesson in democracy; that is the creation, organization and assertion of public opinion. One cannot create public opinion by concealing one's own opinion. Public opinion can be created, and the courage needed for open defiance can be generated only through public articulation of rights and wrongs, of the nature of the injustice and the remedy that it calls for. Gandhi thought and worked in the open. His thoughts and experiences were put before the public with meticulous truthfulness even when they were not directly related to what are regarded as public affairs.

His code was clear: "And I owe it to the country that my views should be clearly known and taken for what they may be worth. I must shed the timidity that has almost led to self-suppression. I must not fear ridicule, and even loss of popularity or prestige. If I hide my belief, I shall never correct errors of judgment. I am always eager to discover them, and more than eager to correct them. "No one, therefore, had to speculate about Gandhi. The world knew where he stood.

Take for instance, an unprecedented situation like the Emergency. No one can say what lead or programme of action Gandhi would have given to the country. But everyone will agree that it was an unprecedented situation. When one sets aside one's likes and dislikes about Indira Gandhi and Jayprakash Narayan, and one's opinion on what actions led to what reactions or responses, certain facts stand etched in one's memory, and will perhaps stand etched in history. The constitution was amended to alter the balance between the Government and the Judiciary, and between the Government and the citizen. Habeas Corpus was suspended. Freedom of speech and other fundamental rights were taken away from the citizen. The judiciary lost the right to protect the citizen from the ire and caprice of the Government. An effort was made to place the Ruler above Laws. Civil rights were extinguished. It was argued on behalf of the State that the citizen had no right of protection from the judiciary even if he was shot without trial. All this constituted an undeniable attack on civil rights, freedom and the ideals of the struggle for freedom. Could a *Satyagrahi*, as defined by Gandhi, have been a silent and helpless witness?

To Gandhi, civil rights were not a charter of bourgeois freedom. He described civil rights as the water of life. "Civil liberty consistent with the observance on non-violence, is the first step towards *Swaraj*. It is the breath of political and social life. It is the foundation of freedom. There is no room there for



dilution or compromise. It is the water of life. I have never heard of water being diluted."<sup>15</sup> Would Gandhi, then, have remained a silent and helpless witness? Were there no weapons in his non-violent armoury, - fierce or gentle, subtle or otherwise, that he could have deployed? The least that a *Satyagrahi* could do, was not to evade the issue, take an open and unambiguous stand, desist from lending respectability to and cooperating with what was evil, and asking people too, to non-cooperate. Do Gandhi's life and views give one reason to believe that he would have remained silent and helpless?

To me, they do not.

#### IV

The third fallacy concerns the concept of a consensus. The *Satyagrahi* undoubtedly wants and works for the emergence of a social consensus on his perception of Truth. He is always prepared to submit his perception to scrutiny, ever ready to accept his errors, and to revise his perception of truth in the light of fresh evidence that may come to light. But, at any given moment, he has a perception which forms the basis of any action that he might have to take to live by the Truth, to vindicate truth in his life, or in situations and relationships in social life; and it is in favour of this perception that he wants a consensus to emerge. He cannot be neutral to his perception of truth; he cannot abandon it unless it is proved to erroneous. Nor should he be hesitant about working for the acceptance of his perception of truth, as long as he believes in the rightness of his perception.

Consensus is defined in the Dictionary as "agreement", or 'unanimity' or general agreement in matters of opinion, etc., also loosely in more recent usage, the verified or convergent trend, as of opinion. It is the objective of a *Satyagrahi* to make truth prevail. He has, therefore, to work for the acceptance of truth or a social consensus on truth. A consensus, thus, is an

objective; it is not a condition precedent for action.

Even as an objective 'consensus' cannot be a paramount objective for a *Satyagrahi*, - because, for a *Satyagrahi* what is paramount is Truth (which here means, as often explained by Gandhi, his current understanding of truth, or the relative truth, as he sees it), and not its acceptance by others. Acceptance by another, or by a group, cannot be the test of truth, except where empirical evidence is concerned. A *Satyagrahi*, must be ready to face even martyrdom to vindicate his perception of truth or his faith in his perception of truth. He does not dilute his perception, to secure social acceptance. Gandhi always described himself as a man of peace and compromise. But he was equally clear that his eagerness for compromise did not include compromise on fundamentals. On them he was firm as rock. There should be no dilution of principle "to accommodate a situation."

Gandhi leaves no room for doubt on compromise on fundamentals. "All compromise is give and take, but there can be no give and take on fundamentals. Any compromise on fundamentals is surrender. For it is all give and no take." <sup>16</sup> "I have made up my mind to surrender every non-essential... Full surrender of non-essentials is a condition precedent to accession of internal strength to defend the essential by dying." <sup>17</sup>

Thus Gandhi makes a distinction between essentials or fundamentals, and non-essentials; he rejects compromise on fundamentals, and recommends renunciation of non-essentials, not so much for pleasing an adversary as for increasing one's own combat-potential, when one is joining battle to defend the essential even by dying. In combat phraseology, it is the jettisoning of all superfluous weight that may adversely affect strike potential or manoeuvrability.

The willingness to compromise is thus confined to non-

essentials. Now let us look at what constitutes a consensus or what leads to a consensus. A consensus is, as has been stated earlier, a point of view that is commonly accepted in a group. How does one identify this consensus or become aware of it? As people, or the members of the group, express their views, one is able to see what is the opinion that is acceptable to the majority or to most. No count is taken; but the direction or strength of the opinion is clear even to those who do not agree with the desirability of the direction or the opinions expressed by the larger number, though the number is not quantified. At that point, two alternatives are available. Either some one is designated to identify the consensus, or individual members have the good sense to acknowledge the view of the unnumbered majority as the consensus of the House. But, often, a degree of insistence on the part of two or three or a small number who feel strongly about their views or convictions prevents the emergence or acceptance of a consensus, thus, in effect, reducing the concept of consensus to the concept of unanimity; and unanimity is hard to attain where there is no direct or indirect pressure flowing from force, or from faith. If it is not unanimity, consensus is only the graceful acceptance of a majority that has not been crudely and offensively quantified to embarrass or humiliate the minority.

It now remains for us to examine the consequences of accepting consensus or unanimity as a condition precedent for action. On fundamentals, the *Satyagrahi* is not expected to give in, or give up his view to facilitate or fall in line with a "consensus". "In matters of conscience, the law of majority has no place."<sup>18</sup> "The rule of majority has a narrow application, i.e. one should yield to the majority in matters of detail. But it is slavery to be amenable to the majority, no matter what its decisions are. Democracy is not a state in which people act like sheep. Under democracy individual liberty of opinion and action is jealously guarded."<sup>19</sup> It is more important for the

*Satyagrahi* to cling to his perception of truth and his commitment to fight for it than to cling to his company, - either out of affection, as in the case of the family, and those who are near and dear, or out of a desire to seek strength in numbers.

Gandhi has repeatedly declared that the *Satyagrahi* has to be prepared to be in a minority of one. How can one be in a minority of one if one is willing to submit oneself to a "consensus" on fundamentals?

It is acknowledged that when the *Satyagrahi* is convinced of a certain truth or a certain course of action, he does not wait till he convinces others. He starts with himself. He cannot absolve himself of the responsibility to act in defense of his perception of truth on the ground that he is waiting for others to accept it. It is morally indefensible for the *Satyagrahi* to continue to acquiesce and cooperate or refrain from action on the ground that the others are not ready. He can act concurrently with the effort to convince others or to convert the majority. Movements for reform or revolts against injustice and exploitation or against *adharma* have started as one-man-movements or minority movements.

If Prahlad had agreed to abide by a consensus in the Court of his father, he might well have had to accept that there was no God. If Socrates had accepted to abide by the consensus of his disciples, he would have fled his city to save his life "for humanity" and not drunk hemlock to become a martyr, to become a *Satyagrahi*. If Gandhi had offered to abide by the consensus of his colleagues, his life would have been different. At almost every stage in South Africa he stuck to his views even when his colleagues differed. At the Amritsar Congress, Gandhi was in favour of cooperation with the Government. Most of the other leaders were not. He first thought of leaving the Punjab and the session to avoid a conflict with the leaders.

But then he decided to stay on - not to acquiesce by silence, but to pit his views against those of the stalwarts, and to insist on a vote on - his motion. He could have voiced his views and abided by the consensus. He was new to the Congress, but he knew that it was his duty to persist even if he were in a minority, and even if he had to go against the leadership. He would not have launched the "Quit India" struggle of 1942 if he had been ready to abide by a consensus. He considered it his duty to tell the nation that he would launch the struggle on behalf of the Congress if possible; on his own, if the Congress did not endorse his view. Instances can be multiplied.

"I have always been in a minority. In South Africa, I started with practical unanimity, reached a minority of sixty four and even sixteen, and went up again with a huge majority. The best and the most solid work was done in the wilderness of minority ... They little know that I dread it (majority) even more than that. I would feel certain of my ground if I was spat upon by them ... And even though I have to face the prospect of a minority of one, I humbly believe I have the courage to be in such a hopeless minority. That to me is the only truthful position."<sup>20</sup>

Gandhi, thus, never waited for a consensus. He could not countenance it as a condition precedent for action. Waiting for a consensus meant a moratorium on action; which meant a double dereliction of duty for a *Satyagrahi*: one, the acquiescence in evil or cooperation with evil that resulted from failure to dissociate with evil; and two, the indirect support that inaction gave to the status quo. In public affairs, inaction is action on the side of the status quo. That it is unconscious or unintentional does not make it any less effective at the movement when the battle is on. A *Satyagrahi* has no business to become an unconscious soldier of adversary.

## V

The fourth fallacy concerns the attitude to Elections. In fact, there are quite a few fallacies that one comes across in this area.

- A. (1) What has been described as the Last Will and Testament clearly underlines Gandhi's profound concern for democracy in India. Gandhi's incisive and trenchant criticism of Parliamentary Democracy as it obtained in Great Britain did not dilute his commitment to adult franchise. He looked upon adult suffrage as basic to a democratic system. But he also realised that democracy could not be real, could not endure unless it was total; absence of equality in the economic or social sphere could endanger and destroy political democracy, or render it nominal and meaningless. In that sense, democracy, too, was indivisible. Adult suffrage was a powerful instrument that people could use to make democracy complete; and to secure true democracy in the economic and political spheres as well. So, Gandhi did not dismiss adult franchise as the luxury of a bourgeois liberal system. He wanted it to be used in the cause of justice and equality, in the cause of the revolution that he advocated.

If his attitude to the exercise of franchise was casual, he would not have written his Last Will to emphasize how CRUCIAL the universal exercise of the franchise is. In the Last Will, he talks of the crucial importance of ensuring that (a) every eligible voter is enrolled in the list of voters; (b) bogus names are eliminated by periodic checks and constant vigilance; (c) every voter exercises his or her vote without fear or favour; and (d) every voter exercises his vote with wisdom. Nowhere does he suggest, that the test of objectivity and wisdom lines in NOT exercising one's franchise. As a *Satyagrahi* he could not ask others to do what he himself would

refrain from doing.

*It may be pointed out that Gandhi suggested that there might be an upper age limit for the eligibility to vote, even an there is a lower limit today. He did not suggest that those who were above a certain age might be eligible but should not exercise their franchise.*

- (2) The way to ensure that every eligible voter voted without fear or favour lies partly in administrative measures and partly in the education of voters. The way to ensure that voters vote wisely lies mainly in educating voters on (a) the issues before the electorate; (b) alternative solutions; and (c) the crucial need for a wise choice. A wise exercise of the franchise, therefore, depends on the availability of information, as well as the will to adhere to socially necessary values. Voters' education, thus, should not merely transmit information but also create the socially necessary commitment in the voters. Voters' education includes value education; the object of value education is not merely to remind voters of the existence of values but also to train them in evaluating alternative policies, parties and persons in the light of values and information. Thus, in voters' education objectivity does not mean unwillingness to give expression to one's choice and the reasons for the preference that it involves,
- (3) One of the functions of political parties is to attempt to educate the electorate. But there is a danger that parties may be more concerned with propaganda, with exploiting the weaknesses of the electorate rather than with the true education of the electorate. The danger is all the more serious in India, where masses are poor and illiterate, and subject to loyalties and disadvantages that can be exploited to harm democracy and the genuine interest of the masses. Given the state of Indian voters, dispassionate political

education is crucial for the success of democracy, and that is why Gandhi thought that this kind of political education would go by default unless a body like the Congress with its values and traditions, the proven caliber and selflessness of its leaders, and its organised network that extended to far off villages took responsibility for this basic task. There were two other reasons. The Congress had functioned as movement, and not a party based on a specific ideology or programmes. It had brought freedom to the country. It would not be fair, therefore, group in it to appropriate the 'credit' or mass support generated by the freedom struggle to itself. Moreover, it might mean appropriating the credit without verifying whether the masses approved of their ideology. It might also mean that the Congress would be returned to power because of its role in the freedom struggle, and worse still, because it was already in power. This, too, would not be fair or conducive to the development of a clear and well-defined party system. It was for these reasons that Gandhi wanted the Congress to become a *Lok Sevak Sangh* and take up electoral constructive work or the work of building the base of democracy.

- (4) It is to the Congress that the Last Will gives the advice to disband or "flower into a *Lok Sevak Sangh*", - not to the All-India Spinners' Association, All India Village Industries Association, *Hindustani Talimi Sangh*, *Harijan Sevak Sangh*, *Go-seva Sangh* and other such bodies which it (the Will) expects to continue to function as agents of nation building at the grass-root level in their own spheres. The historical and political arguments for the transformation of the Congress have already been reviewed in the earlier paragraph.
- (5) The Last Will does not expound the irrelevance of political parties, or exile them from the scene. It says that they



should take shape on the basis of specific ideologies and programmes. Gandhi knew that the withdrawal of the British had not created the conditions that one expects in a stateless society. He knew his revolution was, had to be, a gradual revolution, an 'evolutionary revolution'.

(B) Another fallacy is to argue that Gandhians should not take part in electoral politics, since they are revolutionaries, and believe in revolutionary means of action. A revolutionary and a utopian or a reformer may believe in the same ultimate goals; but the revolutionary is willing to resort to extra-constitutional methods to achieve his goals. He may even consider them basic to his strategy. But his readiness to take to extra-constitutional action does not mean unwillingness to use venues of constitutional action. He is not against constitutional venues, he is against confining himself to them. He believes in taking full advantage of whatever constitutional means can offer him to present and advance his case, but where these are inadequate he launches on extra constitutional action. A classic examination of this fallacy can be found in Lenin's Left Wing Communism - an infantile disorder.

A *Satyagrahi* is expected to use all peaceful means to create public opinion and enable public opinion to assert itself; but he should not allow the temptations of electoral power politics to get the better of his commitment to revolution. In other words, electoral politics is meant to capture and use the existing power structure; revolutionary politics is meant to alter the existing power structure. The objective in the field of electoral politics can only be to advance the objectives of revolutionary politics; that is to prevent an increase in the power of the forces that have to be overcome if the revolution is to succeed. The first is therefore secondary, and the second is primary.

*The goal of the Gandhian revolution is to create a*

*society in which people will always retain the capacity to resist the abuse of power, through non-violent means. This capacity cannot be created through the capture or use of power. For the Gandhian revolutionary, therefore power itself, is secondary; it is the ability to control power that is primary. That is all the more reason why the Gandhian must be concerned at the emergence or continuance of a Government that erodes the right and the capacity of the citizen to resist any possible abuse of power.*

## VI

The fifth fallacy is to overlook the rights and wrongs of an issue merely because both contending parties are using means that are unacceptable to the *Satyagrahi*. The *Satyagrahi* is no doubt committed to unadulterated non-violence. He believes that two opposing forces, violence and non-violence can not work concurrently to help each other. They are likely to cancel each other. This entitles the *Satyagrahi* to refrain from participating in the actual physical combat on either side; but it does not entitle him to condemn both parties and take a stance of neutrality or equidistance, as far as the basic issue itself is concerned. To the *Satyagrahi*, there can be no neutrality on a question of Truth or Justice. Though both parties may be using violence, one of them may be fighting for truth (or relative truth) and justice, and the *Satyagrahi* cannot put both these in the same basket and condemn them without acknowledging the moral superiority of the one who is fighting for justice. While dissociating himself from and condemning the violent means adopted by both, he has to identify which one of them is fighting for a just cause. He should not hide or suppress his sympathy for the just cause.

One can cite a number of instances in support of this statement: the attitude that Gandhi took during the Second World War indentifying the superiority of the cause of the

Allies, and supporting it; the attitude he took in the War between Italy and Ethiopia, the attitude he took to the despatch of Indian troops to Kashmir; the stand that is taken in support of struggles against Imperialism or Colonialism, or racial discrimination in South Africa etc. .

Let us look at Gandhi's own words, "whilst all violence is bad and must be condemned in the abstract, it is permissible for, it is even the duty of, a believer in *ahimsa* to distinguish between the aggressor and the defender. Having done so, he will side with the defender in a non-violent manner, ... give his life in saving him. His intervention is likely to bring a speedier end to the dual, and may even result in bringing about peace between the combatants".<sup>21</sup> Or, "My non-violence does recognise different species of violence-defensive and offensive. It is true that in the long run the difference is obliterated, but the initial merit persists. A non-violent person is bound, when the occasion arises, to say which side is just. Thus I wished success to the Abyssinians, the Spaniards and the Czechs, and the Poles, though in each case I wished that they could have offered non-violent resistance."<sup>22</sup> "If a War is itself a wrong act, how can it be worthy of moral support or blessings? I believe all War to be wholly wrong. But if we scrutinise the motives of two warring parties, we may find one to be in the right and the other in the wrong ... B, whose cause is just, deserves my moral help and blessings."<sup>23</sup> It is not necessary to adduce further arguments to show that this logic applies not only to cases of conflict between nations, but also to conflicts between groups or between a group and the state, or an individual and the state, or between two political parties. One can not, thus, take the view that since one is not a member of any political party, one has no responsibility to say which one of them is right on a given issue. One may not join anyone of them, but one has to distinguish between the one that is in the right and the one that is in the wrong. And it is the duty of the *Satyagrahi* to place his

views before the people, without fearing the displeasure of the Government or of agitators whose ends or methods may demand his public disapproval. "A believer in non-violence is pledged not to resort to violence or physical force either directly or indirectly in defence of anything, but is not precluded from helping men or institutions that are themselves not based on non-violence. If the reverse were the case, I would, for instance, be precluded from helping India to attain *Swaraj* because the future Parliament of India, under *Swaraj*, I know for certain, will be having some military, and military forces, ... and there are not wanting men, who do believe that complete non-violence means complete cessation of all activity. Not such, however, is my doctrine of non-violence, ... But I would be untrue to my faith if I refused to assist in a just cause any man or measures that did not entirely coincide with the principle of non-violence, ... Even when both parties believe in violence there is often such a thing as justice on one side or the other".<sup>24</sup>

## VII

What does all this have to do with the present and the future? Are these only matters of interest to those who are concerned with the subtleties of theory, or do they also have some effect on the present and the future? Whatever the subtleties and 'refinements' in which these fallacies are clothed, they have gained currency as clichés. They seem to have become parts of a catechism.

For instance, in the last two years of more, I have been asked by many friends, "Have you totally given up politics" I have invariably answered with some force: "No. I have not left politics at all. Nor do I intend to do so. Whatever I am doing is political activity. The only difference is that I have ceased to be a member of any political party." Then I go on the offensive, and ask, "Can you show me one line in the 90 odd volumes of

Gandhi's complete works in which he has said that those who attempt to follow him should first give up all politics?" That brings the invariable answer, "What I meant was party politics."

But the impression that has been created by the aggressive circulation of the cliches is that: (1) One who wants to follow Gandhi can have nothing to do with political activity; (2) The *Satyagraha* that Gandhi placed before the country has become obsolete or irrelevant in free and 'democratic' India, where the duty of the citizen is to 'assist' and not resist the Government. (Resistance has become 'un-Gandhian!'); (3) No decision can be taken, no opinion can be formulated, no action can be taken by Gandhians except on the basis of a consensus, and since this is difficult to achieve, one should reconcile oneself to expressions of piety, and to inaction; (4) Gandhians can help voters to get themselves registered, but not express 'Political Opinions' about contending candidates or parties. At most they can, place a charter or a code before the candidate and the voter; (5) A Gandhian cannot distinguish between one party and another because they are all engaged in party politics. One is tempted to add two other observations. It seems one can declare one's faith in a stateless society and yet want to serve on committees and bodies set up by the Government; it appears that sympathy with the opposition is politics; whole sycophancy of those in power is not politics.

I strongly believe that it is such cliches that have tied many of us in knots, and rendered us ineffective as a group, - at a time when the fundamentals of our faith and the fundamentals of our national polity are facing the fiercest challenge that they have faced after Independence.

That we have proved ineffective can hardly be denied. We are ineffective in the face of communal riots and caste wars. We are unable to prevent them or bring them under

control. We are committed to the creation of a non-violent society. But our society today is in the grip of violence and terror. Violence seems to have entered the warp and the woof of our social fabric; manifesting itself in railway compartments; educational institutions; industrial relations, legislative bodies, court-rooms and struggles for social justice. It seems to have acquired sharper dimensions of cruelty and inhumanity. Kidnapping, torture, blinding attacks with bombs and acid, extraction of ransom and the like have become the order of the day. The law of the jungle seems to have taken the place of the law of civilised society, posing a serious threat to the integrity of the nation and to the forces of cohesion and unity that sustain in our society.

Various popular movements - ranging from movements to redress local grievances or local manifestations of injustice to movements for the formation of new states are resorting to violent means of struggle. Groups that advocate secession, and extremist groups that act in the name of social justice, are taking to violent means that include terrorism, insurgency and guerilla action. The state is often responding in kind, suspending or circumventing civil rights, and meeting terrorism with 'encounters', torture and massive repression.

Demands for autonomy and secession may compel a redefinition of the kind of federalism that can preserve unity while respecting the diversity that characterizes India. We have not found an effective way to work for justice, peace and reconciliation in such situations. Our *Shanti Sena*, such as it is, has not been able to cope with the situation,

We believed that Independence and democracy would see power return to the *Gram Sabhas* or *Panchyats*. But we are still in the grip of centralisation and all the violence and corruption that have become characteristic of centralised systems. Our movement for *Gram Swaraj* has made no dent on

the system.

We believe that lofty and socially desirable goals can be achieved only through non-violent means. But the desire for immediate personal gain and unconcern for the social consequences of one's action have led to the jettisoning of values. Gandhi wanted to 'spiritualise' politics. The last forty years have seen its relentless criminalisation.

