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**REMEMBERING GANDHI:  
POLITICAL PHILOSOPHER AND SOCIAL THEORIST**



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Don Bosco Road, Siliguri

734 001 / Post Box No. 73

[principal@salesiancollege.net](mailto:principal@salesiancollege.net)

[salesian.publication@gmail.com](mailto:salesian.publication@gmail.com)

“My belief is that whenever you go into somebody’s head - anyone’s head - it’s all insecurity.... I live with that fear that in a minute everything could go away.”

Andre Acimann, in the interview on his books - *Call me by Your name* and *Find Me*, in Rich Juzwiak, “The Story Continues, after all” *Times*, November, 4, 2019, 91.

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**CONTENTS**

*Editorial*

<b>Remembering Mahatma as Gandhi: Gandhi as Political Philosopher and Social Theorist</b>	v
<i>Pius V Thomas</i>	

*Original Articles*

<b>Gandhi and the Development Discourse</b>	1
<i>Siby K. George</i>	
<b>A Conciliatory Gaze: SNG on MK Gandhi and BR Ambedkar</b>	23
<i>George Thadathil</i>	
<b>Gandhi's Legacy: Vandana Shiva as Gandhi's Heir</b>	51
<i>Pius V Thomas and Violina Patowary</i>	
<b>Gandhi in the Tropics: Climate, Disease and Medicine</b>	73
<i>Bikash Sarma</i>	
<b>The Violence of Non-violence: Reading Nirad C Chaudhuri Rereading Gandhi</b>	85
<i>Jaydeep Chakrabarty</i>	
<b>Freedom, Authority and Care as Moral Postulates: Reexamining Gandhi's Proposal for Ethical Reconstruction</b>	95
<i>Subhra Nag</i>	
<b>Decoding Gandhigiri: A Genealogy of a 'popular' Gandhi</b>	111
<i>Abhijit Ray</i>	

<b><i>General Commentaries</i></b>	
<b>Labour for Love or Love for Labour?</b> <i>Shruti Sharma</i>	135
<b>Production of a 'degenerate' form</b> <i>Vasudeva K. Naidu</i>	149

<b><i>Book Reviews</i></b>	
<b>Irfan Ahmad, <i>Religion as Critique: Islamic Critical Thinking from Mecca to Marketplace</i></b> <i>By Shofiul Alom Pathan</i>	157
<b>Punam Tripathi, <i>The Vulnerable Andaman and Nicobar Islands: A study of Disasters and Response</i></b> <i>By Bipul Chhetri</i>	161
<b>Sreetanwi Chakraborty, <i>The Sleeping Beauty Wakes Up</i></b> <i>By Monika Rana</i>	165

**Our Contributors** 169

**Notes to Contributors**

## Editorial

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### Remembering Mahatma as Gandhi: Gandhi as Political Philosopher and Social Theorist

*Pius V Thomas*

#### I

The special issue dedicated to Gandhi titled 'Remembering Mahatma as Gandhi: Gandhi as Political Philosopher and Social Theorist' intends to address Gandhi's concept of democracy, its delicate relation with his millennial ideal of non-violence/*Ahimsa* and the intent and impact of Gandhian thought in the contemporary discourses on socio-cultural-political life and coexistence.

Many influential studies and social theorists have pointed out the legacy of Gandhian thought on contemporary philosophy and social theory as - rigorously reprimanding and controversially concealing - simultaneously. Nonetheless, Gandhi and his philosophy prominently figures in all discussions about democracy, ethics of plurality and political morality. Therefore, we have solemn re-readings and reinterpretations of Gandhi which consummate radical negotiability with the concepts of democracy, nation state, critique of modernity, human rights, civil society, religion and social freedom. We have worthy models of rereading of Gandhi in the theoretic efforts of Partha Chatterjee, Ashish Nandy, Bikhu Parekh, Akeel Bilgrami, Shiv Viswanathan, Ramchandra Guha, Sumit Sarkar, Rudolf C Heredia and Thomas Pantham - to mention a few prominent names from the scores of such efforts from India and abroad.