We wanted to build a non-violent economic order which eschewed exploitation and the evils of industrialism. We believed that the poverty of our villages could not be abolished without generating employment in the villages; that employment could not be generated except through village industries and a technology that is modern, yet appropriate to the needs of massive employment generation. Yet, we have seen Seven Five Year Plans take us in the direction of Western or Soviet industrialism. Unemployment has increased. Disparities have increased, - between individual and individual, urban and rural India, and one state and another. We have not been effective in stemming this trend; or even in forcing a countrywide debate on the pattern of 'development' that we want, and the kind of plan that is needed to achieve our pattern of development.

We have been ineffective in preventing or reversing these trends. Yet the world is witnessing great changes. Exhilarating winds of change are blowing in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and other areas of the world. The old systems of capitalism and communalism seem to have failed. Unprecedented uprisings have shown what can be achieved by the power of the people. Humanity seems to be looking for new forms of self-government, new forms of ownership, new forms of management and technology that can combine material

welfare with spiritual values, realising that it is only such a combination that can ensure individual freedom and equality, and harmony and peace. It seems that experience is compelling humanity to look at the alternatives that Gandhi advocated.

## VIII

People who were under the heel of Totalitarianism for a half century or more have begun to demonstrate what people's power can do. We have been talking of people's power for many decades. But we have not been effective in arousing the power of the people or giving it a direction. Power lies latent or dormant in the people. They have to be made aware of it, and ready to deploy it in action in the field. This action can be constructive, electoral or revolutionary (we believe that revolutionary action too has to be non-violent). Telling people that they have power but shying away from helping them to express their power in action is futile. In fact, it is frustrating, both to the people and to the worker. It may even be dangerous if it only sows for others to reap.

Repetition of clichés about our ideals will not take us forward unless we are prepared to act in support of them. For instance, take *Gram Swaraj*. Talking, or walking and talking about it will not create *Gram Swaraj*. To create it, we either need a constitutional amendment that vests powers in the *Gram Sabha*; or peoples' action which involves : (a) by-passing or ignoring the existing administrative structure that is backed by the power of the Government; (b) setting up parallel peoples' institutions and diverting peoples' support to them; (c) boycotting goods that may be imported without the approval of the concerned organisations in the peoples' set up. This may also include picketing of shops that sell such goods; (d) organising a net work of economic activities including village industries that are competent to cater to the demand in the village for basic goods and services, - food, clothing, utensils,



shoes, shelter, employment, medical care, and education. These activities may bring us into conflict with the local representatives of the Government and with agents and beneficiaries of big industry including multi-nationals.

In the last 40 years or more we have not been able to do either, of these, i. e. successfully canvas a Constitutional amendment or lead the necessary peoples' action even in one village. (Is this an exaggeration?) A Fundamental change in the Constitution needs a clear popular mandate. It can not be secured through the peripheral support of political parties that do not believe in such radical change. It can come only through electoral action that is, if necessary, endorsed by a new Constituent Assembly. In the absence of such a mandate, Governments will only take peripheral action.

A popular candidate is given only to those who are ready to carry it out. Carrying out a mandate requires administrative action.

If we are not willing to take up responsibility for administrative action, people will choose others who are willing to accept the power that the mandate gives, but have no conviction in, or commitment to the content of the mandate. This can lead only to the soft-peddling of the content of the mandate or to hypocritical exercise that will call for popular action to divest the mandatories of the mandate. That can be done only through compelling a re-election; it may be possible to compel a re-election only through *Satyagraha*. There is no guarantee that choosing a new mandatory (assuming we are still unwilling to accept the responsibility that comes with a mandate) will not lead to the repetition of the earlier syndrome.

Gandhi, of course, visualised the possibility of controlling those in power without oneself assuming the reins

of power in one's own hands. The strength to exercise such control, he thought, would, come from *Satyagraha*.

Gandhi called himself a practical idealist. The adjective may seem irksome or uncomplimentary to some. But Gandhi was a realist par excellence.

While he talked of the ideal of a stateless society, he also warned us that the ideal was like Euclid's line. In theory, a truly non-violent society needs no government. The individual will have acquired such self-control, and will be so conscious of, and loyal to, his duties that there would be no need for external control. Maximisation of self-restraint would make external restraint, and the state which is an organ of external restraint, unnecessary. But such self-control, readiness for *Satyagraha*, and unswerving allegiance to duty cannot be created over night; and as long as there are imperfections and inadequacies in these crucial factors, some kind of government will be necessary. But that government must be one which governs least, which does not extinguish the right of, or the capacity for *Satyagraha*. It must be based on a system in which power is decentralised and exercised by representatives elected by adult franchise, and accountable to the people. Gandhi even mused that such a government might not be 'coercive' in the current sense, "but in their hands, power can be as light as a feather which would not crush anybody,"

In the Aga Khan's Palace, when "Dr. Sushila Nayyar asked Gandhi, 'Do you believe that in an ideal society there will be no need for a government'" he replied, "I believe we shall always need a government, but in an ideal society it will be run by ideal men. In the ancient times people were guided by sages. It will be a government of sages (*Rishis*). In modern times a sage is one who is most highly educated, fired with the spirit of service and capable of rendering service. Such a man would not run after power, but the people can understand that they can not

do without him. They will seek him out and put power in his hands".<sup>25</sup>

This does seem to be too distant a possibility today. But what has been quoted shows that (1) Gandhi visualised 'sages' or wise men running a government and; (2) he thought that in the hands of such men government need not be a mere coercive apparatus, but in their hands, 'power could be as light as a feather'. Perhaps such a state is one of the intermediate stages on the way to the closest possible approximation to the ideal. It should help us to realise that the institutions that may obtain in an ideal society cannot arise in the immediate future, and can, in fact, arise only when 'ideal' conditions have been created. In the meanwhile the direction has to be towards the ideal, although the forms of the institutions may not be what can obtain only in the ideal society.

Let us then have a closer look at electoral action. If Gandhi had no faith in the role, power and sanctity of electoral action, he need not have written the Last Will and Testament. Electoral action can consist of: (a) making the electorate conscious; (b) extending support to one or the other of the existing parties; (c) forming an electoral organisation of our own. The need for the first of these is accepted, almost by all. The second been tried, and the experience has not been encouraging or reassuring. So some amongst us have begun to consider that the third course of action has become a necessity. They want an organisation that will (1) promote the selection of a candidate by voters; (2) place a 'manifesto' before the electorate; (3) ensure that the candidate accepts the manifesto and binds himself to get it implemented; (4) coordinate the work of such candidates who may be elected; and (5) monitor the work of the elected candidate by making him periodically submit reports of the stand and the initiatives he has taken. Such an organisation will work on the basis of internal democracy, and be controlled by the people.

Now, when one makes a critical appraisal of the functions that this Voters' Organizations is willing to undertake, one sees that they are the very functions that political parties undertake today. It can thus be seen that, whatever the name by which the organisation is known, representative democracy needs an organisation that performs the functions that have been identified by the Voters' Organisation or Parties. The organisation may be called a 'Voters Union' or a party. No one should resent a spade being called an agricultural implement with a sharp edged broad metallic blade and a wooden handle. It will, it has to, perform the same functions.

A Voters' organisation does not represent all voters merely because of the name that it uses, or because its doors are open to all. Other voters who have different opinions and interests may form similar unions and use similar names. A voters' Organisation will itself have to tolerate and respect dissent. Nor does a candidate become a "peoples' candidate" because such an organisation sets him up. He may have been chosen more democratically, but he will still remain the candidate of a section of the voters.

It can well be said that today political parties (1) do not have internal democracy (there are no regular or free elections or adequate and free debate on policies and programmes); (2) impose arbitrarily selected candidates on the electorate; (3) do not promote the accountability of the candidate to the electorate. There are many other grave defects in the political parties that we have in our country; including the casual attitude to their manifestos, their populism, their links with antisocial forces etc. It is not possible to go into all of them in this paper. Nor is it possible to outline the corrective devices that have been tried in other countries, or the additional measures that can be tried in our country.

However, it must be pointed out that there is no reason to believe that every political party has to suffer from these defects. In fact, it should be possible for 'a group of 'practical idealists' to build up a party without these defects, to present to the electorate a new 'type' of party. (The Green Parties in some European countries are indeed attempting to develop such alternatives). Such a 'party' or 'Voters Organisation', whatever its name, can place a new model before the people, by declaring that it looks upon power as a means or an instrument, and not an end in itself, - to be attained and retained 'at any cost'. It is when a party wants power 'at any cost' that it deliberately or unwillingly sacrifices values, resorts to intrigues and strategies that negate democracy, promote the personality cult, abridge democratic processes within the party, and lose all compunction in treating the electorate as gullible and corruptible, and controllable with a combination of blandishments and subtle threats, or if necessary, naked terror. The moment a party or voters' organisation declares that it does not believe in seeking power at any cost, that it looks upon power as an instrument of service, and so, would not resort to populism or try to short-circuit rights; processes and institutions, it creates a new category for itself. It becomes a party that is willing to shoulder the responsibility to implement a mandate, if necessary, or to monitor the implementation of the mandate by others if others take the responsibility. It thus becomes a realistic alternative.

The electorate cannot be asked to choose between those who are willing to take up responsibility if given a mandate, and those who are not willing to take responsibility. There will be severe, lethal limitations on our ability to influence the electorate if we insist on not accepting responsibility. We may be looked upon, as 'irrelevant'. The experience of the many attempts that have made in different states should convince anyone that the electorate did not take us seriously because we

did not want them to look upon us as alternative executors of the popular will in relation to the functions of government.

Thus, if political action has to include both *Satyagraha* and electoral action, it has become necessary for us to review which forms of these have to be adopted today to increase our effectiveness, in terms of: (a) the ultimate goal; (b) the responses that are required in the immediate present to deal with explosive situations that arise; and (c) the need to see that undesirable trends do not become irreversible.

We have thus to have programmes of:

- a) Constructive-developmental work; to afford relief; show the viability of our ideas of development; to pave the way for the economic and social order we visualise; to generate the power and organisation necessary for struggle, if struggle becomes necessary. Organisation relates resources and energy to the objective, and enables us to look for a graded path to the goal.
- b) Non-violent struggle or *Satyagraha* to deal with local grievances, to secure justice, for disabled, exploited and endangered groups. It may be necessary to review many of the forms of unarmed struggle that are in vogue today, - like *gheraos* and *rasta rokos*, from the point of view of *Satyagraha*. These may be 'unarmed' struggles; and the organisers of such struggles may describe them as '*Satyagraha*'; but there is a basic difference between a *Satyagraha* struggle and an 'unarmed struggle'. An unarmed struggle can result in violence, deaths and the exacerbation of animosities. A *Satyagrahi* struggle is motivated by love, and is meant to pave the way for persuasion, not physical coercion. It is obvious that one can not embark on a detailed examination of all these forms in this paper.
- c) Political action that may include both electoral action, and

*Satyagraha*, when necessary.

## IX

A new strategy of this kind will have to be a multi-pronged strategy since the crisis itself is multipronged. Gandhi himself followed a multi-pronged strategy. He combined constructive work, *Satyagraha* and political action. There is no reason to think that any other strategy can be effective today. We must therefore overcome the effects of the five fallacies; forget the differences of the past, and work on all three fronts, each working on a front of his choice or liking, but recognising that others who are working in either of the other fronts is working for the same purpose, and is therefore a comrade in the same struggle for a non-violent social order.

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## **Is There an Alternative to A Non-violent Revolution? \***

I am deeply grateful to Dr Vivekanandan for the opportunity that he has given me to pay my respectful tribute to the memory of Lok Nayak Jayaprakash Narayan and to speak a few words on a subject that occupied his mind for many years.

For many of us who belong to the generation that entered public life during the last decade of struggle for independence, J.P. was a legendary hero. It is only with the deepest of emotions that we can recall the many landmarks of his eventful life-his escape from the Hazaribagh Jail, the torture that was inflicted on him in the Lahore Fort the suffering that he had to undergo during the last days of his life, during the Emergency. He was a man of indomitable courage and determination. His devotion to the cause, of social justice was total. He was transparently selfless. For a man who was known as a revolutionary, he was full of gentleness and concern. He had no personal ambition; his only ambition was to work for the emergence of a new society which would be free from exploitation and misery. He knew that one who wanted to work for the creation of such a society had to be ready to keep a lonely vigil, to pay the price that is demanded of those who resist injustice and evil. He was a man of action who led many struggles and built up many organisations. But he was also a thinker who rose above orthodoxy and conformism, who had the courage and humility to evolve, and to testify to his evolution through speech and action. He held nothing higher than the interests of humanity, of people,-whether they lived in India or Tibet or Bangladesh or Pakistan or any other part of the globe.

I venture to think that the subject that I have chosen does, in some measure, reflect of the direction of the journey of his mind.

In raising the question, "Is there an alternative to a non-violent revolution," I must first explain the context in which the question has arisen in my mind. It is obvious that the question relates to the prevailing political, economic and social systems, the success that they have achieved in solving the basic problems of our people, and the promise that they hold for the future. We have, therefore, to begin by asking ourselves:

- (1) Have we failed in achieving our national objectives?
- (2) If we have failed, is it a failure of individuals, or is it a failure of the system?
- (3) If it is a failure of the system, can we still hope that it can be corrected from within?
- (4) If it cannot be corrected from within, or solely by action from within the system, and needs action from without, from outside the system, can 'violent' action or action that depends on the use of violence or physical force achieve our social objectives? In other words, can a violent revolution achieve our social objectives?
- (5) If a violent revolution cannot be relied upon to bring about the social transformation we desire, is there an alternative to a non-violent revolution?

At the very outset, one should state what one means by social transformation. To put it very briefly, for the purpose of this discussion, one is using the term to denote the transformation of the present society into one in which there

will be equal rights and equal opportunities in which man-made disparities will be minimised or eliminated; in which there will be no exploitation or discrimination; in which the ownership of wealth and instruments of production will subserve these objectives, and not the creation and exacerbation of inequalities and disparities; in which there will be maximum self-government and participatory democracy at all levels, and in all social institutions that govern the life of the people; and in which unarmed people will have the ability to control and correct the abuse of the power that emanates from them, and is exercised in their name.

A logical and legitimate way of examining the question whether we have failed will be to begin by asking ourselves why we struggled for independence, and what our conception of independence was. Why did we believe that *Swaraj* was our birthright, and the re-assertion of national sovereignty or complete independence was the first step that we had to take if our people were to come into their own, if their poverty was to be liquidated, their human dignity was to be restored, and the doors to growth and self-expression opened to them? For an answer, we have only to look at the Independence pledge that was taken in 1930: "We believe that it is the inalienable right of the Indian people, as of any other people, to have freedom, and enjoy the fruits of their toil, and have the necessities of life so that they have full opportunities of growth. We believe also that if any Government deprives a people of these rights and oppresses them, the people have a further right to alter it or to abolish it. The British Government in India has not only deprived the Indian people of their freedom, but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally and spiritually. We believe therefore that India must sever the British connection and attain *Purna Swaraj* or complete independence. India has been ruined economically. Village industries such as hand spinning have

been destroyed leaving the peasantry idle for at least four months in the year and dulling their intellect for want of handicrafts ... nothing has been substituted, as in other countries, for the crafts thus destroyed... British manufactured goods constitute the bulk of our imports, revenue from them is used not to lessen the burden on the masses, but for sustaining a highly extravagant administration. Politically,... no reforms have given real power to the people. Culturally, the system of education has torn us from our moorings, our training has made us hug the very chains that bind us. We hold it to be a crime against man and God to submit any longer to a rule that has caused this disaster to our country. We recognize, however, that the most effective way of gaining our freedom is not through violence . . . . “and so on.

I have no intention to multiply such embarrassing quotations. What I want to point out is that there are some nearly universally accepted indices that we can use in deciding whether we have failed or succeeded in the intentions with which we set out as an independent nation. One such index is the pledge of complete independence that was not merely an ultimatum to the British Government, but also a commitment to the people of India about the purpose, content and meaning of independence. The other two indices that I would like to mention are the constitution (that is a national covenant) and the unanimous report of the committee that the Congress set up immediately after Independence, under the chairmanship of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.

Since I propose to confine myself, in this talk, to the political dynamics that the current situation may call for, I shall refrain from referring at length to the Nehru Committee and its recommendations in the economic field except to say that the report renewed the commitment to the people, and reiterated

that the paramount duty of the State would be:

- (i) To raise the standard of living of the poorest section of the people;
- (ii) To assure them the basic necessities of life;
- (iii) To ensure full employment;
- (iv) To demarcate separate sectors for small-scale, large-scale, and state-run industries to achieve this objective;
- (iv) To make the district, or lower units, self-sufficient in the production of basic necessities;
- (vi) To increase industrial production without increasing disparities;
- (vii) To fix a ratio of 1:40 between the minimum and the maximum incomes, to be gradually reduced to 1:20; and
- (viii) To ensure that foreign capital and investment do not take over control of the economy from 'national hands.'

There are four indices that the Constitution provides: One, the basic concepts or foundations of our polity, viz., (a) nationhood or the belief that we are one nation; (b) sovereignty; (c) democracy; and (d) socialism. The last of these was added many years after the Constitution was adopted and promulgated. Two, the chapter on Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles of the Constitution. Three, the organs or institutions that were set up under the Constitution, viz., the Parliament or the Legislatures, the judiciary, and the executive. Four, the Federal Principles, and the distribution and balance of powers envisaged by the Constitution.

Before examining the present in the light of these

indices, let us cast a quick look at where we have reached in achieving what were identified as the first priorities. Forty per cent of our people are still below the poverty line. The basic necessities of life are still outside the grasp of a very-large section of our people. We have not been able to assure pure drinking water to every village. Only three per cent of villages have facilities of rural sanitation. Forty-eight per cent of our population is still illiterate in spite of the fact that our Constitution has imposed on the State the duty to provide compulsory primary education to all our children, and this provision has been in the Statutes for over four decades. There are many villages without primary schools, many primary schools without buildings or teachers, many teachers who live in the headquarters of the tahsil or district and visit their schools only to claim their salaries every month. Disparities in wealth have increased between person and person, region and region. Nearly 3.4 crores of our people are registered as unemployed in the rural areas. The number of landless agricultural labourers has increased manifold. Most of our handicrafts are getting extinct. Artisans who were proud craftsmen earning their livelihood as smiths, carpenters, masons, metal workers, potters, cobblers and the like are unemployed. They have been thrown out of work, and their arts and crafts have withered, if not disappeared, as a consequence of the ruthless and state-supported competition they have had to face from big industrial units, and now, from multinational corporations and their junior partners. Every sector, or practically every sector of the national economy, including those related to the production of consumer goods or food processing, has been opened to foreign enterprise.

But failures on these fronts need not be looked upon as the failures of the system itself. So, let us turn to the Constitution which was adopted to define the foundations, and

to provide the framework of our system. Firstly, let us look at the foundations-the belief in a common nationhood, in sovereignty, in democracy, and in socialism.

The sense of nationhood was not merely a reflex that the presence and policies of the alien caused. It was essentially a positive awareness of oneness, of the commonness of experience and aspiration that had seeped into the subconscious, through oral traditions, mores and myths, and the ambience of amity and mutuality in the case of the common man, and through all these reinforced by the study of history, culture, and modern ideas, in the case of the elite and the educated. Those who have lived through the period of the struggle for independence will surely testify to the reality and the near-universality of this sense of oneness. I do not suggest there was no dissent, or that no one challenged the prevalent notion of nationhood. Indeed there were some who argued that religion or ethnic affinity was the predominant determinant of nationhood, and that India could not, therefore, be considered a country inhabited by one nation. Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah forced the partition of the country on the basis of his two-nation theory. But, apart from those who followed him, the vast majority of Indians considered this view an illogical and unfortunate aberration, and believed that religion or ethnic affinity could not be considered the sole basis of nationhood; that diversity in religious beliefs, ethnic origin, language, and the like need not prevent the emergence, stability, and progress of a nation. Thus the concept of nationhood that took shape from our distant as well as recent history was based on secularism or equal respect for all religions, pluralism, and virtual federalism. It was widely believed that, with the Partition, and the carnage and colossal uprooting of families that came as its aftermath, the illogicality and impracticability of the two-nation theory had been proved to the hilt, and the theory that had become a convenient political hatchet in the

hands of power-seekers had been buried many fathoms deep.

But, with the advent of freedom, politics itself underwent a change. It became a power game. Power ceased to be looked upon as an instrument of social transformation. It became a goal in itself. It became an obsession. Power was everything; without it one could do nothing; without it one was nothing. So one had to get to power at any cost, and to retain power at any cost. One should not fight shy of using any appeal, any argument, any libel that could help one to sway the mind of the electorate, even if it meant appealing to what was divisive, selfish, and base; and even if the sway or influence did not survive the frenzy that was created for a few days. It was soon discovered that the appeal to the interests of a part paid more electoral dividends than the appeal to the interests of the whole. All political parties, therefore, entered into a fierce competition to discover, pamper, and exploit "sectional" and divisive interests that helped them to climb the rungs of the ladder of power. Parties began to woo communal forces, parochial forces, caste groups, linguistic or ethnic groups and so on, not to remind them of the imperative need to preserve the integrity of the nation, but to seek partisan dividends. Those who were the standard-bearers of secularism and the one-nation theory were perhaps the first to lead others into the quagmire. The consequences that we see today are:

- (i) The surreptitious return of the theory that linked religion to nationhood;
- (ii) The emergence of movements that link ethnic affinity to the right to nationhood; and
- (iii) The emergence of caste as a weapon in the struggle for political power. -

The first of these manifests itself in three forms:

- (a) Open revival or formation of political or electoral



organizations that base themselves on the interests of one religious community;

- (b) Pampering communal organizations and forces by conceding their demands, even when they are patently violative of secularism and the commitment to assure equal rights to people belonging to all faiths; and
- (c) Using a communal appellation like “Hindu” or “*Hindutva*” to define common nationhood, thereby creating the apprehension that the meaning and character of nationhood is being altered through a jugglery of words. It is easy to see that all three of these repudiate secularism or equal respect for all religions in practice, and can therefore be called "pseudo-secular' or anti-secular.

When all parties are equally anxious to seek dividends from the communal card, all sections, however fundamentalist or fanatical, are looked upon as potential allies. No party is willing to "alienate" any section by dissociating itself or condemning the potential friend. How then can public opinion be created against the forces of communalism? If one sees that a competitor is likely to get 'the solid support' of a communal group, one feels compelled to adopt a tactic that will help to minimise the disadvantage, and that is to attempt to split or divide the target group, by discovering a moderate group or a group that can take extreme positions in the intra-group competition for the support of the community. The result is the fluid state of permutations and combinations that we witness, and the increasing inability of parties to resist the forces of divisiveness, fanaticism, fundamentalism and its backlash, and so on. Political parties, in power or outside, fail even to prevent open and naked incitement to communal violence, public speeches threatening retribution by massacre, assassination, arson, etc., the production and playing of highly provocative

audio tapes that spread hatred. They have no qualms in preventing action against those who are engaged in building arms dumps and organising anti-social elements for riots, even the punishment of those who are found guilty. The result is the creation of an atmosphere of suspicion and hatred; the stockpiling of weapons, even in places of worship; the formation and training of action-squads; increasing incidents of communal conflict, and so on. The fact that those who have taken a leading part in organising communal riots are sometimes concurrently elected from a number of constituencies in the area of conflict throws light on the extent to which the poison has spread in our body politic. There are instances in which the elected representatives of the people coming from premier parties have led marauding mobs and got away with impunity. What more is required to show that our political parties have collectively undermined the basic concept, of secularism and created a situation in which some leading figures can talk of a fight to the finish, or push the country to the brink of a civil war?

The threats that we witness in the tribal areas in the border states as well as in the heartland have arisen from a number of factors. It is not possible for us here to go into them at length. The policy of the imperialist government was aimed at isolating them from the mainstream, and exposing them to the exclusive influence of forces that could be relied upon to support the government. When independence came, our politicians, businessmen, traders and others failed to welcome these citizens of our country on terms of equality, respect, and friendship. Those who were better off tried to exploit the innocence and openness tribal population with cynical abandon and contempt. Brazen inroads were made into their traditional homelands in the name of development, of the exploitation of mines and minerals and timber, and the location of industrial

plants, thermal power stations, hydro-electric projects and schemes for the protection of wild life. The callousness with which tribal have been dispossessed of their lands, uprooted from their habitations and their traditional economic and social systems, and thrown to the mercy of powerful forces with which they were unfamiliar, and the inadequate respect given to the federal concept are all responsible for the sullenness, and the challenges that we are witnessing today in these areas. Many of our tribes fear that their identity and their life systems are being destroyed by 'outsiders' who have tricked them, and laid claim to their land resources. The system has failed to protect them. How then can they retain faith in the system?

In what part of the system should they repose their faith-the legislators, the politicians who are hand in glove with their exploiters, the bureaucracy on the spot, the forest officers, the contractors, the poachers, the police, the judicial system that is too distant; too costly, too complicated, too awe-inspiring for them? They are unlettered. They do not know the intricacies of the law that are promulgated by the government. They do not know how to preserve their lands, their traditional ways and economies. They are dazed when they are told that they have become poachers or illegal trespassers in their traditional homelands. They are sent out into cruel exile by those who claim legal rights to their century-old possessions. In this situation, they begin by asking for cultural autonomy, move to the demand for administrative autonomy, and then to the demand for separation or secession. This is the syndrome that we now witness in many of our tribal areas.

I do not think it is necessary for me to deal in detail with the similar syndrome of escalating demands, that one sees in territorial units that have ethnic, religious, or linguistic groups that claim an identity of their own. Here too, one sees escalating demands leading to the demand for separation, and

in some cases to terrorism and worse. The elements of federalism in our system have been found to be too inadequate, and even the earnestness to explore their adequacy or resilience has been conspicuous by its absence.

Though I have mentioned caste as a powerful factor that is undermining the spirit of oneness, I do not propose to deal with all aspects of the question including the justification for reservations, their impact, and so on. But a few aspects need to be pointed out:

- (1) In the years after Independence, caste consciousness has been escalated to an unprecedented pitch;
- (2) This has been done primarily by politicians who have talked in the name of social justice, but presented escalating demands as part of their manoeuvres to appeal to vote-banks;
- (3) As in the case of communal vote-banks, in this case, too, the competition among parties, has induced all parties to take populist stances, and then become victims of their own stances;
- (4) This has prevented an objective examination of the most effective ways of ending all discrimination and disadvantages, and the caste system itself. The relative effectiveness of reverse discriminations and repeated extensions of reservations in securing justice and equality to those who suffer from the effects of traditional social discrimination (and economic disadvantages), and in making the caste system illegal-whether there is any element of counter-productiveness in the present methods-cannot be discussed in the atmosphere of populist frenzy that is whipped up;
- (5) In spite of the provisions in the Constitution about untouchability and the laws that have been enacted,

continued practice of discrimination, illegal and inhuman manifestations of the might of the so-called upper classes, and the stealthy support that they receive from the guardians of law and order continue to mock our professions;

- (6) Caste and the vested interests of the economically powerful have combined to defend regimes of exploitation and to suppress the socially and economically backward, particularly the landless in the rural areas;
- (7) This, as well as inter-caste rivalry, has led to the formation of, caste armies, and to massacres and retaliatory massacres. It has been reported that between March and September 1990, nearly 370 Dalits were killed every month in one State of India. It is not necessary to quote figures to show that many districts in the State of Bihar are in the grip of a relentless and barbarous caste war;
- (8) The Mandal riots gave us an idea of what is in store for the nation, if the fires of caste-conflict are allowed to spread, and not contained;
- (9) Here again, we find that the democratic political system has been exploited by the power-hungry to accentuate conflict, and take society to the brink of a civil war.

I have referred to the other foundational ideas of our polity-viz., sovereignty, democracy, and socialism. Of these, the word 'socialist' was introduced to describe the nature of our Republic only decades after the Constitution was adopted. These days, many countries that once prided themselves on being 'socialist,' are dropping the use of the adjective to describe their State or parties. Socialism is sometimes compared to an old hat, and it is said that as the hat that adorns

many heads loses its shape, socialism too has lost its meaning. Be that as it may, socialism has something to do with social control or ownership of the instruments of production and wealth, equitable distribution, equal opportunity, and the like. Can any one claim that we are progressing towards these? In fact we are relinquishing social or State control in as many fields as the World bank-IMF prescribes or advises, if that is a better word. Can any one say what the World Bank-IMF would think tomorrow of the creditworthiness of countries that use the word 'socialist' to describe themselves?

Turning to Sovereignty, we see that threats have appeared-internally, from those who have begun to challenge the paramountcy of the central state, and externally from multinational financial institutions and corporations that seem to be anxious to step into the breach created by the termination of the old and crude forms of imperialism, and are using compulsions and conditionalities to whittle away the economic self-determination and self-reliance of developing countries.

The concept of sovereignty has to be viewed from more than one angle; one obvious angle is that of the paramountcy of the State within the territory that it claims as its own. In exercising this paramountcy, it depends not merely on the electoral mandate that it receives periodically, and the armed force with which it asserts its authority, but also on the various sub-centres of the power structure in the society, in its territory. Another angle is reflected in the relationship of the State to other States; its ability or inability to exercise complete independence in determining, defending, and promoting the interests of the people it represents, without being inhibited by the political, military, or economic power of another State. In the olden days, the standard way of imposing these inhibitions was through conquest and political domination as one sees in imperialism or its milder versions. Political domination was

achieved and maintained through intrigue and naked military power. But, of late, physical possession of territory has become less important. What is aimed at is the creation of client states that are willing to serve the economic, military, political, or ideological interests of the other, while still preserving the appearance and appurtenances of sovereignty.

In both these areas, serious threats have emerged. Within the country, we find areas in which the commitment to the sovereignty of the Central State has been corroded. The threat may turn even more serious if some of the forces that I have referred to act in concert. It appears that the economic pressures that are being exerted from foreign countries and multinational corporations or multinational economic institutions may also contribute to the inhibition of sovereignty.

If the history of other developing countries offers any lesson, this threat cannot be brushed aside as non-existent. Even those who believe that the concept of sovereignty itself is under attack in the world today must be able to distinguish between the surrender of some of the attributes of sovereignty by all nations, and the surrender or atrophy of the sovereignty of one nation in its relations with another nation, or a group of nations.

I do not say anything about democracy now since I propose to deal with it when I come to our political institutions.

But, before we turn to them, let us look at another index, the Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles outlined in the Constitution.

The Articles that enshrine Fundamental Rights have acquired provisos that render the 'Fundamental' Rights less than fundamental and inviolable. They have given the State the right to abridge practically every Fundamental Right, in the name of

public order, or defending the State or society from disruption. The Emergency exposed how almost all Fundamental Rights could be put in cold storage or extinguished by introducing amendments that aimed at conferring immunity on the political leaders who hold the power of the state in their hands, and exposing the common citizen to loss of life or liberty, without the redress that judicial review might give. That these amendments were secured, or favourable judgments obtained through the use of terror and temptation, aimed at the members of the Legislature and the judicial system, has also exposed the mettle of our representatives and the earnestness and the commitment of the judiciary to uphold justice and the liberties guaranteed by the Constitution. I do not know how many of our legal luminaries and the leaders of the judicial system developed uneasy consciences after the Emergency ended, but I cannot brush aside the thought that, on some crucial occasions, the judiciary, of some of our neighbouring countries chose to set a different example. The main point that I want to make here is that the Emergency showed how our system could be destroyed from within, among other things by the component organs being paralysed by fear, or by those in power using threats and sops to subvert the system.

Now, where do we stand if we look upon the Directive Principles as indices of the direction we were expected to take? The Constitution says that the Principles are not enforceable, but are "fundamental in the governance of the country, and It shall be the duty of the State to apply these principles in making laws."

Article 38 (2) talks of striving to minimise inequalities in income, status, and opportunities; 39 talks of securing to all citizens the right to an adequate means of livelihood, of ensuring that the ownership and control of material 'resources are so distributed as to subserve the common good and the



operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production. Article 40 talks of ensuring that village panchayats become units of real self-government; 41 talks of providing the right to work, and to social security, assuring a decent standard of life, and opportunity for the full enjoyment of leisure. Article 44 talks of a uniform civil code. Article 45 provides for the free and compulsory education of all children up to 14 years of age; 46 talks of the protection of the rights of the weaker sections, the scheduled castes and tribes. Article 47 talks of bringing about prohibition. Yet, which one of these has been adhered to by the State? The case of prohibition is eye-opening. Today, a large part of the revenue of almost every State in India comes from the production and sale of liquor. Do we add to the credibility of the system by persistently and flagrantly violating the Directive Principles?

Now, let us turn to the basic institutions-the Parliament or legislature, and the judiciary. (Where should one start to be sure that one does not attract pleas of privilege or contempt?) Let us look at the Parliament and the legislatures. When we opted for adult franchise, we had hoped that: (i) there would be a Commensurate and continuous effort to 'educate' the voter, to provide him with the information and knowledge that he required to form opinions on matters of public importance. (ii) Every effort would be made to free his mind of feudal loyalties, fear of reprisals, superstitions, etc., so that he might not feel inhibited in the expression of his views; so that he exercised his franchise in an atmosphere of calm reflection, and not in frenzy. The contributions that parties have made in this field have been marginal, if not negative.

Since 1969, most parties have fallen in line with the tactic of personalising politics (that Indira Gandhi initiated); of regarding debates on policy as redundant; of projecting a

person as the solution; of asking other parties to project their alternatives to the person not to a set of policies or a team of competent leaders.

Some of the consequences of this style need to be identified:

- (1) The unashamed emergence of a personality cult and the theory of the indispensability of an individual or a dynasty-although the concept of indispensability is incongruent with or repugnant to the basic concepts of democracy.
- (2) The magnification and predominance of one personality in each party.
- (3) The liberation of that person from the control of the party.
- (4) The centralisation of the power to select candidates, in one person, thereby losing the links with the rank and file at the grassroots.
- (5) The emergence of a crop of leaders who depend on the leader for their positions.
- (6) The decimation of those who had independent followings or views.
- (7) The substitution of elections within the party by nomination by the leader.
- (8) The ellipsis of democratic processes, accountability, and control within the party.
- (9) The a trophy of the federal principle.

Almost concurrently with personalisation came a high degree of populism and an attempt to reduce policy canvasses to a single slogan that could catch. In choosing candidates, ideological commitment, caliber, record of social or political

work, character or integrity, became less important than (a) loyalty to the leader, (b) the capacity to get elected whether or not one was acceptable to the local unit of the party or the people in the area, and (c) access to money and the ability to mobilise even anti-social forces to ensure victory at the polls. The consequence was the entry or induction of a new kind of politician who had no ideology other than the pursuit of power, who desired to secure and retain power at any cost. This meant readiness to use money and terror, to resort to any means that secured the desired result—impersonation, booth capture, terrorisation of voters and presiding officers, stealing of ballot boxes, assassination of rival candidates or their workers, and threats of retribution or massacre after the polls, and so on. It is obvious that those who can get such things done have themselves to be persons with money and muscle power or persons who can depend on the full-scale cooperation of anti-social elements who control money and muscle power. Thus has come into being a formidable combination of three forces — those who seek political power and the wealth and privileges that it brings; those who can find the lakhs or crores of rupees that each candidate needs to get elected; and those who can physically deliver the votes needed for victory,—a combination that threatens to prove fatal to our democratic system.

Today, we find that a Chief Minister can openly declare that he would see that no candidate other than the one of his party would be declared elected anywhere in his State.

When candidates need crores of rupees, parties have to raise the money through misuse of government machinery or by depending on those who have amassed black money through illegal operations, including smuggling. Those who make such money available have their own demands or expectations. They may be crude or refined in demanding amenability, immunity or the freedom to expand their empires. Money can buy tickets;

it can buy seats where elections are indirect; it can buy the loyalty of legislators or buy their silence. It can engineer defections. It can save or break Governments. So, politicians who seek the summits of power must make money or get the backing of 'money-banks.'

The next phase commences when those whose money power or muscle power gets candidates elected soon begin to wonder why they should not themselves turn candidates. Thus, you have the 'gradual criminalisation of politics, the introduction of persons with startling criminal records into the legislatures, municipal corporations and local bodies. It is reported that in some municipal councils, the majority of successful candidates are persons with criminal records. In one Municipal Corporation, there is a known organiser of communal violence who got elected from five constituencies simultaneously. In one State, there was a Minister who, as reported in some reputed journals, figured in 256 out of the 388 cases of kidnappings in the State, had 49 criminal cases pending against him in two districts, and along with his goons, was reported by reputed journals to be involved in 150 deaths during communal riots and 35 murders during general elections, and so on. I do not think a lengthier citation is needed. In another State, the continuing conflicts between the gangs led by two legislators is reported to have taken three districts to the verge of a civil war. In yet another State, one party is reported to have fielded 30 candidates who had connections with dacoit gangs. Thus we see that criminals have walked into the chambers of legislatures as well as the Councils of Ministers, acquiring respectability, acquiring immunity, making a mockery of the laws of the legislature, the bureaucracy, the judiciary, and the democratic system itself. How can a system retain its credibility when it tends to push criminals to the summits of power, when political parties themselves induct anti-social elements into power?

Can we then say that legislators, once elected, have been anxious to protect the dignity and the basic axioms of the system? Disorderly behaviour in the Houses, mutual fisticuffs, obscene language and gestures, outrageous conduct like attempting to pin down and molest a woman member on the floor of the House, willingness to change loyalties, betrayal of the mandate of the electorate, and defection to gain an office for a wad of notes, have contributed to make a mockery of the system. It is not that the system has been brought into disrepute; it is the system that has produced the present quagmire. How then can it save itself?

The next institution that we have to look at is the Judiciary. Neither Fundamental Rights nor the Concept of Equality before Law can have meaning without an independent, fearless and incorruptible judiciary. The lowliest of citizens must be able to obtain justice before the efflux of time robs judicial verdicts of the power to provide redress. It must be said with regret that the credibility of this institution too is receiving, a severe battering. To take expeditiousness and expensiveness first: it is well known that there are more than two crores of cases pending in the courts. Backlogs keep accumulating in geometric proportions. Hearings are repeatedly put off for long periods, causing delay, expenses, harassment, and denial of justice. There are no codes that limit the fees of lawyers and relate them, to the incomes of the poor who constitute 80 per cent or more of our people, or even to the income of clients. There are lawyers who charge 'astronomical' fees for appearing for a few minutes, and there are some who charge not only for appearing, but also for not appearing on behalf of a defendant or petitioner. It is reported that there are courts that teem with touts and fixers and brokers who claim to be able to get judgements in favour of their clients. Charges of bribery, corruption, and consideration have been made even

against sitting judges of High Courts. One judge of the Supreme Court has been arraigned for corruption. Bar associations have passed resolutions condemning the conduct of judges as well as High Judicial Officers of the State including the Attorney-General. As has happened with the politicians, the innocent and the upright may also become victims of a feeling of general cynicism, and the institution itself may lose credibility and effectiveness.

Ever since the theory of a committed judiciary was put forward in the late sixties, in the regime of Indira Gandhi, there have been a series of attacks on the independence of the judiciary. Packing courts with caste cronies and political appointees, using the threat of transfers and supersessions, and the temptation of discreet offers of lucrative or prestigious postings or appointments, and so on, and in the cases of some lower courts, downright arm-twisting or violence, have been employed to 'clip the wings' of the Judiciary; in other words, to subject them to the same tactic of threats and sops, and to use the power of the legislature or the executive to circumvent the judgements, intentions and role of the judiciary. No wonder Justice P.N. Bhagwati was forced to observe that 'the judiciary is under attack, and the rule of law is in danger.'

For lack of time, I do not propose to deal with the Bureaucracy.

But there is one other powerful enemy that has infiltrated into every vein, artery and capillary, into every nook and corner of the system, and is working nonchalantly, cynically, ceaselessly to destroy the system. This is corruption. Laws can be circumvented. Immunity can be bought. A crime that is committed in broad daylight before witnesses may never get proved. The guilty may not be punished. An innocent person who incurs the ire of the powerful may rot in jail on trumped up charges. Postings in police stations that are

considered lucrative go by auction. It seems that unlike water, money seeps or flows to higher levels. Admissions are bought, marks are bought, invigilators are terrorised or bought, jobs are bought. There is a rate for the job of a peon, a clerk, a primary schoolteacher, and so on. You do not get the job, or the posting or the transfer or the promotion unless you pay. Files do not move, traffic does not move, documents do not get registered; sometimes, even letters do not get delivered; electric connections are given or disconnected, gas cylinders arrive or fail to arrive, railway reservations are not available, a dead body may not be located in the morgue, or a corpse cremated unless you grease palms. When the processes prescribed by law and institutions can be circumvented, undermined, rendered nugatory and farcical by corruption or the might of physical force, what is it that controls the system-not Law, not the Constitution, but money, and the force of arms.

The interests of the seekers of political power or the pedlars of influence, the merchants of greed, the mafia and the goondas have got so inextricably intertwined that the system that was launched four decades ago has been subverted beyond redemption.

It should now be easy for us to answer the questions with which we started. The system has failed to deliver the goods. It is not individuals who have failed, but it is the system itself that has been subverted. It is no longer possible to hope that there are elements in the system that can help to redeem it. To which institution shall we look for a reversal of the process or for breaking the stranglehold that is choking the system?-the parties, the legislatures, the Judiciary, the bureaucracy? The salt hath truly lost its flavour. Wherewith shall it be salted? Do we then go back to Dandi?

If a system cannot be corrected from within, it has to be

corrected or substituted by efforts from outside, or by a combination of efforts from within and from without. The efforts from outside the institutions of the system have to come through the intervention or action of the masses. It is this intervention by the masses that we have come to identify as direct action. In theory, direct action can be armed or violent, or non-violent I have used the word 'non-violent' because unarmed action need not necessarily be non-violent, and I want to underline the non-violent nature of the alternative to violent variants. It may be possible for non-violent action to combine action from without with action from within. This is, however, difficult, almost impossible, in violent action.

Now, we must examine why violent variants of direct action cannot repair or replace the system.

In the centuries that have followed the Industrial Revolution, the induction of sophisticated technology has brought about massive changes not only in the fields of production and communication, but also in the field of destruction, often euphemistically called 'defence.' Once violence is made the arbiter in an encounter, victory goes to the side that can deploy superior force, and not necessarily to those who can claim logic or justice on their side. All those contemplate the use of force either as the first resort, or as the last resort will therefore have to take into account: (a) the nature of the weaponry, and the likely tactics and friends of the prospective enemy; (b) the need to acquire superiority in the quantum of force at one's command and to be one step or many steps ahead in the competition to stay superior; and (c) the inherent danger of obsolescence of the weapons on which one relies. These basic factors have to be taken into account by nations that want to settle disputes by military encounters as well as by citizens' groups that want to prepare for violent, armed encounters against other groups that they regard as



perpetrators of injustice, or against the state itself. In fact, groups that want to fight for what they consider social justice, especially when their fight involves an assault on the status quo often find that they are pitted against the state. There is nothing surprising in this, since the state is the ultimate protector or under-writer and defender of the 'order' and 'Laws' that are approved by a 'legally' constituted body of 'representatives.' But it does underline the fact that all citizens' groups that are prepared to take to the path of extra-constitutional direct action for 'social justice' or for changing the status quo must be prepared to encounter the armed might of the state. A comparative appraisal of the armed might and tactics of the state and the armed might and radical tactics of citizens' groups therefore becomes relevant and necessary.

The induction of sophisticated technology has brought about a massive escalation in the destructive power of weapons, in their variety, in the efficiency of delivery systems, in the resilience and range of logistical systems, and in the means of psychological warfare. This, in turn, has created an almost unbridgeable disparity between the quantum of armed force at the command of the State and that at the command of citizens' groups. Citizens' groups have, therefore, had to look for a change in operational tactics that can enable them to reduce the impact of this disparity and retain the hope of victory. They have had to abandon the tactics of open, direct confrontation at the legendary 'barricades,' and take to means that help to minimize their vulnerability and maximize their strike power to paralyse as well as to overcome. The operational necessity to offset the overall superiority of the State (including superiority in the variety and stockpile of arms etc.) by achieving parity or superiority in deployable force has compelled them to adopt such tactics, theatres, terrains, durations and variants of confrontational actions as are conducive to this objective. There are four such variants with which we have become familiar,

viz., (i) assassination; (ii) terrorism; (iii) insurgency; and (iv) guerrilla warfare. Each of these has its own effect on the mind, organisation and command-structure of the group that initiates such action; on the minds of the so-identified perpetrators of injustice; on the minds and responses of those who have to take, and implement decisions on behalf of the government, including the ministers, the bureaucracy, the police, officers on the spot and the like; and on the minds of the people at large. It is not possible here to examine all these in detail. But a few observations have to be made about the processes that they set in motion, their effect on the social psyche, and their effectiveness as instruments of social transformation.

To take up assassination first-and the number of political assassinations has increased spectacularly in the last few years-,its object is removal or retaliation. The target is identified, and the deed is executed as a result of an individual decision or a secret conspiracy. It may succeed in the removal of the target, but it does not achieve the object of changing the system or bringing about social transformation. The one who is assassinated may be followed by another who is even more tyrannical or ruthless, and who may utilise the atmosphere of sympathy that the assassination may generate, to resort to even more ruthless suppression of dissent. Assassinations are therefore never adopted as the single-point programme of any revolutionary or radical group. They may become part of a war-plan, never the whole of it. In fact, they are used in terrorism as well as insurgency or guerrilla warfare.

This leads us to an examination of terrorism. Terrorism uses assassinations as well as massacres; but its main objective is not the removal of individuals. Its main objective is to use terror as a weapon, to create terror in the minds of the perpetrators of injustice, in the minds of those who formulate

and implement government policy in support of the so-identified perpetrators of injustice, and in the minds of people in general. It becomes necessary to create fear in the minds of the people for two reasons. Firstly, the terrorist or the guerrilla wants to ensure that he is not betrayed to the police or the authorities, that his plans are not foiled by the transmission of intelligence about his intentions, his movements, the whereabouts of his arsenals, etc. To some extent, he does depend on ideological sympathy for the cause that he espouses; but since all the people who live in the territory in which he operates may not share his ideology or his perception of the cause, or belief in his methods, he wants to ensure safety through deterrence or fear of retaliation. He also wants to prove that the State or the representatives of vested interests cannot guarantee the safety of the populace; that the common citizen is at his mercy, and can buy security only through acquiescence or silence. The objective of the terrorist thus is to paralyse the administration, to expose its ineffectiveness, its inability to protect even the common citizen who is innocent; to show that the writ of the government does not run; that its force, or superiority in force, is a myth. To achieve this objective, the terrorist uses the weapon of fear. He does not confine his targets to leaders and officers of the government or the leaders and symbols of social injustice or to those who are opposed to his views, He is indiscriminate. The terrorist does not discriminate in the use of terror. There is no longer any distinction between the innocent and the guilty. All are targets, inasmuch as injury done to them can set off waves of fear and insecurity. Physical targets too are not confined to strong points or logistical systems or armouries. The terrorist resorts to individual murders, blowing up of buses, trains and tracks, indiscriminate firing into assembled gatherings, kidnappings of important human targets or their relatives, ambushing, waylaying, hijacking, blowing up of hotels, banks, hospitals,

etc. He may hold people to ransom to extract money or weapons, or use them as hostages to secure the release of his companions who have been taken prisoner by the State. At other times, he may play Robin Hood or mete out instant justice to instill fear, or faith in his revolutionary 'bonafides.'

At this point, it is necessary to draw attention to the response that this draws from the State. Firstly, even when the leaders of the administration are aware that there is a dimension of 'social justice' to a conflict or an incipient conflict, they are most often prone to view the conflict as a challenge to 'Law and Order,' entitling them to use the traditional means that are used by States to maintain Law and Order. Those in authority often develop a fear that 'political means' may be regarded as a sign of weakness; that at best they may be used to buy time or to seal a situation after the paramount authority of the State has been established and vindicated for the view of those who may entertain ideas of similar action in the future. So the standard drill is the recourse to the Riot Act. And when the State finds that it cannot suppress the symptoms of terrorism without containing or eliminating the cause, and with the wonted ease with which it is habituated to deal with problems of law and order, it begins complaining that the powers that it has at its disposal are inadequate; that it must have more powers, especially to free itself from being 'bound down' by the fundamental freedoms that are used to 'undermine' law and order. Since the terrorist does not function in the open, but in secret, under cover, the guardians of law and order argue that they should have the powers necessary to tear down the veil, to unmask, and bring to book; they should therefore have the power to search without notice or specific warrant; to arrest and detain without trial. Since both witnesses and judicial officers (magistrates) are threatened and terrorised, and find it difficult to depose, or sit in open court or pronounce judgement using the deterrent and penal provisions of the law, the guardians of

law and order want anonymity for witnesses, summary trials, and on top of everything else, a reversal of the accepted canons of jurisprudence by transferring the onus to the accused, making it his responsibility to prove innocence in some instances, even for contravention or suspicion of contravention of laws that retrospectively expand definitions of crime. Thus you have a crop of restrictive legislations, suppressing or suspending fundamental rights and traditional civil rights-the P.D. Act, MISA, ESMA, TADA, and so on. At the time that the legislature is asked to entrust these new Draconian Powers to the Government (which in many cases put the Rowlatt Act to shame as I myself have had occasion to establish in Parliament), the Government gives a solemn assurance that the powers would be used only with the greatest reluctance and in unchallengable cases of hardship, and in general public interest; and yet, perhaps even before the Acts are gazetted, the provisions (of the Acts) are invoked indiscriminately, sometimes against political opponents who have nothing to do with terrorism, but are contenders in the hunt for Parliamentary majority or majority in Party Councils, sometimes against advocates who are engaged in public interest litigation or the defence of civil liberties, or the defence of those whom the minions or leaders of government have deliberately and falsely implicated with charges of protecting or abetting terrorism, sometimes against those who are agitating against being ousted from their ancestral homes in the forests, or in support of causes relating to hazards to public health, or the protection of the environment, and so on.

Thus the instruments of terror used on one side and the instruments of suppression used on the other side lead to total laxity in the definition of targets, gradual extinction of the distinction between the combatant and the non-combatant (as in modern warfare), between the accused and the innocent who are on the scene or far from the scene, the creation of a climate

of uncertainty and fear for the common citizen, increasing use of torture and barbaric methods of extracting information or confessions of complicity, and increasing use of anti-social elements, (smugglers, musclemen and the like) on both sides. The social objectives of the struggle thus move out of focus, and yield supremacy to the needs or strategy and tactics or psychological warfare.

We have also seen that mere increase in the power or legal sanctions that the government possesses to 'suppress' does not lead to victory over terrorism. Apart from the ability that the terrorists demonstrate to circumnavigate the legal net that is spread for them, the police often finds it difficult to match the superior and more sophisticated arms, tactics, logistics, means of communication, powerful wireless sets etc. that the terrorist groups have acquired from other countries, ironically, because of the incompetence or the Nelson's eye of the government. This leads to the humiliation of the police on the one hand, and the Government's decision to induct the para-military, and then the military in defence of civil authority, to uphold the superiority of civil authority. The military also runs into its own set of problems-inadequate understanding of the mind of the civil population in the area, difficulty in distinguishing between friend and foe, the consequent indiscriminateness in the use of force, the possibility of alienating the civil population as a result of inadvertent excesses, maltreatment of women, the difficulty that civil authority faces in giving a-blank cheque to the military, and so on. Moreover, the frequent or large-scale induction of the military itself becomes a source of psychological ascendancy to the terrorist and perplexity to the harassed citizen. At least in some cases it also tends to have a deleterious effect on the respect for or confidence in civil authority.

Here we have reached a scenario that is not very

different from what one encounters in insurgency or guerrilla warfare. In fact, those who resort to terrorism may not necessarily look upon it as the limit to which they are willing to go. They may look upon it as a stage on the path to insurgency and guerrilla warfare, to achieve the destruction of the credibility of the government, and the paralysis of the government, as a prelude to establishing a parallel government, and later still establishing a liberated territory where it is the writ of the 'revolutionary' group that will run, not that of the government. Without going too far into the dynamics of such revolutionary manoeuvres or operational blueprints, one can easily see that when an organised force that uses violence wishes to move from hit-and-run tactics or the operations of mobile and secret squads to positional operations that involve the use of territories as sanctuaries, or bases, or units of liberated area, the force or group will have to look for a friendly hinterland or rear, to prevent the attrition and defeat that can follow from the risk of encirclement. This is precisely the reason why insurgent and secessionist movements reach the brink of guerrilla warfare in areas that have common frontiers with a country that is unfriendly or not totally friendly with the government against which the guerrillas or insurgents operate. I do not want to go into the various aspects of this question at length here. I only want to point out how insurgency and guerrilla warfare, and terrorism that is meant to pave the way for insurgency or guerrilla warfare inevitably tend to look for assistance from across the frontiers for arms, for training, for sanctuaries, for safety of the rear and so on, and how this in turn tends to political proneness or amenability to extraneous foreign forces, thus creating the possibility of tempering or affecting the social objectives with which the group started its struggle.

It is also necessary to point to some other unavoidable concomitants of the dependence on 'violence.' Firstly, no

violent struggle can be waged without total and extreme secrecy. This means the constant need to maintain groups that function in secret and remain linked through a secret chain of command. Since the units as well as the command have to be protected from infiltration, and betrayal, vigilance and mutual suspicion become necessary for collective security, and begin to be regarded as legitimate. Secondly, since ideological authority as well as tactics and operational details are determined by the same secret group or nucleus, there occurs a contraction of the base of consent, and participation, and an increase of the area of enforcement through 'military discipline' and liquidation. This has been the common lot of all or almost all insurgent forces that have depended on violence or secrecy.

Thus we see that all the four variants of violent struggle have become counter-productive and suicidal as far as the objectives of social transformation-freedom from exploitation, freedom from fear, the creation of a society based on consent and participation, etc.-are concerned. As in the case of war between nations, here too, in the area of the conflict between citizens' groups and the state, in the area of struggle for social justice too, the very consequences of the use of sophisticated technology, the very nature of the weapons at the disposal of the State and the citizens' groups has made all citizens vulnerable, made both the combatant and the non-combatant uncertain and vulnerable, and made society itself vulnerable without any reasonable hope of transformation in the desired or declared direction. In fact, it has therefore become necessary to look for a new method that will lead to the elimination of exploitation, and the establishment of a democracy that will assure control of authority by the unarmed people whom it claims to represent.

In this analysis, it may be pointed out that I have not brought in questions of ethics, philosophy, psychology and the



relation between ends and means, all of which are pertinent and highly relevant.

I think we have now arrived at a point where the futility and the suicidal character of available violent variants are clear. If violent means are counter-productive, we have to turn to non-violent means. It is not my intention in this talk to present a blueprint for non-violent action. My purpose is to show that we have reached a stage where, (i) nothing but the active and organised intervention of the people can achieve the objectives of the struggle for independence, viz., (to build) a just society, and (ii) nothing but non-violent action can preserve social and national cohesion and provide the clinching force that can work as an instrument of change as well as catalysis. The consensus or acquiescence that launched the system has been eroded. A new consensus or basis for acquiescence can be created only through non-violent methods.

But, here it becomes necessary for one to revert to the distinction between unarmed action and the truly non-violent action that Gandhi called *Satyagraha*. Though unarmed actions like *bandhs* and *gheraos* and *chakka jams* brought about through terror have the appearance of being non-violent, a little thought will show the difference in motivation, execution, and effect. Relay fasts and jail *bharos* are a parody that vainly hopes to produce the effect or aura of *Satyagraha*. In the last few years, we have witnessed so much of this parody and so little of the genuine that we have succeeded in creating a mood of cynicism about non-violent action itself. One sees too little of persistence, too little of purity, too little of earnestness in what goes by the name of *Satyagraha* today. One will therefore have to rediscover the virtuosity of the non-violent method if it is to be accepted as the only effective alternative.

No action can be regarded as non-violent, and can hope

to generate the forces that non-violent action can generate unless it: (j) distinguishes between the evil and the evil-doer; (ij) aims at convincing and not coercing or liquidating the evil-doer; (iii) uses methods, words, and situations to promote introspection and to effect a change in perception; (iv) promotes self-introspection in the evil-doer; (v) refrains from action that inflicts vicarious suffering on those who are not the perpetrators of the injustice that is being resisted; vi) confines itself to action that causes only voluntary suffering, and that to the resisters who invite it as a consequence of their resistance to injustice; (vii) paralyses the evil through non-cooperation with it; (viii) refrains from action that leads to the destruction of public property; and (ix) abjures all secrecy and fear.

Without these conditions, non-violence will be as self-defeating as violence has proved itself to be. Subject to these, non-violence can promote total and effective resistance even in the face of the violent power of the State. Even a mild version of such resistance has, in the last five years, succeeded in bringing down totalitarian regimes in many countries of Europe. Humanity is awakening to the realization that technology has rendered violence obsolete.

A good way to end this analysis may be to quote from Achille Occhetto, Secretary-General of the Italian Communist Party. When asked by an interviewer: "What you have said could give the impression that you think violence is an evil, but a necessary evil in history," Occhetto replied: "I believe the opposite; history has no more need for violence. In 1789, violence was against an oppressive system, of injustice and hunger. But since history moved into the era of democracy, everything has changed ... A modern terrorist is ten thousand times more terrorist than Robespierre. Violence these days cannot be justified. It is anti-historical, because it is happening

in an age which already knows there are other democratic means."

Q: So, the Secretary of the Communist Party is saying that the age of revolution is over ....

A: So, I Say: "The age of violent revolution is over. The age of non-violent revolutions has begun."

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\* Text of J.P. Memorial Lecture delivered by Ravindra Varma on October 11, 1992 at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

## **Gandhi's Theory of Trusteeship: An Essay in Understanding\***

Of all novel ideas that Gandhi wove into the pattern of a nonviolent revolution, none, perhaps, received the ridicule that greeted his ideas on Trusteeship. But to Gandhi himself the idea was an integral part of the pattern. In fact, he had no doubt about its abiding value: "My theory of 'Trusteeship' is no makeshift, certainly no camouflage. I am confident that it will survive all other theories. It has the sanction of philosophy and religion behind it . . . No other theory is compatible with non-violence."<sup>1</sup>

Undoubtedly, the concept of Trusteeship flows from the ideals of *aparigraha* and *ahimsa*. It appears to me, however, that Gandhi's unique and revolutionary approach to the phenomenon of power has also contributed to the evolution of the concept. *Ahimsa* and *aparigraha* are ethical ideals: power is a social phenomenon.

Bertrand Russell described power as "the fundamental concept in Social Science"<sup>2</sup>. To many revolutionaries before Gandhi, the capture of power was the war-cry of the revolution. To Gandhi, 'capture' of power did not guarantee the end of injustice or exploitation. He did not believe in the 'capture' of power by a few, but in the 'accrual' of power to the many, to all. If power is the influence or control that an individual or group acquires, or exercises over other individuals or groups in society, capture of power is not the solution to the problem of power. Power could be abused. If the deposed had abused power, those who succeed to the throne with the banner of the

revolution could also succumb to the temptations and the logic of power. They too might abuse power. The answer to the problem of power, therefore, lay in altering the very concept of power, in investing it with an ethical content, in freeing it from obsession with domination and coercion, and relating it to the function of promoting self-restraint, and initiating, inducing and mobilising collective action in pursuit of social objectives; Gandhi lighted on the idea of Trusteeship as the answer to the problem of power and the means of transforming the very nature of power.

Power had to be tamed and transformed by minimising its concentration; fostering an attitude of trusteeship in those who held power; and universalising and maximising the readiness and ability to resist the abuse of power. The means of achieving this was decentralisation, trusteeship, and *Satyagraha*.

To characterise *ahimsa* and *aprighraha* as ethical ideals is not to dismiss them as interlopers in the field of social dynamics. To Gandhi, ethical norms or principles were not meant exclusively for those who sought salvation in a penance grove. Ethical norms relate to man's conduct in society. They are meant to govern his relationship with, and attitudes to, other men and women in society. It is, therefore, inconceivable that they have value only for ordering the personal life of the individual. What is of relevance and value to each constituent of society must undoubtedly have relevance and value to the life or the aggregate or 'totality' of the constituents, that is, society. What was good for the part had to be good for the whole, and what was bad for the part had to be bad for the whole.

Truth and Non-violence are the *sine qua non* for cohesion and harmony in any society. A society that does not

accept them as the basis of mutual relationship within itself cannot survive as an entity. If man wants to outgrow the limitations imposed by the traditions of the tribe and the nation state, and view human society as indivisible, he will have to accept, that these verities have universal validity.

*APARIGRAHA* is the ethical ideal of non-possession; of the renunciation of ownership; of liberation from the subtle as well as the coarse bonds that possessions forge for one. It is a hoary ideal sanctified by every religion. In a pithy verse, the *Isopanishad* exhorts: -

*Tena Tyaktena Bhunjeethah: Ma Gridha  
Kasyaswiddhanam?* (Enjoy by renouncing, do  
not covet, or cling to possessions; for, whose is  
wealth?)

This is not merely an exhortation to those who would strive for salvation but also to those who would negotiate their way through the temptations and zones of conflict in society. It also defines man's relationship with the world of objects—the objects in nature that may be of use to him. He must look upon them as objects that are meant to be used for the satisfaction of his needs, not meant to be sequestered in possessions that become sources of distraction for the spirit, and inequality and conflict in society.

To Gandhi the verse laid down a code of conduct for the individual as well as society. The individual should abstain from acquisitiveness and possessions. The body itself is a possession. Absolute non-possession, therefore, is impossible as long as one possesses the body. But one should subject every want, every desire that leads to acquisition and possessions to rigorous scrutiny, and should relentlessly abstain from everything that appears non-essential. As a consequence, one

should distinguish between needs and wants, reduce one's wants to the barest minimum, and content oneself with appropriating what one needs to satisfy one's current need. One will not appropriate more than what is necessary for current use, with the thought of the future, or the desire for wealth or power. Gandhi cited five reasons to explain why one should abstain from such appropriation:

1. It is against what he calls the Fundamental Law of Nature. "The profound truth upon which this observance is based is that God never creates more than what is strictly needed for the moment. Therefore, whoever appropriates more than the minimum that is really necessary is guilty of theft."<sup>3</sup>
2. When man is born into the world he gains access to resources that he did not create. In fact, he depends on resources that nature and society have created. If he appropriates or uses any part of these resources without replacing it or contributing in commensurate measure to the replenishing of the social heritage, he is guilty of appropriating the fruits of someone else's labour. In the case of nature, he is guilty of predatory spoliation and depletion of exhaustible and non-replaceable resources. In fact, he owes a debt to society when he is born, and unless he works to repay this debt, he will be guilty of theft. In other words, his inherited right to enjoy the fruits of other people's labour depends on his duty to repay his debt with physical labour. This is a duty that he may not abdicate without attracting the charge of delinquency or the guilt of theft. Even those who earn their livelihood through intellectual labour cannot escape the ambit of this law.
3. Sequestration for future use is cornering what someone else may need urgently, what may well spell the difference between life and death to someone. That such a potential beneficiary is not physically present before one does not

make it any less of an act of deprivation.

4. To burden one's mind with the thought of possession is to invite an obsession that takes one away from the life of the spirit, makes one oblivious of social ethics, and leads one to mistake the multiplication of wants for civilization. With such an obsession, one loses one's peace of mind, and makes it impossible for society to find peace.
5. Possession means retention for future use, or for the acquisition of power. But one cannot retain a possession unless one is ready to defend it. To do so one has to use force, or depend on force wielded by others. One thus becomes a part of an apparatus of coercion that is set up to defend possessions. A man who believes in non-violence, therefore, has to opt for the path of non-possession.<sup>4</sup>

The individual would thus work for his bread, earn his livelihood without exploiting others, minimise his wants, use what he requires for current consumption and hold whatever surplus survives as a trust for society.

What then are the social implications of *aparigraha* that lead to trusteeship?

A society that accepts the ideal of non-possession or *aparigraha* is the anti-thesis of an acquisitive society. In such a society, wealth will not be the index of respectability. Civilization will not be equated with the multiplication of wants and the accumulation of material goods to satisfy our ever-increasing wants. No one can satisfy his wants unless he works, since there will be no inheritance to fall back upon.<sup>5</sup> Work then becomes the medium of sustenance and self-expression. Work is a duty cast on man.<sup>6</sup> Everyone, therefore, has a right to honourable livelihood.<sup>7</sup> The ideal social or economic order would therefore be one that ensures this right.



The means that one adopts to earn one's livelihood should be truthful and nonviolent, not deceitful and violent, or exploitative.<sup>8</sup> All work has equal value, and should therefore receive equal remuneration.<sup>9</sup> This remuneration should be such as assures a decent living. The level or standard of living should be such as leads one to self-realisation or the fullest development and expression of one's personality, and not the vicious cycle of multiplying wants.

Gandhi believed that *aparigraha* or the abdication of acquisitiveness would facilitate and promote equal distribution. Equal distribution was his ideal. But since absolute equality will be unattainable, and even injurious in some cases, he would work for the equitable distribution of wealth.<sup>10</sup> To achieve this objective, he would provide equality of opportunity, ensure equality of incomes; reduce wage disparities to the minimum warranted by differences in the needs of the recipient; and reorganise the system of production. To prevent concentration of economic and political power, and to see that workers are not reduced to the status of mere wage-earners, he would work for a system of production that does not divest the worker of the ownership of the instruments of production. The evils that arise from the alteration or diminution of the status of the worker when he becomes a wage-earner will continue, and perhaps, be accentuated when the all-powerful State becomes the beneficiary and the defender of the evil. Gandhi did not believe that the evils that flow from the concentration of the ownership of the instruments of production could be overcome by transferring the concentrated ownership to the State which has already concentrated all political power in its hands.<sup>11</sup> If concentration is the culprit, it should be minimised or eliminated, and not transferred from one place to another. Gandhi thus wanted curative or corrective action at the very source of the malady. He wanted a revolution at the base itself.

One need not assume that modernisation or industrialisation is impossible without centralisation and concentration. The progress of science and technology have shown that there are alternatives that can minimise concentration without impairing efficiency. Gandhi was not against scientific inventions or improvements in technology, but he wanted such inventions or improvements in technology to subserve the interests of the masses, and not the owning classes or the State.<sup>12</sup> Gandhi identified an acid test. The motive force that propels one to seek or adopt improvements in technology or machinery should not be greed, or profit, but love and the interest of the whole of society, and not one part or the other.

Gandhi formulated six criteria that the nonviolent, non-exploitative society should use to assess machinery and technology: they should subserve the interests of all; should not lead to concentration of ownership; should not lead to unemployment; should not result in distance between centres of production and centres of distribution; should not result in alienation and dehumanisation; should not result in the atrophy of the creative and participatory element in work, and reduce man to a robot.<sup>13</sup>

In India science and technology, and industry itself should serve the masses in the rural areas, and not add to the disparity between the conditions of life in the rural and urban areas. This cannot be done without decentralisation. Decentralisation would facilitate the fulfillment of the six criteria that Gandhi formulated for machinery and technology; and would also promote real democracy reduce regional disparities in development, and facilitate the growth of economic self-government.

Gandhi's first preference was therefore for a technology that promoted self-employment. Where the demands of

economic efficiency in any industry did not permit it to be operated on the basis of self employment, he would prefer cooperative ownership or social control and in exceptional cases, where this too was not possible, he would prescribe state ownership.<sup>14</sup>

He would thus want the State to take the responsibility for public utilities, electricity, ship-building and the like. But he would want every form of ownership, collective as well as individual, to function on the basis of Trusteeship.<sup>15</sup>

When technology is liberated from the profit motive, industrial relations will undergo a revolutionary change. Ideas of superiority and inferiority will disappear when all work is regarded as of equal value, and even those who work with their intellect engage in some form of 'sacrificial' physical labour (Bread Labour).<sup>16</sup> Disparities in incomes, and therefore wealth, will be marginal, related to disparities in wants, and not to the nature of one's work. Industrial relations then will scale down to those between persons who have a special responsibility for taking managerial decisions, and all others who are working in the undertaking. Gandhi believed in the full and equal participation of workers in the management of any undertaking.<sup>17</sup>

This takes one to the question of undertakings that are owned by individuals, and, in the agricultural sector, to the position of zamindars or landlords. A communist would nationalise the ownership of all undertakings, and all land. He would dispossess private owners of their ownership and transfer all ownership to the State. Gandhi did not believe that violent dispossession and State ownership offered the answer to the problem of exploitative ownership.<sup>18</sup> State ownership will, in practice, operate through the coercive apparatus of the State which in reality becomes the managerial apparatus of the State

in the economic field. In Gandhi's view, this would only lead society into the quagmire of violence and conflict.<sup>19</sup>

Gandhi's opposition to violent dispossession has been grossly, and in some instances, deliberately misinterpreted. It is argued that Gandhi was against dispossession because, in the ultimate analysis, he believed in preserving existing property relationships. He is portrayed as a defender of private property; one who was not willing to abolish class distinctions, one who defended the riches of the rich and the poverty of the poor, and defended the right of the rich to exploit the poor. There cannot be a more unjust misinterpretation of Gandhi's views. Gandhi was not opposed to dispossession because he wanted to leave the rich in possession of their riches, or because he believed in private property, but because he believed that violent means could not solve any social problem, including the evils that have originated from private property. He did not believe in private property; in inequalities of wealth; in inherited riches; and in private ownership of the instruments of production.

Let us first look at his views on inequalities of wealth. The poverty and inequality that private ownership had brought about were revolting to him. He described them as crime against man and God. He would not tolerate them for a day if he had power to end them. His speech at the inauguration of the Banaras Hindu University,<sup>20</sup> his letter to the Viceroy on the eve of Civil Disobedience,<sup>21</sup> his statement at the Ahmedabad trial<sup>22</sup> and his speeches at the Round Table Conference<sup>23</sup> bear eloquent testimony to his anguish and indignation at the cruel exploitation of the masses by the rich, and his total identification with the interests of the masses, the dispossessed, the *Daridranarayan* as he called them.<sup>24</sup>

At the Round Table Conference he set the Thames aflame by declaring that when Independence came, every title

to property would be subjected to scrutiny, and confiscation ordered, where necessary, with or without compensation as the case demanded.<sup>25</sup>

He believed that riches had not been taxed adequately. He would therefore support the imposition of death duties, and could hardly think of a maximum for the rate of taxation on riches beyond a certain level.<sup>26</sup>

He would thus fight the inequality of wealth by scrutiny of titles, taxation, abolition of the right of inheritance, and dispossession, where necessary and unavoidable.

Gandhi believed that instruments of production whether in industry or in agriculture, should belong to the worker or the tiller.<sup>27</sup> He claimed that he had become a socialist long before many who claimed to be socialists accepted the idea of socialism.<sup>28</sup> He said he did not know the meaning of Bolshevism fully. "All that I know is that it aims at the abolition of the institution of private property." If that was so, it was "only an application of the ethical ideal of non-possession in the realm of economics"; and he had accepted it long ago.<sup>29</sup>

He did not believe in the perpetuation of classes or in one class eliminating all others. He believed in the ideal of a classless society, and held that a classless society would be born only when the technological revolution is harnessed to eliminate the distinction between the owner or employer and the employee.

Reduction of disparities in wealth and income does not dispose of the disparities in power and the potential for recurrent inequality that 'ownership' signifies. It is the institution of ownership that has then to be attacked and altered. The toiling masses will not be liberated from exploitation

unless the character of ownership is altered to make them equal beneficiaries of the assets, with equal rights and responsibilities in management, as equal partners in a common enterprises.<sup>30</sup>

Gandhi offered Trusteeship as an alternative. Capital was power. Labour too was power. Either could be used constructively or destructively. Both should, therefore, hold their power in trust.<sup>31</sup> Trusteeship would transform the very concept of ownership, both for the owners of capital and labour. It would snap the link of ownership with private profit and link it to social profit, possessions being held in trust for the welfare of all. Trusteeship thus would take one to an area in which the concepts of possessions and property that provide the vocabulary as well as the instruments of measurement in both Communist and Capitalist theory will cease to apply. It provides one with a glimpse of the social potential of what, for lack of a better word, may be described as 'integral altruism', or 'mutualist socialism'.

Like *aparigraha*, *ahimsa* (non-violence) too led Gandhi to the concept of Trusteeship. Gandhi saw that the idea of Trusteeship was inherent in the ideology of *ahimsa*.<sup>32</sup> He also saw that Trusteeship was an inescapable stage in the methodology of a non-violent revolution. That it was seen as a stage did not mean that in every case it was considered as merely transitional. It could also be a stage that yielded the result that one was seeking. In that sense, therefore, it was both a 'means' and an 'end'. Hence, Gandhi claimed "no other theory is compatible with non-violence."<sup>33</sup>

A society that accepts non-violence has to be a non-acquisitive society. A votary of non-violence cannot hunger for possessions. He cannot acquire more than others without exploiting the labours of others in some manner. Exploitation is a form of violence. He can not hold more possessions than what

he requires to meet, his immediate needs, without depriving someone else; and to deprive someone else of what he needs would be violence. He cannot hold on to possessions without depending on violence to defend his possessions. A votary of non-violence, then, can hold anything in excess of what he needs only as a Trustee for others.

A non-violent society is a non-exploitative society. It can be non-violent only when it assures economic equality. Equal distribution is the ideal.<sup>34</sup> "To bring this ideal into being, the entire social order has to be reconstructed. A society based on non-violence cannot nurture any other ideal."<sup>35</sup> It is not possible to end disparities and achieve economic equality while the present pattern and prerogatives of ownership prevail. Instruments of production as well as the produce should belong to those who work. A change can not come, through philanthropy. It can come only through a change in the conception of ownership. Capitalists should understand that the old order cannot survive. The dawn of the day of the toiler is at hand.<sup>36</sup> It had to come, — through violent dispossession or nonviolent abdication of the socially injurious and odious attributes of ownership. It is for the capitalists to choose. They can court destruction or opt for Trusteeship which will permit them to retain the stewardship of their property<sup>37</sup> and function as Trustees for the *Daridranarayan*. "We invite the capitalist to regard himself as trustee for those on whom he depends for making, the retention, and increase of his capital."<sup>38</sup>

It they were not willing to accept this transformation in the meaning of ownership, they would have to face a revolution.<sup>39</sup> "They (the capitalists) know that I desire to end capitalism almost, if not quite as much as the most advanced socialist or even communist. But our methods differ, our languages differ."<sup>40</sup> Gandhi was engaged in solving the same problem that faced 'scientific' socialists.<sup>41</sup> In fact, he was

already "carrying on a revolution" on behalf of the peasants and workers. "Some have called me the greatest revolutionary of my time. It may be false, but I believe myself to be a revolutionary -a non-violent revolutionary. My means are non-cooperation"<sup>42</sup> The *Satyagrahi* relied on persuasion as well as non-cooperation. Non-cooperation itself was a form of persuasion.

Those who advocated a violent revolution believed that the capitalists would not consent to any change in the concept of ownership that prevailed in the capitalist or acquisitive society; that to expect this was to expect the impossible since it asked for a change in human nature; that a class war was an inevitability; that violence was inevitable in the class conflict; that the successful termination of the conflict would come when the working class violently dispossessed the holders of property, eliminated the class of exploiters and transferred ownership of all property to the State.

Gandhi did not believe that it was impossible to change human nature. He did not believe that man was essentially and incurably selfish by nature.<sup>43</sup> No man is incorrigible. Man has climbed the ladder of civilisation only by learning to control and sublimate selfishness. Even the survival of the species depends on the balance between self-interest and the altruistic interest in posterity. The mother is the symbol of this balance. It is love that enables the mother to keep this balance. True non-violence or positive non-violence is another name for this love. There is no reason to believe that true non-violence cannot awaken this realisation in the adversary. If one fails, it will not be because non-violence is ineffective, but because one's non-violence is inadequate or imperfect."<sup>44</sup> If parity or superiority in the quantum of violence is relevant in a violent encounter, the purity and quantum of the non-violence that the *Satyagrahi* uses are also determining factors in the efficacy of



non-violence.

Again, the progress of civilisation has shown that human nature does not continue to be what it was in the Stone Age or even in comparatively recent history. Instances can be cited to prove that man's attitudes and responses to situations and institutions are not precisely what they were some years ago. What was regarded as impossible has been proved to be possible in man's ability to control nature. There is no reason to assume that man will not be able to acquire greater control over his mind or his own nature. What is described as human nature is not a monolith. It is an ensemble. The many elements that go to make it respond jointly and severally, and result in the submergence or emergence of what leads to harmony or cohesion in society and the individual himself. The record of the progress that we have achieved hitherto is reason for optimism, not pessimism. The survival of mankind may well depend on the displacement of selfishness and greed with love and non-violence, or at least an acceptance of the interdependence of interests.

As for the testimony of history: "It may be asked whether history at any time records such a change in human nature. Such changes have certainly taken place in individuals. One may not perhaps be able to point to them in a whole society. But this only means that uptill now there has never been an experiment on a large scale in non-violence. Somehow or other, the wrong belief has taken possession of us that *Ahimsa* is pre eminently a weapon for individuals and its use should, therefore, be limited to that sphere. In fact this is not the case. *Ahimsa* is definitely an attribute of society. To convince people of this truth is at once my effort and my experiment. In this age of wonders, no one will say that a thing or idea is worthless because it is new .... things undreamt of are daily being seen, the impossible is becoming possible. We are

constantly being astonished these days at the amazing discoveries in the field of violence. But I maintain that far more undreamt of and seemingly impossible discoveries will be made in the field of non-violence."

Gandhi recognised the existence of class conflict. But he did not believe in the inevitability of class war. Nor did he believe that the solution or resolution of class conflict lay in accentuating class conflict and eliminating one class or the other. "In India, a class war is not only not inevitable, but it is avoidable if we have understood the message of non-violence. Those who talk about class war as being inevitable have not understood the implications of non-violence or have understood them only skin-deep."<sup>45</sup>

One who believes in non-violence cannot, therefore, believe in the inevitability of class war.<sup>46</sup> Firstly, because he believes in the power of *Satyagraha* to influence the mind of the exploiter, and secondly because he believes in the power of *Satyagraha* or non-violent noncooperation to enable the workers to prevent exploitation and paralyse the exploiter.

The first of these beliefs is supported by two arguments: One, man is capable of being educated, or 'reformed'; two, since *Satyagraha* or non-violence derives from love, the *Satyagrahi* can (a) soften or relax the mind of the 'adversary' by forestalling the syndrome of fear and aggression, thus making him amenable to an examination 'of the *Satyagrahi's* point of view; and (b) enable the 'adversary' to realise that the *Satyagrahi* is not seeking to injure the true interests of his adversary; that he is in fact striving to protect and salvage the true interests of the 'adversary' by reconciling (dovetailing) it with those of others, thus neutralizing or removing the overgrowth that had attracted attacks.

A man can see reason if there is a judicious appeal to

his mind and heart. The appeal can work only if we prepare the ground; one has to create a conducive climate for the appeal to work. This can be done by removing fear<sup>47</sup> and creating an awareness of his dependence on the cooperation of those who are asking for change. He would then realise that the *Satyagrahi* is not against his personal interests. In fact, he (the *Satyagrahi*) is willing to safeguard the adversary's legitimate interests. What the *Satyagrahi* is opposing is the pursuit of self-interest at the cost of the interest of the community. Even as the rich man prizes his interest, everyone prizes his own interest. Aggrandizement involves inroads into the legitimate and similar interests of others. The *Satyagrahi* is only demanding retreat from these incursions, and not the extinction of the genuine self interest of the adversary. The *Satyagrahi* is only asking for a reconciliation of his (adversary's) self-interest with the interests of all others. The *Satyagrahi* enables the adversary to see this in two ways one, non-aggression, i.e., desisting from physical action that creates the fear that the object of the *Satyagrahi* is to annihilate him, and other, non-cooperation.

Non-aggression enables the 'adversary' to see the difference between the needs of self-preservation and the requirements of self aggrandizement. When he thus begins to see the difference, the *Satyagrahi* tries to make him realise that self-aggrandizement has been possible only because of the cooperation of those at whose cost he is seeking aggrandizement. When the victims of his aggrandizement withdraw their cooperation, he realises that the fruits of his aggrandizement did not depend on any inherent virtue of his own, but on the cooperation of others. He will then be willing to agree to retreat from self-aggrandizement to the needs of self-preservation. This self preservation includes the preservation of his riches as well his status in society. Dispossession takes away both. Violent dispossession may take

away his life as well. Trusteeship allows him to retain the stewardship of his property as a trustee,<sup>48</sup> and thereby retain the social recognition of his special talent, perhaps even enhanced by the alchemy that renunciation has brought about in his personality. A new incentive, a new method of achieving social recognition is offered to him. There is every possibility that he might be willing to trade the old social odium for the new social recognition, and pay the price by giving up the privileges and prerogatives of the possessions that he did not need for self-preservation. He will be richer for his now reputation or social recognition.

One who believes in non-violence cannot believe that the problem of exploitation can be solved by eliminating the exploiter! The individual exploiter can be educated and weaned away from exploitation. Society then can continue to benefit from his talents. Violent elimination of the exploiter cannot benefit society. Society will be the poorer, for it will lose the gifts of a man who knows how to accumulate wealth.<sup>49</sup> Nor can the elimination of individuals guarantee the elimination of the system.<sup>50</sup> The *Satyagrahi* believes that the essence of change lies in eliminating the evil, and not the evil doer. The evil doer may be removed, but another may appear in his place if the evil itself is not eliminated. The way to eliminate evil is to desist from it oneself, and resist it when it comes from others. Gandhi's uncanny insight enabled him to see that every form of exploitation depended on the cooperation or acquiescence of the exploited. "All exploitation is based on cooperation, willing or forced, of the exploited. However much we may detest admitting it, the fact remains that there would be no exploitation if people refuse to obey the exploiter. But self comes, and we hug the chains that bind us."<sup>51</sup> This was a bitter but basic truth. It could not be wished away by looking the other way. In fact, violence is the outcome of our reluctance to admit our own culpability, and our lack of confidence in our

ability to face the consequences of refusing to cooperate with the exploiter. Gandhi was relentless in his diagnosis of the phenomenon of exploitation. He pointed out that the exploiter depended on the cooperation of the exploited. This is the Achilles' heel of the exploiter. The moment this cooperation is denied to him, his hands are paralysed, and his weapons fall from his hands. He is 'disarmed'; his economic power is quarantined, or "sterilized,"<sup>52</sup> and he is ready for meaningful negotiations for a way out; "My non-cooperation with him will open his eyes to the wrong he may be doing".<sup>53</sup>

It is this withdrawal of cooperation that Gandhi called nonviolent non-cooperation. "No one is bound to cooperate in one's own undoing or slavery."<sup>54</sup> Non-cooperation thus becomes a right, a duty and a non-violent weapon which is truly infallible. Hence Gandhi claimed that "non-violent noncooperation can secure what violence never can, and this by ultimate conversion of the wrong doers."<sup>55</sup> If the exploited united and demonstrated that they would pay the price of liberation, but not cooperate with the exploiter, the evil-doer would be paralysed, and the evil would be liquidated. If the toilers intelligently combine, they will become an irresistible power. This is how I do not see the necessity of class conflict. If I thought it inevitable, I should not hesitate to preach it and teach it."<sup>56</sup>

*Satyagraha*, thus, is not merely a pious appeal, not merely verbal persuasion. It asks for revolutionary action by the exploited to elicit a revolutionary change in the attitude of the exploiter and to bring about the total paralysis and extinction of the system of exploitation.

Gandhi did not believe that violence could solve social problems or lead to social justice"<sup>57</sup>, or lead to the real rule of the people. The results that it brought were transitory.<sup>58</sup> What

was achieved by violence had to be retained by violence. It may well disappear in the face of superior violence. The leaders of a violent revolution have, therefore, had to depend on violence, terror, suspicion, and, suppression of all dissent to "guard the gains of the revolution." History has proved the futility of violence.<sup>59</sup> Mankind has begun to look for an alternative, a means that does not lead to the negation of the end.

Gandhi did not believe that the transfer of "ownership" to the State would lead to the end of the evils of capitalism. The State represented violence in a concentrated and organised form.<sup>60</sup> Gandhi was suspicious of the State. To add to its power is to invite more trouble. To entrust it with the responsibility to suppress capitalism with violent means is to permit it to arrogate a perpetual mandate to define, identify, and eliminate the "class enemy". This will give it a licence for authoritarianism. Moreover, "if the State supported capitalism by violence, it will be caught in the evils of violence itself, and fail to develop non-violence at any time. . . . The individual has a soul; but as the State is a soulless machine, it can never be weaned from violence to which it owes its existence. Hence, I prefer the doctrine of trusteeship,"<sup>61</sup> To fuse economic and political power, and concentrate it in the same apparatus is to make the State omnipotent, and to render the citizen powerless to protect himself against economic and political authoritarianism. "I look upon an increase of the power of the State with the greatest fear, because while apparently doing good by minimising exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality, which lies at the root of all progress. We know of so many cases where men have adopted trusteeship, but none where the State has really lived for the poor,"<sup>62</sup> That this premonition of Gandhi was borne out by developments in the 'Socialist countries' is evident in the incisive and authentic analysis that Milovan Djilas has presented in his *New Class, and The Unperfect Society*.

To sum up: Firstly, the results of violence are transitory and illusory; secondly, violent revolution may reverse the position of labour and capital, but not result in the elimination of exploitation. Thirdly, the violent elimination of the evil doer does not necessarily result in the elimination of the system. Fourthly, if the State suppresses capitalism by violence. It will be caught in the vicious cycle of violence. Fifthly, violent action that removes the entrepreneur may result in the paralysis and retardation of the economy which, in turn, will occasion chain reactions. Trusteeship will avoid these evils, and permit society to use the talent of the entrepreneur without the evil of exploitation.

Trusteeship then has to be understood as part of the scenario of a non-violent revolution, as an instrument in the *Satyagrahi's* struggle for economic equality and the elimination of classes. The *Satyagrahi* will make every effort to persuade the holders of capital that Trusteeship is the alternative to destruction. But if all his attempts at persuasion fail, he will resort to corrective mass action—to the supreme and infallible remedy of (*Satyagraha*) non-violent non-cooperation within the industrial system as well as the political system.

No society can exist without nuclei of power. Some of these may be associations that one chooses voluntarily. Some, like the state, may be entities that one does not choose, but one is born into. Both are nuclei of power. They may vary in range,- in the power that they have to ensure compliance, in the coercive power at their command, The State, of course, is the repository of sovereignty and the paramount concentration of power in its territory. Irrespective of size and the quantum of power, every institution in society, every association of individuals who come together for a common purpose and collective action of one kind or another, in one field or another, is a nucleus of initiative and power, delegated by its members

and sanctified by voluntary recognition. All associations are therefore nuclei or concentrations or manifestations of power. The responsibility to make use of this power in pursuit of common objectives is vested in a person or group of persons who are accepted or chosen by consent. This responsibility, and the power that underwrites the responsibility are entrusted to those who are chosen to act on behalf of the group. This responsibility and power are therefore *entrusted* to the 'executive' (or the leader of the group) that is at once both the repository and the beneficiary of the power.

All sources of power have then to be held in Trust. Power that has social sanction is power that has been entrusted. One who holds such power is therefore a trustee. He may be entrusted with power through a process of election, or through some other system. Whatever the process, he is a trustee. The opportunity for abuse of trust may be minimised by the imposition of limitations and penalties including dispossession. He can be called to account. He may be removed if he misuses or betrays the trust. But power is vested in the hope and faith that it will be used as a trust. An element of trusteeship is therefore inherent in the concept of recognition of power. It is only in a society in which the obligations of accountability are atrophied or extinguished that there is no such assumption. In such societies power becomes naked power, power devoid of social sanction.

There are three ingredients in Gandhi's answer to the problem of power: minimisation of concentration; spirit of trusteeship; and the corrective of non-violent direct action. Applied to the phenomenon of power in the economic field, these elements will take the form of (a) (i) decentralisation of the ownership of the instruments of production, and the systems of production and distribution, and (ii) the repudiation of the values of the acquisitive society; (b) the



institution and spirit of trusteeship which virtually alter the meaning of property, delinking it from personal profit, and linking it to use, and social profit, taking society in the direction of a mutualist socialism; and (c) the corrective of nonviolent non-cooperation within the industrial system as well as the political system.

Now let us have another look at Trusteeship with these three elements in mind, even if it means some recapitulation of what has been stated earlier in a different context.

In the economic field, ownership or private property is the source of power and inequality. Private property and the social sanction for inheritance lead to the perpetuation and accentuation of inequality. Private ownership of instruments of production leads to exploitation and appropriation of surplus value, leading to the accumulation of capital and wealth, and the concentration of the ownership of the instruments of production in the hands of a few. The use of highly sophisticated technology leads to centralisation of the system of production and distribution, and the ownership of capital. Capitalism sanctifies the system of concentration and centralisation in the name of the liberty of the individual, the right to private property, the right of inheritance, and the right to pursue private profit without concern for the resultant cost to society.

Gandhi held that true liberty of the individual was inconsistent with these 'rights'. To him rights flowed from duties.<sup>63</sup> He therefore rejected these rights as unilateral abstractions that neither recognised the nexus between duties and rights, nor reconciled the social consequences of the individual exercising these rights without social control. The unilateral exercise of these rights without self-restraint or social conscientiousness had only resulted in inequality, injustice, exploitation, suffering and conflicts. No man who believed in

non- violence or truth could uphold such a social or economic order or tolerate its continuance.<sup>64</sup> He had to work for a revolutionary change. Gandhi claimed that he himself was leading such a revolution on behalf of the dispossessed, the peasants and workers, the victims of the Capitalist system. But his revolution was a nonviolent revolution.

As has been pointed out, Gandhi did not believe that the solution of the problem of exploitation lay in the violent dispossession of the owning class and the abolition of private property; nor did he believe that the transfer of ownership to the society or the State would automatically lead to the elimination of classes, the ushering in of equality and humanism, and the emergence of a non-exploitative society.

We have had an opportunity to watch the success of those who attempted to launch a new society on the basis of these beliefs. Private property was abolished and was transferred from the individual to society. Society was equated with the State, and the State was equated with the Party. The State became the only employer, the only owner of the instruments of production. The bureaucracy of the State, the Party, inherited the powers and prerogative of the owner, and used them to entrench itself and totally disarm the worker. The worker became a wage-earner with no right to bargain; no right to function in a free trade union, no right to free participation in the management; no right to influence decisions on the sharing of profit, or the surplus value that he created; and no equality of incomes. Every abridgment of basic human rights was justified in the name of the millennium. The promise of freedom and equality remained to mock, while the basic rights that are essential for the emergence of equality or freedom or true humanism were extinguished. In the capitalist system economic power was interlocked with political power. In the communist system the two were merged, and became one, and the State

became the sole legatee of both the sources of power. Gandhi therefore looked for another solution and lighted on Trusteeship.

What then is this Trusteeship that Gandhi offers to the captain of industry, the landlord, and in fact, to all holders of power? Is it the status quo with another name? Is it only an exhortation to philanthropy? Who is a Trustee? What will be the nature of his title? What remuneration will the Trustee receive? Who will determine the quantum of remuneration? Will there be any limit on the remuneration? Will Trusteeship be heritable or alienable? Who will keep watch on the Trustee and oversee his functioning? Can he be removed? Who can remove him? Will trusteeship have a legal and institutional form? Or will it only be a subjective attitude? How can one reach the ideal of Trusteeship? How can the present pattern of ownership be transformed into Trusteeship? Is it only through verbal persuasion? What if the owners of instruments of production or property refuse to become Trustees?

The Trusteeship Gandhi advocated was not philanthropy. In fact, Gandhi held that "if the trusteeship idea catches, philanthropy, as we know it, will disappear.<sup>65</sup> Trusteeship has nothing to do with philanthropy. Philanthropy or charity may lead to the gifting away of riches. Such a donation or gift is, at worst, charity to curry self glorification, and, at best, an act of expiation or compassion, or even a limited concession to the sense of social responsibility. But renunciation of a part of one's riches without the surrender or sharing of ownership is by no means the transition to trusteeship. Trusteeship is nothing less than qualitative transformation of the attributes and meaning of ownership. The test will therefore lie in the attitude to ownership.

A trustee is one who holds property or wealth in trust

for others who are identified as the beneficiaries. The ideal trustee will be one who holds the Trust solely for other beneficiaries. But the ideal is like Euclid's definition of the point. One may never attain it in practice. So the Trustees may have a share of the benefit. But this share can only be equivalent to what any other beneficiary receives.

Anyone who aspires to function as a trustee will take nothing for himself that his labour does not entitle him to. "Indeed at the root of this doctrine of equal distribution must be that of trusteeship of the wealthy for the superfluous wealth possessed by them. For, according to the doctrine, they may not possess a rupee more than their neighbours."<sup>66</sup>

The Trustee will be entitled to a commission that is commensurate with the value of his service to society,<sup>67</sup> and in tune with what other workers receive. The criteria that apply to the determination of the remuneration or income of other workers, including the criterion of equal wages for all kinds of labour, will apply to him too. It is not possible to fix a uniform percentage. The amounts or percentages may vary.<sup>68</sup> In a State built on the basis of non-violence, the commission of Trustees will be regulated by the State,<sup>69</sup> and not determined by the Trustee himself. But his own attempt will be to reduce what he takes to the minimum required for "his legitimate needs" and to leave "the remainder for society"<sup>70</sup>

The Trustee cannot bequeath his property or wealth to his children, except where the son or daughter accepts all the conditions of trusteeship and is deemed capable of functioning as a trustee. In fact, "a trustee has no heir except the public".<sup>71</sup> Even if the trusteeship is to be passed on to a son or daughter, the Trustee will only have the right to make a proposal to that effect. It will be for the State to approve or reject the proposal.<sup>72</sup> It will be approved by the State only if the State is satisfied that the nominee can fulfill the rigorous role and duties of a trustee.

These conditions put a check on the State as well as the individual. Trusteeship thus cannot be regarded as heritable or alienable. Nor can trusteeship lead to the generation or accentuation of inequality of wealth or disparities in income.

The Trustee will live and work under the gaze of the beneficiaries as well as the State. He is accountable to them. If he fails to live up to his commitments, and the rigorous code of Trusteeship, there are two remedies—one, what Gandhi described as the sovereign remedy, *satyagraha*; and the other, action by the State.

There are two widely prevalent misconceptions about Trusteeship that have to be discussed here. One is that Gandhi's concept of trusteeship was meant only for those who owned property and riches; and the other is that the concept was designed to deal with the problems created by the ownership of material possessions that are physically external. Both these have been denied and contradicted by Gandhi himself.

Gandhi wanted the rich to hold their property and possessions as Trustee. But he did not tire of asserting that labour too was power.<sup>73</sup> Capital cannot fructify without labour.<sup>74</sup> The power of labour lay in its unity. When labour is united and determined, it can be more powerful than capital.<sup>75</sup> Its power can indeed be frightening. Both labour and capital have therefore to hold their power in trust. There was nothing unilateral about the theory of trusteeship.<sup>76</sup> It is a perfectly mutual affair—"Capital and labour will be mutual trustees, and both will be trustees of consumers."<sup>77</sup>

The very fact that Gandhi advocated mutual trusteeship or trusteeship of both labour and capital should prove (1) that Gandhi was not offering Trusteeship as a camouflage for the continuance of the power and prerogatives of capital; that he, in

fact, offered it as a way of changing the canvas itself, of transforming the gamut and parameters of relationships and power equations in the field of economic activity; and (ii) that Gandhi's primary concern in trusteeship was power, and the ownership of whatever generates power.

This takes us to the second misconception that trusteeship was designed only to deal with the problems created by the unequal distribution of the ownership of material goods or instruments of production.

It is not only material possessions or physical labour that can produce wealth and power. Material possessions may lend themselves to equal or equitable distribution. But there are 'special talents' (like those an artist possesses) that some men and women have acquired at birth, or subsequently, which enable them to generate power and wealth. Such talents cannot be- 'socialised' or 'collectivised'; but they can lead to inequality in power and wealth. The only way to ensure that such possessions do not lead to the accentuation of un-equal distribution of power and wealth in society is through the concept of trusteeship. The man with extraordinary talents should hold his talents in trust for society.<sup>78</sup> "Every individual must have the fullest liberty to use his talents consistently with equal use by neighbours, but no one is entitled to arbitrary use of gains from the talents. Therefore, he can use his talents not for self only but for the social structure of which he is but a part, and on whose sufferance he lives."<sup>79</sup> Gandhi's trusteeship thus covered not merely material sources of wealth and power, but also non-material possessions which are not amenable to equal distribution, and for which, State ownership is no answer.

Thus it can be seen that in the case of material possessions, trusteeship will involve a subjective change of attitude as well as a structural or institutional change and a

statutory framework, while in the case of non-material possessions that generate power and wealth, the primary safeguard will lie in the change to the attitudes of trusteeship.

What if the Trustee fails to live up to these criteria? There are two remedies,—*Satyagraha*, and action by the State. If the trustee fails to function as a real trustee, "not nominal trustee", the State would be justified in taking away the property. "We shall have to dispossess them of their possessions through the State with the minimum exercise of violence."<sup>80</sup> "... But the fear is always there that the State may use too much violence against those who differ from it."<sup>81</sup>

What then was the role that Gandhi visualised for the State, and the laws of the State, in relation to trusteeship? Gandhi visualised that trusteeship would become a legalised institution. In fact, he hoped that it would be a gift from India to the world. The State would give statutory recognition to the institution of trusteeship; determine the rate of commission for the trustees; oversee the fulfillment of the conditions of trusteeship; regulate and approve the appointment of a successor trustee if the need arises; and dispossess the person who, after having accepted trusteeship, fails to act in accordance with the tenets of trusteeship. Even in cases where an inherited possession is used or disposed of against the interest of society, the State will be justified in depriving the proprietor or owner of his possessions.

The functions that have been assigned to the State do raise the question of the nature of the State in a nonviolent society and the sanctions that such a State may use. One may not discuss the question in detail here, since it relates to the larger question of Gandhi's attitude to the State.

Gandhi did not hold that the institution of trusteeship

should be imposed by law. To do so would have been contrary to his philosophy of non-violence. Law has to be based on the sanction of public opinion. Those who believe in trusteeship should therefore first forge the sanctions for the institution in the minds of people. When an atmosphere of acceptance has been created, statutes that give legal recognition to the institution should be adopted by the State. A beginning may be made at the base, at lower levels like the *Panchayat*,<sup>82</sup> where it may be easier to get acceptance for the idea, and to generate the social ethos necessary for the success of the idea.

Gandhi was clear that one did not have to wait for a law, or the Greek Kalends, till everyone accepted the theory of trusteeship.<sup>83</sup> One who believed in it could and should start with himself.<sup>84</sup> Gandhi himself would start by asking all owners of capital, all owners of property and riches to become trustees and hold their property in trust. He would refashion the economic system to facilitate this transformation. He would persuade the holders of capital to see the writing on the wall; that they would face violent dispossession if they did not voluntarily agree to a transformation in the nature of ownership itself; that the choice was between class war and voluntary acceptance of trusteeship; that trusteeship would allow him to retain stewardship of his possessions and to use his own talent to increase wealth, not for his own sake, but for the sake of the nation, and, therefore, without exploitation.<sup>85</sup> He would offer all capitalists an opportunity of becoming statutory trustees".<sup>86</sup> If all this effort at persuasion fails, he will resort to non-violent non-cooperation to open the eyes of the capitalists and to elicit consent to the change. "If however, inspite of the utmost effort, the rich do not become guardians of the poor in the true sense of the term, and the latter are more and more crushed and die of hunger, what is to be done? In trying to find the solution to this riddle, I have lighted on non-violent non-cooperation and civil disobedience as the right infallible means. The rich cannot



accumulate wealth without the cooperation of the poor in society.”<sup>87</sup>

Now, to recapitulate what has been stated in the earlier paragraphs: Gandhi did not believe in private property, or the right of inheritance. Inheritance belonged to the nation. He would examine every title to ownership and dispossess anyone whose title was found to have been acquired by injuring the interests of the masses. He may not even give compensation to those who are so dispossessed. He believed that instruments of production should be owned by those who use them to produce wealth, in the field of agriculture as well as in the field of industry. He would, therefore, prefer such instruments of production as could be owned by the workers themselves. This would eliminate the distinction between employer and employee; thus, preventing the rise of one class of employers and another of employees, and the consequent syndrome of competition and conflict. Wherever it was difficult to achieve efficiency in production without the use of instruments that the self-employing individual could not own, he would want cooperative ownership of all those who worked on the machinery and organised production or distribution. Such an undertaking would work on the basis of equality, equal interest, equal responsibility, equal partnership in management, equal benefit and equal power. Where the nature and cost of the machinery did not permit even this type of ownership, he would vest ownership in the State. But the State was a concentration of violence, and therefore he was wary of increasing its power. A state that concentrated both political power and ownership in its hands would be a titanic concentration of power that would reduce the citizen to the status of a wage-earner and at the same time attenuate his ability to exercise control over the political or economic activities of the State. Gandhi would therefore favour a system which takes one nearest to the elimination of the differentiation

between employer and employee, owner and workers.

The capitalist system or the status quo is the anti-thesis of such a system, since it leads to concentration, inequality and exploitation. In fact, both the capitalist system and State capitalism have yielded to the lure of greed and gigantism. Neither of these systems therefore can lead to the equal distribution of power and wealth. These systems and the attitude that sanctify them are of no avail.

Where then should we look for a solution? Gandhi was convinced that the solution lay in trusteeship.

Where the title was legitimate he would permit the owners of property to act as trustees. They could retain ownership or stewardship as trustees. A trustee would have no right to higher remuneration than those who are the beneficiaries of his trust. He would be entitled to a commission that would be commensurate with the value of his work to society. He would have no right to bequeath what he was holding in trust except on the condition that the successor too acted as a trustee, and the State approved of the transfer. He would have the opportunity to use his special talents to increase the wealth or the society of which he is a member. The society would benefit from his talents, and he would have the incentive of notional ownership, and the social recognition that his extraordinary talents deserved, but his ownership would have been freed from the motive of private profit and the power that comes from private ownership. The trustee would be accountable; answerable to society, and if he failed to live upto the rigorous test of trusteeship, he would be removed either through *Satyagraha* or through State action.

It is not only material possessions or the accumulation of material goods that generates power. There are other sources

of power whether directly related to economic activity or not—that can result in economic gains, or power over the minds of others. Material possessions can be distributed equitably. But since non-material sources of power do not lend themselves to immunisation through equitable distribution—those who possess such sources of power will have to hold them and use them as a trust that they hold for society.

Trusteeship then does not ask for the impossible; it defines a socially necessary attitude to all power, and possessions that generate power; and visualises a pattern of supporting institutions. If the change in attitude is described as a subjective change, the objective and institutional changes that promote and safeguard the subjective change lie in the new economic order which minimises the concentration of ownership, and maximises the ability to control, and if necessary, to resist the abuse of power.

Thus it can be seen that in the case of material possessions, trusteeship will involve a subjective change of attitudes as well as a structural or institutional change and a statutory framework, while in the case of non-material possessions that generate power and wealth, the primary safeguard will be in the change to the attitude of trusteeship.

At this point, it may be worthwhile to reproduce the text of a formulation on Trusteeship that received the approval of Gandhi himself:

1. Trusteeship provides a means of transforming the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one. It gives no quarter to capitalism, but gives the present owning class a chance of reforming itself. It is based on the faith that human nature is never beyond redemption.
2. It does not recognise any right of private ownership of

property, except in as much as it may be permitted by society for its own welfare.

3. It does not exclude legislative regulation of the ownership and use of wealth.
4. Thus, under state-regulated trusteeship, an individual will not be free to hold or use his wealth for selfish satisfaction or in disregard of the interest of the society.
5. Just as it is proposed to fix a decent minimum, living wage, even so a limit should be fixed for the maximum income that could be allowed to any person in society. The difference between such, minimum and maximum incomes should be reasonable and equitable and variable from time to time, so much so that the tendency would be towards obliteration of the difference.
6. Under the Gandhian economic order, the character of production will be determined by social necessity and not by personal whim or greed.<sup>88</sup>

It may now be useful to look at some of the criticisms that have been levelled against the theory:

One line of criticism is that it is "so-flexible that it can serve as a justification for inequality".<sup>89</sup> It has been pointed out in earlier paragraphs that the trustee will not be entitled to unlimited income from his title or work, or to a remuneration that is proportionate to the wealth that his talents or capital help in producing. His share of the benefits will be equal; since all kinds of work will receive the same remuneration, he will not be entitled to a higher income that may become the source of inequality. Even so his remuneration or commission will be fixed by the State, and therefore subject to the criteria and permissible range determined by the State.

Another criticism that has been levelled against the theory is that it leaves unchecked power and wealth in the hands of an individual. "Is it reasonable to believe in the theory of trusteeship, to give unchecked power and wealth to one individual and to expect him to use it entirely for the public good? Are the best of us so perfect as to be trusted this way."<sup>90</sup> This criticism comes from a person who was closely associated with Gandhi, and who could therefore have looked into the real content of Gandhi theory of trusteeship a little more closely. Earlier paragraphs have elaborately described the criteria and conditions that a trustee had to fulfill to be considered a Trustee. They make it clear that the Trustee will not be left with unchecked power or unchecked wealth. His personal wealth cannot be inordinately high or disproportionate to the incomes of others who work with him. His emoluments will be determined by the State. He will be subject to severe taxation if his income goes high, in spite of these checks; and he will not be able to bequeath his wealth. This cannot be described as a State of unchecked wealth. He is answerable and removable, either by the State or by the workers, through *Satyagraha*. This does not leave him with unchecked power. In fact, it is Gandhi's desire to prevent the concentration of power and wealth, not only in any individual, but even in the State that may turn totalitarian in the name of ideology, that made Gandhi evolve the concept of trusteeship with its checks, social control and accountability for the individual as well as the State.

A third criticism is that it will lead to "larger and larger accumulations of capital on the one hand and pauperization of the masses on the other."<sup>91</sup> The earlier paragraphs explain how there can be no pauperization of the worker since he will be regarded as an equal partner, and his remuneration will fall within the same range as that prescribed for the trustee. An increase in the income of an undertaking will not be credited to

the personal account of the trustee. It will belong to the undertaking. The capital that will be accumulated will not be the trustee's private property. Gandhi held the view that in a non-violent society the individual could not accumulate capital, but the State, i.e. the nonviolent State could, and should do so. In fact, it would be one of the functions of the State to do so.<sup>92</sup>

Another criticism is that the theory demanded "a change of heart among the rich."<sup>93</sup> "But in the real world such a revolution is unlikely and the trusteeship idea is nought but a vision of society where the rich are charitable, so that the poor can remain weak."<sup>94</sup> The author of this criticism has then moved to the frontier of charitableness, and suggested that "by his (Gandhi's) stress on the principle of trusteeship, and his friendliness towards many in exalted economic positions, he established a pattern of radicalism in talk but conservatism in action that is still very much a part of the Indian scene."<sup>95</sup>

If one ignores the polemical tenor, there are three points that need response. To begin with the last of the observations, it is true that Gandhi was friendly towards many in exalted economic positions. There were many "capitalists" whom he regarded as his friends. In fact, he was a friend of all. But he repeatedly made it clear that he wanted to be known for what he was, both by the people and the government, the workers as well as the capitalists. He never concealed his views. He did not want to sail under false colours. Nor did he desist from declaring his views from the housetops for fear of hurting or alienating anyone, even hurting his image in the minds of the people. As has been pointed out earlier, his speech at the Banaras Hindu University, his speech at the Round Table Conference, his statement in the court and a host of other statements clearly stated where he stood, and what he was working for. He talked of the rich living on the blood of the poor—language that one does not normally associate with the

Mahatma and declared that the toiler was the owner of the instrument of production; that all titles would be scrutinised and anything that was in conflict with the interest of the masses forfeited, with or without compensation. He warned that the choice before the rich was between voluntary surrender of riches and violent overthrow, destruction and ruin. He forecast: "I see coming the day of the rule of the poor, whether that rule be through the force of arms or non-violence." Surely, then he cannot be accused of dissembling. To those who twitted him on his friendship with the rich, he said: "I have never concealed the fact that I am a friend of everybody ... irrespective of caste, colour or persuasion."<sup>96</sup> "They (the rich) have no hold on me, and I can shed them at a moment's notice, if the interests of the masses demand it."<sup>97</sup>

The second point is that trusteeship would turn out to be nothing but the vision of a society in which the rich are charitable so that the poor can remain weak. The question whether trusteeship is only charitableness and philanthropy has been examined in an earlier paragraph. One need only add that to make a proper assessment of trusteeship one should not look at it in abstraction, but as part of the dynamics of a non-violent revolution that aims at abolishing exploitation, and property and wealth that lead to exploitation and inequality.

This takes us to the third point that the theory demanded a change of heart, and in the real world such a revolution is unlikely. The meaning of a change of heart and the circumstances that Gandhi wanted to create for a 'change of heart' have been discussed in earlier paragraphs. He did not depend merely on verbal persuasion or appeal, but on *Satyagraha*, the main weapon that he forged and used with spectacular effect for a change of heart or for progressive shifts in the positions of his adversary that ultimately brought him (the adversary) closer and closer to the baseline that Gandhi

had drawn for himself in South Africa, in Champaran, in Bardoli, at Vykom and in what was British India. These achievements cannot be lightly brushed aside by any student of social dynamics.

Critics from one school of thought<sup>98</sup> have attacked the theory as an apology for class collaboration. Gandhi did believe in the existence of class struggle. But he did not believe that the evils that gave birth to class struggle could be eliminated by accentuating class struggle, with the avowed purpose of eliminating one class and establishing the dictatorship of the other. Nor did he believe in the inevitability of class conflict. He wanted to end capitalism and exploitation and evolve "a truer socialism and truer communism than the world has yet dreamed of."<sup>99</sup>

His method was the method of non-violence. He did not believe that evil would disappear if the evil doer was eliminated. He did not believe that capital alone was power. Labour too was power, and if those who toiled combined with the unshakable determination not to cooperate in their own exploitation, they could bring capital to its knees. Behind and beyond the apparent conflict in the interests of the 'monied classes' (capitalists) and labour, there is a mutualism or inter-dependence of functions, and therefore interests. One cannot fructify without the other. A solution of the evils of capitalism that lead to class conflict has therefore to be found without ignoring, this inter-dependence. To achieve this objective, Gandhi would revolutionise the very concept of property, the attitude to property and profit (making profit a socially conditioned incentive), and use the powers of collective direct action, *Satyagraha*, to prevent deviations. Gandhi would therefore ask the capitalist to hold his power in trust in the spirit and discipline of trusteeship. He would ask labour too to hold its power in the spirit of trusteeship. "In fact, capital and



labour will be mutual trustees, and both will be trustees of consumers. The trusteeship theory is not unilateral, and does not in the least imply the superiority of the trustees. It is, as I have shown, a perfectly mutual affair and each believes that his own interest is best safeguarded by safeguarding the interest of the other."<sup>100</sup>

This is not class collaboration for the protection or preservation of the capitalist system or the exploitation that has become the base of the capitalist system. Gandhi did not believe in collaboration with or within any exploitative system. "I have, never said that there should be cooperation between the exploiter and the exploited so long as exploitation and the will to exploit persists."<sup>101</sup> It is the duty of a believer in non-violence to fight the injustice even at the cost of one's life. Gandhi, therefore, did not advocate class collaboration to perpetuate exploitation or capitalism. His objective too was the creation of a classless society and freedom from the thrall of private property. But he had no faith in the ability of violence to achieve this objective, and so his means were different.

It has already been stated that he did not believe in the inevitability of class conflict. He did believe that human nature could be changed. But to take that to mean that he did not believe in bringing about changes in institutions and the environment—both to quicken change and to sanctify change, is to mistake the meaning of his faith in human nature. Human nature is made up of a complex of elements. Science has proved that the appropriate stimuli bring appropriate responses to the surface.

The theory of inevitability of class conflict is built on many assumptions: that the working class does not have the power to paralyse and defeat capital by action within the

Industrial system; that it does not have the power to induce or compel the State to intervene to hold the balance or assure justice; that intermediate classes would disappear; that the State would identify itself with capital even if the State is run by a government that depends on the consent of labour as well; that the working class will not have the power to induce corrective action within the political system; that the attempt to destroy the State and establish a dictatorship of the proletariat is sure to succeed.

It is not possible in this paper to examine each of these assumptions from the Gandhian point of view. But enough has been said in earlier paragraphs to indicate Gandhi's faith in the power of labour to end exploitation by united action, his lack of faith in violence, his faith in human nature and mutualism of interest and his faith in non-violent, non-cooperation as supporting action in the political field.

In fact, so much has happened in the last century in widely distant place, in societies at different stages of economic, political, historical, and technological development to cast serious doubts on each of these assumptions, that the experience of the last century is demanding ever increasing ingenuity to defend these assumptions. An alternative cannot, therefore, be judged by its ability to fit into a moth-eaten mould that has moved to the twilight zone between hope and despair.

The foregoing paragraphs show that the theory of Trusteeship was not conceived "as a compromise to enable the rich and the working classes to work together during the struggle for independence. It was not a compromise with the rich, or a sop to the poor. It evolved as an integral part of the theory and dynamics of a non-violent revolution in the field of economic relations.

Gandhi, therefore, made the deliberate claim that his theory of trusteeship was no makeshift, or camouflage. He was sure that it would survive even when other theories were proved wanting, and discarded.

That non-violence has not been used in the past to achieve such a revolution is no reason to hold that it cannot happen in the future. Humanity is in fact beginning to see the futility and the self-defeating and suicidal nature of violence. Experience has made it imperative to look for an alternative. The Gandhian theory of trusteeship is undoubtedly an alternative that merits examination. It may well turn out to be what humanity is looking for.

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- 10 . *Young India*, March 17, 1922.
- 11 . *Harijan*, January 27, 1940.
- 12 . *Young India*, April 15, 1926; *ibid.*, 13 November 1925.
- 13 . *Ibid.*, November 13,1924; *ibid.*, November 5,1925; *ibid.*, April 15,1926.
- 14 . *Ibid.*, November13, 1924.
- 15 . *Ibid.*
- 16 . M. K. Gandhi,*From Yeravda Mandir*, op.cit. p. 50.
- 17 . *Young India*, August 4, 1927; *Harijan*, February13, 1937.
- 18 . *The Modern Review*, October 1935.
- 19 . *Ibid.*
- 20 . "The Maharaja who presided yesterday over our deliberations spoke about the poverty of India. Other speakers laid great stress upon it. But what did we witness in the great *pandal* in which the Foundation Ceremony was performed by the Viceroy. Certainly a most gorgeous show, an exhibition of jewellery . . . I compare with the richly bedecked noble men the millions of the poor. And I feel like saying to those noblemen: There is no salvation for India unless you strip yourselves of this jewellery and hold it in trust for your countrymen in India . . . whenever I hear of a great palace rising in any great city of India, be it in British India, or be it in the India ruled by our great Chiefs, I become jealous at once and say, 'Oh it is the money that has come from agriculturists' . . . There cannot be much spirit of self-government about us if we take away or allow others to take away from the peasants almost the whole of the results of their labour ..." Speech delivered by M. K. Gandhi at Banaras Hindu University, February 4,1916,
- 21 . See M. K. Gandhi's letter to the Viceroy, March 2, 1930. "It (British rule) has impoverished the dumb millions by a system of progressive exploitation and by a ruinously expensive military and civil administration which the country cannot afford... there is every danger of independence coming to us so changed as to be of the value to those toiling voiceless millions for whom it is sought and for whom it is worth taking, .. Take your own salary. It is over Rs. 21,000 per month, besides many other indirect additions. You are getting over Rs. 700 per day as against India's average income of less than *annas* 2 per day. Thus you are getting much over five thousand times India's average income. On bended knees, I ask you to ponder over this phenomenon. I have taken a personal illustration to drive home a painful truth. I have too great a regard for you as a man to wish to hurt your feelings. I know that you do not need the salary you get. Probably the whole of your salary goes for charity. But a system that provides for such an arrangement deserves to be summarily scrapped." *Young India*, March 12,1930.
- 22 . "Little do the town dwellers know how the semi-starved masses of India are slowly striking to lifelessness. Little do they know that their miserable comfort represents the brokerage they get for their work they do for the foreign exploiter, that the profits and the brokerage are sucked from the masses No sophistry, no juggling in figures, can explain away the evidence that the skeletons in many villagers present to the naked eye. I have no doubt

whatsoever that both England and the town dwellers of India will have to answer, if there is a God above, for this crime against humanity which is perhaps unequalled in history". Statement at trial at Ahmedabad, March 18, 1922. See *Young India* March 23, 1922 99. Also: "The greatest obstacle in the path of non-violence is the presence in our midst of the indigenous interests that have from British rule, the interests of worried men, speculators, scrip holders, land holders, factory owners and the like. All these do not always realise that they are living on the blood of the masses and when they do, they become as callous as the British principals whose tools and agents they are". *Young India*, February 6, 1930.

<sup>23</sup> "Then you have 'not being in conflict with the best interest of the nation'. I have in mind certain monopolies, legitimately acquired understandably, but which have been brought into being in conflict with the best interests of the nation. Take this white elephant which is called New Delhi . . . I contend that these buildings are in conflict with the best interests of the nation. They do not represent the millions of India. They may be representative of the monied men who are sitting at the table, they may be representative of His Highness the Nawab Saheb of Bhopal, or of Shri Purushottam Thakurdas or of Shri Pheroze Sethna or of Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, but they are not representative of those who lack even a place to sleep and have not even a crust of bread to eat. If the National Government comes to the conclusion that place is unnecessary, no matter what interests are concerned, they will be dispossessed, and they will be dispossessed, I may tell you, without any compensation, because if you want this Government to pay compensation, it will have to rob Peter to pay Paul, and that would be impossible". *Selections from Gandhi* (Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1957), p.109.

<sup>24</sup> . *Young India*, October 15, 1931; *Harijan*, June 1, 1947.

<sup>25</sup> . *The Modern Review*, October, 1935.

<sup>26</sup> . *Harijan*, July 31, 1937.

<sup>27</sup> . "In reality, the toiler is the owner of what he produces." *Harijan*, December 5, 1946.

<sup>28</sup> . *Harijan*, 4 August 1946; *ibid.*, April 20, 1940.

<sup>29</sup> . *Young India*, November 15, 1928

<sup>30</sup> . *Harijan*, February 13, 1937; *Young India*, August 4 1927; *Harijan*, July 3, 1937.

<sup>31</sup> . *Young India*, March 26, 1931.

<sup>32</sup> . *Ibid.*, October 20, 1946.

<sup>33</sup> . *Ibid.*, December 16, 1939.

<sup>34</sup> . *Young India*, March 17, 1927.

<sup>35</sup> . *Harijan*, August 25, 1940.

<sup>36</sup> . *Ibid.*, February 1, 1944.

<sup>37</sup> . *Constructive Programme*, p.18; *Harijan*, March 31, 1946.

<sup>38</sup> . *Young India*, March 26, 1931.

<sup>39</sup> . *Constructive Programme*, p.18.

<sup>40</sup> . *Harijan*, December 16, 1939.

<sup>41</sup> . *Ibid.*, February 20, 1937.

<sup>42</sup> . *Young India*, November 26, 1931.

<sup>43</sup> . *Ibid.*, August 4, 1920.

<sup>44</sup> . *Harijan*, February 20, 1937.

<sup>45</sup> . "The idea of class war does not appeal to me . . .", *Anand Bazar Patrika*, August 3, 1940.

<sup>46</sup> . *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> . *Harijan*, 20 April, 1940.

<sup>48</sup> . *Ibid.*, March 31, 1946. Also *Young India*, March 17, 1927.

49 . *Harijan*, April 25, 1940.  
50 . *Ibid.*, July 20 1940; *Young India*, November 26, 1931.  
51 . *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, August 3, 1934.  
52 . *Harijan*, December 5, 1936.  
53 . *Young India*, March 26, 1931.  
54 . *Harijan*, April 20, 1940.  
55 . *Ibid.*  
56 . *Ibid.*, December 5, 1936.  
57 . *Ibid.*, April 20, 1940.  
58 . *Ibid.*, February1, 1942.  
59 . *Young India*, February 4, 1926.  
60 . *The Modern Review*, October 1935.  
61 . *Ibid.*  
62 . *Ibid.*  
63 . *Young India*, March 26, 1931; *Harijan*, June 8, 1947; *ibid.*, July 6, 1947.  
64 . *Harijan*, April 20, 1940.  
65 . *Ibid.*, April 12, 1942.  
66 . Quoted by Benudhar Pradhan, *The Socialist Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, (GDK Publishers, Delhi 1980), Vol. I, p.470.  
67 . *Harijan*, March 31, 1946.  
68 . *Ibid.*, June 11935; *Young India*, November 26, 1931.  
69 . *Ibid.*, April 12, 1942.  
70 . *Young India*, November 26, 1931.  
71 . *Harijan*, April 12, 1942.  
72 . *Ibid.*, February16, 1947.  
73 . *Young India*, March 26, 1931.  
74 . *Ibid.*; *Harijan*, July 3, 1937.  
75 . *Harijan*, March 31, 1946.  
76 . *Ibid.*, June 25, 1938.  
77 . *Ibid.*  
78 . *Ibid.*, February 22, 1942.  
79 . *Ibid.*, August 2, 1942.  
80 . *The Modern Review*, October, 1935.  
81 . *Ibid.*  
82 . *Harijan*, March 31, 1946.  
83 . *Young India*, February 4, 1926.  
84 . *Harijan*, March 31, 1948; *ibid.*, July 12, 1947.

- 85 . *Ibid.*, March 31, 1946.
- 86 . *Ibid.*
- 87 . *Ibid.*, August 25, 1940.
- 88 . *Ibid.*, October 25, 1940.
- 89 . Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama* (Harmondsworth: Penguin. Books, 1968), Vol. II, pp.755-6.
- 90 . Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1962), p. 528. “Again I think of the paradox that is Gandhiji. With all his keen intellect and passion for bettering the downtrodden and oppressed, why does he support a system, and a system, which is obviously decaying, which creates this misery and waste? He seeks a way out, it is true, but is not that way to the past barred and bolted? And meanwhile, he blesses all the relics of the old order which stand as obstacles in the way of advance—the feudal states, the big *zamindaris* and *taluqdaris*, the present capitalist system. Is it reasonable to believe in the theory of trusteeship—to give unchecked power and wealth to one individual and to expect him to use it entirely for the public good? Are the best of us so perfect as to be trusted in this way? . . . And is it good for the others to have even those benevolent super men over them?”
- 91 . Quoted by M.L. Dantwala, *Gandhism Reconsidered* (Bombay: Padma Publishers, 1945), pp. 54-55.
- 92 . Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama*, op.cit., Vol. II, pp. 755-6. “The trusteeship idea is fundamentally a concept that fits into a paternalistic, feudal, pre-democratic society. It is so flexible that it can serve as a justification for inequality. Possibly Gandhi realised this, for he recommended a moral revolution, a change of heart among the rich. But in the real world such a revolution is unlikely and the trusteeship idea is nought but vision of society where the rich are charitable so that the poor can remain weak . . . by his stress on the principle of trusteeship, and his friendliness towards many in exalted economic position, he established a pattern of radicalism in talk but conservatism in action that is still very much a part of the Indian scene”.
- 93 . *Ibid.*
- 94 . *Ibid.*
- 95 . *Young India*, February 6, 1930.
- 96 . *Harijan*, February 1, 1942.
- 97 . *Ibid.*, March 31, 1946.
- 98 . *Harijan*, March 31, 1946. Also see *ibid.*, June 1, 1947.
- 99 . *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, August 3, 1934.
- 100 . *Harijan*, June 25, 1938.
- 101 . *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, August 3, 1934.

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## Gandhi's Philosophy of Swadeshi\*

The three decades during which Gandhi led the Indian struggle for Independence witnessed an unprecedented awakening of the masses of this country. The extensive and intensive dimensions of this awakening have hardly any parallels in the history of resurgence or renaissance at any time, or anywhere in the history of humanity. Gandhi had an extraordinary genius for communicating or radiating his message to the masses, dispelling their scepticism and inertia, and steeling and enthusing them for courageous action.

Many factors contributed to create the magical impact that Gandhi had on the mind of the masses. Gandhi himself threw some light on one of these factors when he said: "My life is my message". His life of utter and rigorous dedication to Truth, the enchanting and inspiring transparency of his *Sadhana*, his commitment to a life of asceticism and renunciation, his unflinching determination and courage, and his restless preoccupation with action for altruistic ends combined to create a unique impact on the mind of the masses. Perhaps another factor was the receptivity that the Indian mind has to the messages and exhortations of those whom they recognise as pilgrims on the path of the spirit. Yet another factor might have been Gandhi's ability to relate his perceptions and programmes to some of the beliefs that lay embedded in the psyche of the average, even unlettered Indian.

For these reasons as well as others that we may not recount have, Gandhi had an extra-ordinary way of kindling faith and self-confidence, and creating rapid, almost instant, mass awareness of the significance and implications of his



revolutionary concepts, and the practicability and efficacy of his strategy or programmes of action. *Satyagraha* and *Swadeshi* were two such concepts that captured public imagination and showed the way to freedom and regeneration.

In spite of the context in which Gandhi placed these two concepts before the country and the world, he did not view them as mere slogans of combat. To him, they were principles of evolution. They were pointers to a creative and constructive way of transformation that would lead to Truth and freedom. To him, they were principles that one had to follow to achieve one's goal of self-realisation and freedom.

Gandhi did not believe in a personal God. To him Truth was God. He believed that the most comprehensive and correct way of describing or identifying God was to say 'Truth is God'. He repeatedly declared that the only God he worshipped was Truth. Truth is the reality behind what is manifest and apparent. It is the Law that governs the Universe, and determines the nature of what we see in the Universe. It is only by discovering this Law and living according to it that we can survive and advance towards self-realisation. To Gandhi, the Law and the Law Giver are one, and the Law is auto-active. In other words, the power that enforces the Law is inherent in the Law itself. Thus the Law, the Law Giver and the enforcer are all one. Gandhi saw this Law as *Dharma*, the determinant of the nature of reality as well as the force of cohesion that determined the identity or integrity of phenomena. Thus, survival and progress depended on the observance of this *Dharma*. The human being could be conscious, aware of the nature of this *Dharma*, as well as his own individual *Dharma* (*Swadharma*) as part of the whole, of which he was a part. Gandhi said that his ambition was to pursue this *Dharma* or Truth, and make all aspects of the life of the individual and society '*Dharma-maya*', or consistent with the Law or *Dharma*. Gandhi considered *Satyagraha* as well as *Swadeshi* as obligations that flowed from

this *Dharma* and *Swadharma*. To him, therefore, *Satyagraha* and *Swadeshi* were both *Dharmik* or ethical imperatives and operational necessities of his *Sadhana*. They were the corollaries of *Dharma* (*Swadharma*) and the application of the Law of *Dharma* to the field of social life, including economic and political activity. Thus, to Gandhi *Swadeshi* was a Law or principle that applied to all fields of human activity, - economic, political, cultural and religious.

He therefore defined *Swadeshi* as a Law of Nature. No one can go against the Laws of nature, and hope to succeed or prosper or build anything sustainable. Gandhi's *Swadeshi* therefore was not negative or exclusive. It was positive adherence to the Law of nature which compels us to recognise the importance of the proximate as a means of progress towards the ultimate or distant. It is a fundamental axiom of nature that progress towards the ultimate is possible only through the proximate. Any effort to reach the ultimate or distant except through the proximate or the immediate is fraught with the risk of failure; it will be infructuous, illusory, self-defeating and futile. One has only to look at time or space or motion to see the working of this Law of nature. There can be difference in the choice of the vehicle, speed, acceleration, the choice of the medium through which one traverses, like land or water or air; but there is no escape from the Law that one has to move from and through the proximate to reach the distant or the ultimate goal. *Swadeshi* is the same Law of nature applied to human activity and the environment. Here, environment includes the social as well as the natural environment.

It has already been pointed out that the Law of *Swadeshi*, since it is a Law of nature applies not only to the field of economic activity, but also the fields of politics, culture and religion.

Let us first look at the field of economic activity.

Gandhi was dissatisfied with the economic order as it existed in his time. I suppose we too are dissatisfied with the economic order as it exists today. We want a just economic order. At the international level, we are, at least till quite recently, we were, among those who demanded a New Economic order. We want the new economic order to be based on justice, and equality, internationally and nationally. A just economic order has to be a non-exploitative economic order, because an exploitative order can be maintained only by fraud and force, and these will sooner or later lead to violent social conflict. An exploitative economic order can not therefore ensure peace, and without peace there can be no progress. Gandhi therefore believed that our effort in the economic field should be to build up a non-exploitative economic order. He identified four pre-requisites of a non-exploitative or non-violent economic order.

Firstly, he believed that a society that sanctified and extolled greed, and prescribed it as the prime motive of one's activity in any field was bound to be rent by conflict and exploitation. One cannot pursue greed without creating and countenancing inequality, exploitation, jealousy and potential conflict. If the desire for acquisition and aggrandizement is not tempered, exploitation and its progeny will make their appearance. In fact, the interdependence that is inevitable in human society demands a measure of altruism, and not the blind and unenlightened pursuit of self-interest at the cost of others. Gandhi therefore identifies *Aparigraha* or abstention from acquisitiveness as a first requisite, and since interdependence calls for a measure of love for each other, Gandhi wants that love should substitute greed as the motive of our activity.

Secondly, Gandhi believes that we have no right to hold or sequester what we have not produced, or what we do not need. Any such sequestration is a subtle form of theft. So he believes that a non-exploitative society can be built only on the

basis of abstention from all forms of gross and subtle theft. He calls this '*Asteya*'.

Thirdly, if one is to abstain from all forms of stealing, one can not live on anyone else's labour. One has therefore to earn one's living by one's own labour. Thou shall earn thy bread by the sweat of thy brow. This he called '*Sharirashram*'.

Fourthly, he pointed out that the Law of *Swadeshi* flowed from the inescapable Laws of Nature that governed growth and evolution. We have to adhere to it if we are to work for a balanced growth of the individual and the environment, and discharge our responsibility to ourselves and our environment.

In economic activity, we utilise resources to produce what we need for the satisfaction of our wants. These resources include human as well as material resources, including financial resources. The Law of *Swadeshi* prescribes priority or preference for the proximate. Without going into the details of the implications of according priority to the proximate, we can see that if we ignore local human resources and induct workers from distant areas, we will invite tension and non-co-operation or antagonism, and at the same time condemn our neighbours to a life of unemployment and poverty. If we do not use the material resources available in the proximity, but depend on resources from distant areas we will be responsible for loss where the resources are perishable, and non-utilization where the resources are non-perishable. If we depend on resources from a distance, including from distant countries, we may have to resort to unjust, questionable and violent means to ensure the continuing access to the resources on which our industry or industrial system depends. In fact, it is the anxiety to ensure the uninterrupted availability of such crucial resources at the lowest possible prices, and to ensure markets for manufactured goods at the highest possible rates of profit that led to colonialism and

imperialism, and the desire to intervene in the internal affairs of other countries to ensure client governments. In recent times, these have led to the manipulation of the terms of aid and trade to suit the interests of the industrial former colonial countries.

But before we examine these questions and the relevance of *Swadeshi* in the context created by the tactics employed by the powerful industrial nations, we must have a look at Gandhi's definition of *Swadeshi*, and try to remove some misconceptions.

Let us then turn to Gandhi's definition, and see (1) whether the *Swadeshi* he advocated was 'exclusive' (exclusivist), or based on unfriendliness or hostility for other countries, and (2) whether the spirit or philosophy of *Swadeshi* is hostile to modern technology.

All articles manufactured in a country do not necessarily qualify to be considered '*Swadeshi*' on the mere ground that they are manufactured in the country. It is therefore necessary first to identify the principle of *Swadeshi*. In fact, it is easier to define the principle than to make a list of the articles that can be described as *Swadeshi*. To Gandhi the principle of *Swadeshi* flows from the Laws of Nature. It is a spiritual Law, and since Gandhi believed that all spiritual Laws were valid in the material or mundane realm as well, the spiritual Law of *Swadeshi* too was valid in the field of mundane activity, which included activity in the economic, political and other fields. The Law lays down that all activity in pursuit of goals in any field should start with the identification, marshalling and utilisation of one's own resources. Progress is dependent on the effort of the individual, and effort depends on, and begins with the utilisation of one's own resources. Dependence on external or outside resources imposes severe limitations. At any rate, it has to come after one has discovered, organised and made use of the resources inherent within one. When one reaches the

limits of one's body or resources, one reaches the immediately proximate, and thus through a succession of proximates, progresses to the ultimate, or infinite. In the physical world there is no escape from this Law. That is what makes Gandhi identify it as a Law of nature. When a thought of the mind has to be translated into action, the Law of movement through proximates begins to take effect. In certain realms the mind may not be subject to this limitation. But progress to a physical goal is subject to this Law. Thus one begins with one's internal resources or the resources in one's psycho-physical aggregate, and then augments these resources by invoking resources that are adjacent or proximate, except when what one needs is available only at a distance.

To quote Gandhi then, "*Swadeshi* is the Law of Laws enjoined by the present age. Spiritual Laws like Nature's Law need no enacting. They are self-enacting..... The Law of *Swadeshi* is engrained in the basic nature of man, but it has today sunk into oblivion..... If this interpretation of *Swadeshi* be correct, then it follows that its votary will, as a first duty, dedicate himself to the service of his immediate neighbours. This involves exclusion or even sacrifice of the interests of the rest, but the exclusion or sacrifice would be only in appearance."<sup>1</sup> In further explanation, he says: "To reject foreign manufactures merely because they are foreign, and to go on wasting national time and money in the promotion in one's country of manufactures for which it is not suited would be criminal folly and a negation of the *Swadeshi* spirit. A true votary of *Swadeshi* will never harbour ill-will towards the foreigner."<sup>2</sup>

Here we have to examine the element of 'exclusiveness' in Gandhi's philosophy of *Swadeshi*. Three questions arise. Does Gandhi's philosophy prescribe the exclusion of everything foreign, or of anything merely on the ground that is of foreign origin? Does his insistence on preference for the immediate neighbour or neighbourhood mean unconcern for all others? Is

the motive behind his uncompromising preference for the proximate parochialism or prejudice or hostility to other countries or other people?

Let us take the first question. Gandhi leaves no room for doubt when he says: "I have never considered the exclusion of everything foreign under every conceivable circumstance as a part of *Swadeshi*. The broad definition of *Swadeshi* is the use of all home-made things to the exclusion of foreign things, in so far as such use is necessary for the protection of home industry, more especially those industries without which India will become pauperized. In my opinion, therefore, *Swadeshi* which excludes the use of everything foreign, no matter how beneficent it may be, and irrespective of the fact that it impoverishes nobody, is a narrow interpretation of *Swadeshi*."<sup>3</sup>

Gandhi is clear that his insistence on priority for the immediate neighbour will not mean injury to or unconcern for the interest of those who are not in the neighbourhood. His reasoning is lucid and perhaps unanswerable. The neighbour has a neighbour, and he or she, in turn, has his or her neighbour. Since each gives priority to his or her neighbour, or bases his action on concern for his or her neighbour, there can be no contradiction or conflict, and no unconcern or injury. Each constitutes or provides a link in the chain of concern that links all humanity. Gandhi "believed in the Truth implicitly that a man could serve his neighbours and humanity at the same time, the condition being that the service of the neighbour was in no way selfish or exclusive, i.e. did not in any way involve the exploitation of any other human being. The neighbour would then understand the spirit in which such service was given. They would also know that they would be expected to give their services to their neighbours. Thus considered, it would spread like the proverbial snowball gathering strength in geometrical progression encircling the whole earth. It followed that *Swadeshi* was that spirit which dictated man to serve his

next door neighbour to the exclusion of any other. The condition that he had already mentioned was that the neighbour thus served had in his turn to serve his own neighbour. In this sense, *Swadeshi* was never exclusive. It recognised the scientific limitation of human capacity for service." <sup>4</sup>

The third question we raised was whether Gandhi's *Swadeshi* had an element of chauvinism or hatred for the foreigner. Let us look at Gandhi's reply: "I have never been an advocate of prohibition of all things foreign because they are foreign. My economic creed is a complete taboo in respect of all foreign commodities whose importation is likely to prove harmful to our indigenous interest. This means that we may not in any circumstance import a commodity that can be adequately supplied from our own country ... .. In other words, I would not countenance the boycott of a single foreign article out of ill-will or a feeling of hatred."<sup>5</sup> Further, "A true votary of *Swadeshi* will not be actuated by antagonism towards anybody on earth. *Swadeshi* is not a cult of hatred. It is a doctrine of selfless service, that has its roots in the purest Ahimsa, i.e. Love."<sup>6</sup> In the economic field, our activities are oriented towards the production and consumption of goods and services for the satisfaction of our wants. Let us see how Gandhi's philosophy applies to both these fields. In production, one will have to give priority to the utilisation or employment of local resources in materials and man-power; in consumption too one will have to give priority to what is manufactured locally. In both cases, the arguments that are put forward against according priority to the neighbour or local manpower and resources, and in the field of consumption, to local employee is incompetent, he is inadequately equipped in skills; his technology is inferior, and therefore, the quality of his products can not compare with the quality of the goods produced elsewhere, generally in other countries. The second argument is that indigenous products are costlier, more expensive. If we



follow these arguments, and switch to or prefer goods manufactured in other countries, we will put our neighbour out of employment, and contribute to a money drain that will benefit other countries at the cost of our nation. The spirit (Law) of *Swadeshi* would demand that we work for the improvement of our skills, improve our technology, and improve the quality and excellence of our goods-and put up with poorer quality till such time as we improve the quality of our goods. In reality the spirit of *Swadeshi* thus acts as an incentive to improve our technology. There is nothing in the philosophy of *Swadeshi* that asks us to be content with archaic or ineffective technology or to abjure the upgradation of technology.

The history of the last three centuries demonstrates the consequences of an economic philosophy that depends on resources from distant lands acquired at minimum or nominal prices, and on markets in distant lands created and maintained through force, deceit and unequal terms of trade. It is this philosophy that has led to the North-South divide; the impoverishment of nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and the ever increasing affluence of the countries that followed the Western philosophy of industrialism. The initial days of colonialism and imperialism witnessed the enslavement of countries, the establishment of imperial 'possessions', - some were termed jewels in the Crown, and a systematic process of the use of naked power and force to destroy indigenous industry, create a vacuum and fill it with the export of manufactured products from the colonising countries, and further, the destruction of surviving Indian industries by compelling them to compete on unequal terms. This led to what our great economists and leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji; Justice Ranade and Gopal Krishna Gokhale described as the "bleeding" of our people.

As early as the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, even

before the Partition of Bengal, our leaders talked of the relation between *Swadeshi* and *Swaraj* or Independence, and exposed the sanctimonious arguments of the exploiting powers.

Let us look at what Gopal Krishna Gokhale, one of the Indian Leaders who were held in the highest esteem in the British Empire had to say in 1907 : "Deliberate steps were taken by the Company to destroy the industries of the people and to make room for Western manufactures ..... This was the first stage in our industrial decay. The second stage began when England forced on us the policy of free trade, i.e. of leaving the door wide open to the competition of the whole world. England's own policy for centuries had been that of Protection, and by that policy she had built up her vast industrial system. ... .. But forcing this policy of free trade upon a country circumstanced as India was, a wholly different thing, was bound to produce results of a most disastrous character. ... .. We did not possess anything like the combination, skill or enterprise of the West ... .. Our industries were, therefore, bound to perish as a result of the shock of this sudden competition to which they were exposed, and as a matter of course the introduction of free trade in this country was followed by the rapid destruction of such industries as had existed in the country. ... .. "

Gokhale then turned to trade, and asked: "Now, I will put a simple question to those present here. If a hundred rupees come into your house every month, and a hundred and fifty rupees go out, will you be growing richer or poorer? And if this process goes on year after year, decade after decade, what will be your position after a time? This has been the case with India now for many years. ... .. No country, not even the richest in the world can stand such a bleeding as this." He said that this bleeding was at the root of our economic ruin, and pointed out that the struggle that Free Trade had brought for Indian industry was like the struggle between a dwarf and a giant. "If

you will form the least idea of the resources of the Western people, then you will understand what a tremendously difficult problem we have to face in the economic field."

Thus Gokhale and Ranade diagnosed the reasons for the industrial domination and consequent impoverishment of India as : (1) the use of political power to destroy indigenous industry; (2) the policy of opening our markets to the products of the Western countries, enforcing an unequal competition between the "giant and the dwarf", leading to the further destruction of whatever had survived of Indian industry or whatever was set up by Indian industrial interests; and, (3) the consequent unfavourable balance of trade resulting in the "bleeding" of the Indian economy.

Since then, the days of naked Imperialism and direct wielding of political power have ended. Political power has been transferred to the people of India, and Britain has withdrawn. But has the picture changed radically after the liquidation of political Imperialism, and the nation's accession to power? We have not preserved or upgraded indigenous technology, nor even succeeded in copying or adapting the technology that the West used. No one has been willing to transfer modern technology to us, inspite of all promises of aid and collaboration in the field of production. The technological lag continues. We have been compelled to open our markets to the consumer goods manufactured in the developed countries or by multi-national corporations functioning from where they get cheap labour, and can produce to maximise profits. Their goods are good, offered in flashy and attractive presentations. They are backed up by a blitzkrieg of propaganda on the Television and other media. How can Indian manufactures compete? They are compelled to salvage whatever they can through becoming subsidiaries or holders of franchise. The Indian consumer is told that these are days of globalisation, that globalisation is the only way in which the consumer can have access to goods of

quality. The temptations and dazzling presentations of the consumer goods that are paraded before him and the spell that is cast on his mind by the insidious and persistent propaganda to which he is exposed by the mass media, in many cases owned or pressed into service by the very concerns that are seeking to entice him, — lead him into a trance in which he becomes oblivious of the effect that his action as consumer is bound to have on the producer in his own house or his neighbourhood. Women and the vulnerable and impressionable minds of children are the special targets of this propaganda. The targeting is patent. Yet one does not know whether one should describe it as brazen or as artful.

One of the specious arguments that have been sedulously floated, and echoed by innocents or the infatuated is that the concepts of *Swadeshi* has no value in a world in which the concept of nationalism and the nation-state is getting out-dated and people are moving towards a global society. The question that immediately comes to mind is whether all nations have begun to dismantle national frontiers and give up nationalism, whether the powerful and industrially advanced countries have opened their frontiers to goods and human beings from other areas. Or is it that the advice and call to confirm to futuristic ideas and patterns are meant only for the weak and exploited nations of the world? Competition between the weak and the strong will lead only to increase in disparity, and to exploitation, whether it takes place within nations or between nations.

Gandhi believed that humanity would evolve towards a world community. But he also believed that such an evolution would depend on our ability to extend the Law that holds the family together to wider and wider units till it ruled all interpersonal, inter-group and inter-national relations. The Law that governs the family is the Law of Love, and humanity can become one community only when love substitutes greed, and

concern substitutes cut-throat competition. There can be no equality, no justice, and therefore no peace if globalization means license for the powerful to pursue greed and gobble up the weak in the name of free competition and supranationalism.

In the field of production, the removal of all restrictions, the invitation to multi-nationals and foreign companies to enter all, fields of production, including the production of consumer items and articles that form part of the daily menu, the removal of or dilution of restriction on limits of equity participation, management, volume of profits and repatriation of profits etc. have exposed Indian manufacturers to unequal competition, and left the choice of priorities in the hands of multi-nationals and foreign companies over which the Government has no or little control. The motive of capturing the market and maximising profit has substituted the motive of ending unemployment and poverty, assuring adequate incomes, and ensuring access to essential consumer goods at prices that the lowest strata of the population can afford.

It is not the political power of an Imperialist Government that has brought about this situation,—but the economic power and 'conditionalities' of international economic and financial agencies,—multi-nationals and Governmental consortia that determine the conditions on which we can get aid. We are compelled to go to them to seek financial and technological assistance and trade facilities because we have chosen to depend on their brand of technology and copy their pattern of economic growth and development.

In these circumstances, since many consumer goods and other commodities are manufactured in the country by multinational corporations or their subalterns or collaborators, a question arises about the attitude of the philosophy of *Swadeshi* to foreign investments, foreign capital and foreign technology.

Gandhi himself was asked this question by Congress Ministers who were in office between 1937 and 1939. His answer indicates criteria that a nation can ignore only at its own peril, peril to the economic condition and freedom of its people, and its system of Government. He said: "Any article is *Swadeshi* if it subserves the interests of the millions, even though the capital and talent are foreign, but under effective Indian control. Thus *Khadi* of the definition of the All India Spinners' Association would be true *Swadeshi* even though the capital may be all foreign and there may be western specialists employed by the Indian board Conversely, Bata's rubber or other shoes would be foreign though the labour employed may be all Indian and the capital also found by India. The manufactures will be doubly foreign because the control will be in foreign hands and the article, no matter how cheap it is, will oust the village tanner mostly, and the village *mochi* always. Already the *mochis* of Bihar have begun to feel the unhealthy competition"<sup>7</sup>

Thus Gandhi has two criteria, - the interests of the Indian masses in employment and incomes, and the retention of effective control in Indian hands. Where these criteria are not fulfilled, the products or the Industrial plant is not "true *Swadeshi*". Gandhi distinguished between true *Swadeshi* and false *Swadeshi*. He said: "If I have to use the adjective 'true' before *Swadeshi*, a critic may ask, 'Is there also false *Swadeshi*?' Unfortunately, I have to answer yes. ... .. I do hope these ministers and others who guide or serve the public will cultivate the habit of distinguishing between true and false *Swadeshi*."<sup>8</sup>

In the 1930s, as the spirit of *Swadeshi* began to cast its spell on the public mind, and as the boycott movement began to make its impact felt, some well-known foreign owned companies began to register their companies or their subsidiaries in India and advertise their names adding "India"

within brackets. They did so in the hope of misleading consumers into believing that the companies were Indian, and so the goods manufactured by them were *Swadeshi*. Gandhi was asked whether such companies and their products could be regarded as '*Swadeshi*'. He answered: "As regards the definition of a *Swadeshi* Company, I would say that only those concerns can be regarded as *Swadeshi* whose control, direction and management ... are in Indian hands. I should have no objection to the use of foreign capital, or to the employment of foreign talent, when such are not available in India, or when we need them, - but only on condition that such capital and such talents are exclusively under the control, direction and management of Indians, and are used in the interests of India. But the use of foreign capital or talent is one thing, and the dumping of foreign industrial concerns is totally another thing. The concerns you have named can not, in the remotest sense of the term, be called *Swadeshi*. Rather than countenance these ventures, I would prefer the development of the industries in question to be delayed by a few years in order to permit national capital and enterprise to grow up and build such industries in future under the actual control, direction and management of Indians themselves."<sup>9</sup>

During the days of the struggle for Independence or *Swaraj*, the British Imperialist Government held the reins of power. They did not have the interests of the Indian masses at heart. Their strategy was to destroy indigenous industry, flood the market with attractive goods manufactured by them, reduce the millions of our people to consumers", look upon our country as a market for their goods and undertakings, fleece, or bleed our economy and our people, compel unequal competition to ensure that we languish and wither while the rich becomes richer, and national and international disparities increase. Today, political power vests in our hands, but it appears as though our weakness before the economic might of

trans-national and multi-national corporations has created genuine fear of a second coming of the syndrome. In spite of decades of aid and trade and development, the net outflow from our country is far higher than what we received through trade and aid, and unemployment and disparities are increasing.

It is in such circumstances, and in the face of an Imperialist Government that used Governmental power in naked and subtle ways to destroy Indian industry, Indian skills and the Indian economy itself that *Swadeshi* or the *Swadeshi* Movement became an instrument of struggle for the defence of our economy and for freedom from exploitation and eventual impoverishment and slavery. It became an effective answer to the tactics of those who wanted to dominate our economy, and exploit our masses by creating an addiction for foreign consumers' goods. Depending on foreign goods also meant tuning oneself to foreign tastes and patterns of thought and values. It led to the atrophy of Indian skills and the Indian genius for originality and variety, and to attraction for the goods and fashions of the West in the induced belief that conformity with the ways of the West is a sign of modernity and progress.

Like Dadabhai Naoroji, Ranade, Gokhale, Tilak, Rabindranath Tagore, Lala Lajpat Rai and other Titans of our struggle for freedom, Gandhi also saw *Swadeshi* as an answer to the Western strategy of economic domination and exploitation. But to him, *Swadeshi* was more than an answer to British strategy. It was part of his philosophy of non-co-operation and self-reliance. He pointed out that there was an element of co-operation that the victim unwittingly extended to the exploiter, and it was the duty of a rebel or revolutionary or *Satyagrahi* therefore to withdraw this co-operation, - refuse to co-operate to bring about one's own ruin. It was also the duty of the *Satyagrahi* to build up an alternative to the system with which he non-cooperated.



Gandhi's philosophy of *Swadeshi* therefore meant the renunciation or boycott of goods that were not *Swadeshi*, and intensive efforts to revive Indian industry and make it more efficient to meet the demand for products of excellence that could compete with the quality of products from anywhere in the world. It is, as part of these efforts that Gandhi set up the All India Spinners' Association and the All India Village Industries Association. Along with the bonfires and boycott of foreign goods he also worked assiduously for the regeneration of village industries, for the upgradation of the skills and technology used in them, and the organisation of artisans, craftsmen and workers engaged in these industries.

It cannot be gainsaid that boycott was the cutting edge of the movement to combat economic domination. This had to be so when the British Government was interested not in protecting Indian industry, but in getting entrenched in the Indian market or capturing the Indian market and driving out Indian goods through unequal competition. But Gandhi never believed that the people were helpless without power. He did not want the people, who are the repository of constitutional and revolutionary power, to feel helpless without the Government. Therefore to him boycott or non co-operation or *Satyagraha* was the 'ultimate guarantee of freedom', the exercise of peoples' power in the cause of freedom. If people are sovereign, and they are sovereign in democracy, they can not abdicate their responsibility to defend political sovereignty as well as their economic and industrial interests. Gandhi was more interested in what people could do than in waiting on Governments: While the Government has the power to determine policy and invoke sanctions, people have the power to boycott, to decline to buy. And in a configuration where the goal or interest of trans-national corporations or multi-national corporations is to make us 'consumers', the only effective power that is left with the people may be to refuse to consume

or to buy, to refuse to become consumers in a captive market, and thus decline to be partners in the conspiracy against their own economic interests. This may be all the more so, when military, political and economic power is concentrated in the hands of those who want to convert others into mere consumers, those whose driving force has not been philanthropy, but the desire to dominate and use power to seek their own benefit at the cost of others. In Gandhi's philosophy, therefore, *Swadeshi* is both a principle of evolution or construction, a creative principle, as well as an instrument of struggle for the economic regeneration of the masses.

As we have already seen, Gandhi believed that the philosophy of *Swadeshi* was equally valid in all spheres of human activity, and all spheres in which man was capable of evolution. I have devoted most of my time to the implications of *Swadeshi* in the field of economic activity. I must now say a few words about the spheres of culture, and of political and spiritual evolution. .

In the realm of culture, *Swadeshi* demands that we do not uproot ourselves from our heritage. Our heritage has taken shape from the thoughts and efforts of those who are, and who were proximate to us. To be ignorant of this heritage or to repudiate it is inconsistent with the spirit of *Swadeshi*; it is the base on which one builds. One can and should contribute to its improvement or enrichment. For this, one must be introspective, and must be able to detect and remove deficiencies and whatever is untenable. One must not fear exposure to other cultural heritages. In fact one should absorb whatever good one finds anywhere. But one should not allow one's roots to wither or be eroded. Gandhi has been quite graphic in outlining the paradigm: "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides, and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to blow about in my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. Mine is

not a religion of the prison house." <sup>10</sup>

The need to be familiar with one's own cultural moorings before one turns to those of others has been endorsed and annotated by the great savant and orientalist, Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy: "Just so with all other indigenous arts and industries; we neglect what lies at our doors, to buy from abroad what we do not understand and cannot use to advantage. No wonder we are poor; but, what is worse, we are intellectually and aesthetically sterilising ourselves as well. We want a *Swadeshi* of ideas, of music, of art, and commercial *Swadeshi* is bound to follow. I do not mean a boycott of foreign ideas; but I mean that Indians have yet to realise that they cannot adequately appreciate foreign ideas, foreign arts or foreign music, if they can not appreciate their own. Remember we have a duty not only to ourselves, but to the world; that duty is to develop our talents and not bury them."

Dr. Coomaraswamy has also pointed out that the spirit of *Swadeshi* should make us question the senseless adoption of systems that originated elsewhere and were once hailed as beneficial, but later discovered to be injurious to society. The countries in which these systems or practices originated were having second thoughts and introducing correctives, but some in India were still victims of infatuation. "Now consider another aspect of *Swadeshi*. Are we going to compete with the West by introducing a factory system and a capitalist ownership of the means of productions, corresponding to that prevailing in Europe? The results of the capitalist system, wherein the possession of the means of production by a few, enables them to exploit the many, are so unfavourable in the West, that we shall do well to question very severely whether it is wise for us to attempt to compete with the West on the same lines; especially as we are quite out of touch with the regenerative tendencies referred to in the West. If Indian industries are to continue to benefit the people of India, and not merely a few

capitalists in India, they must still be the village and home industries of the past, aided of course, by the adoption of such improvements as appear really desirable."

In the realm of religion, Gandhi's philosophy of *Swadeshi* demands that we be respectful and loyal to the religion into which we are born. One should in fact be respectful to all religions. No religion is perfect. All religions have some truth in them. We must therefore be respectful to all religions, and must learn whatever is good in them to enrich the quality of our own religions. It is not by giving up one's religion and opting for some other religion that one can improve one's religion; when all religions are imperfect, if one changes one's religion, one is only moving from one imperfect religion to another imperfect religion. If one religion needs purification and augmentation to be made less imperfect; so does the other, so, one's duty does not lie in abandoning one's religion, but in making one's own understanding and practices more perfect, and in purifying and augmenting one's own religion.

In the field of spiritual evolution, the practice of *Swadeshi* is the practice of *Swadharma*. By *Swadharma* Gandhi means both the specific duty of a person that has crystallized from his nature, his past, and his current situation and context, as well as the general duty of or need for persistent self-reliant effort to overcome obstructions and evolve towards one's spiritual goal of liberation. One can receive guidance and encouragement. But the effort has to be one's own. Nothing external can substitute the internal process. Since the ultimate effort or *Sadhana* is to 'identify himself with the entire creation', he has to commence his altruism with the beings with whom he comes into contact in his neighbourhood, - around him. One relates to distant beings only in and through one's imagination. It is the beings in our immediate neighbourhood that harm us, irritate us or remind us of separateness. It is the

proximate being therefore with whom we can practise altruism. It is the proximate being that enables us to move along the path of altruism, identification and the conquest of ego, thus helping us to be 'emancipated from the bondage of the physical body.'<sup>11</sup>

In the field of politics, Gandhi believed in the preservation and modernisation of indigenous institutions of administration, and institutions and processes for the administration of justice and the indigenous tradition of self-restraint and the Rule of *Dharma*, a state or society in which the ruler as well as the ruled was kept on the straight path by the tenets and codes of *Dharma*.

Thus, in Gandhi's *Swadeshi*, "there is no room for selfishness; or if there is selfishness in it, it is of the highest type, which is not different from the highest altruism. *Swadeshi* in its purest form is the acme of universal service."<sup>12</sup>

For Gandhi *Swadeshi* is the extension of the law of nature to one's environment. "What the *Gita* says with regard to *Swadharma* equally applies to *Swadeshi*, for *Swadeshi* is *Swadharma* applied to one's immediate environment."<sup>13</sup>

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