Ramachandra Guha in one of his timely and interesting write up on Gandhi published in Malayalam<sup>1</sup> discusses how three authors, Ivan Meysky, S A Danke and S D Saklathwala wrote comparatively

<sup>1</sup> Ramchandra Guha, 'Gandhiyum Leninum nammudeyum Avarudeyum Kalath' (Gandhi and Lenin in their and our times), *Mathrubhoomi Weekly*, October, 27, 2019, 52-55.

about Gandhi and tall secular leaders of Gandhi's time – mainly in order to praise leaders such as Lenin, Ataturk and Sukarno. For the authors, while these secular, progressive and popular leaders spearheaded liberative movements against power and exploitation of the masses, Gandhi in the pretext of his principle of *Ahimsa*, religious ideas of *Dharma* and Truth acted like a reactionary who wanted to recreate the past. Guha, nonetheless, completes his write up by underlining a relevant and a timely perspective that inspires us all, that:

[As we celebrate the One Fiftieth Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi]...I think that the posthumous fame and reputation of Gandhi among the ordinary masses and intellectuals alike is far above than Lenin. Clearly, above the Russian prophet of arms revolution and class antagonism stands now the Indian Prophet of Ahimsa and brotherhood and fellowship of all religions and even after thousands of years he [Gandhi] would stand as the guide of humanity.<sup>2</sup>

Hence, Gandhi's thought constantly resurges many major issues such as nature; environment and lifeworld; democracy and development; casteism and caste inequality; the concept of language and democracy; the critique of western modernity and capitalism; women and *swaraj* and their role in democracy; social freedom; nationalism and patriotism; democracy and non-violence; the critique of modern science and technology and human rights.

Meanwhile, we should also see the major debates which took place across the length and breadth of the theoretical gamut of social theory and philosophy which challenged many aspects of Gandhi's concept of democracy and *Ahimsa*. Gandhian concept of democracy which presumes non-violence as its contour/guiding principle have been intensely criticized by many thinkers like Ambedkar as well as by the recent critics of institutionalized democracy. In recent times Gail Omvedt and Arundhati Roy make this discussion alive. Arundhati Roy shows us that Gandhi's ideals of self purification

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 55; My translation, from Malayalam to English.

fail to make poverty visible as Gandhi's ideals of simplicity is always mired with political power. She consistently argues that poverty cannot be simulated as Gandhi wanted to do, as it is sheer powerlessness and not having money or possessions. Whereas those who are at the receiving end of untouchability and caste system are in inimitable poverty.<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note a new dimension that D.R Nagaraj shares with us in this regard. He writes:

Untouchability was of the central concerns of Gandhiji. In all historical fairness it must be admitted that it was Bapu who made untouchability one of the crucial questions of Indian Politics, although there were many yogis and movements before him in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries whose contribution require a deeper grasp and analysis...Gandhiji's take off point was that the problem of untouchability was a problem of the self, in this case the collective Hindu self. He had transformed the notion of the Individual self and the necessity of clearing the cobwebs of caste ego was shifted to the level of the larger notion of the collective self.<sup>4</sup>

However, such criticisms and observations on Gandhi's concept of democracy and non-violence surrounding the social violence (*Himsa*), surrounding the issues of casteism and violence on the Dalits, the nascent grey areas of the idealized uncertainty of minorities', the violently patronized and promoted issues related with language-identity, religious issues related with religions' place in the public sphere, and the responsible dispositions of the civil society along with the moments of Gandhi's self-transcendence opens up a larger understanding of Indian reality – as D R Nagaraj has shown – make rereading of Gandhi politically more demanding.

Therefore, an interesting aspect that runs through all the serious introspections on the ideas and concepts of Gandhi is a reckoning the sage, who largely made the fortunes of political and social India on

<sup>3</sup> Arundhati Roy, "The Doctor and the Saint", In *Annihilation of Caste: An Annotated Critical Edition*, (New Delhi: Navayana, 2014), 78.

<sup>4</sup> D. R. Nagaraj, "Self Purification Versus Self-respect: On the Roots of the Dalit Movement", In Reghuramararaju (ed.) *Debating Gandhi*, (New Delhi: OUP, 2006), 361-368.

the one side and on the other side is being remembered as the failed prophet of Indian democracy – but who still commands the most original discussions on democracy and self rule. That is the reason why it is to be admirably remembered that Gandhi has encountered almost all the conundrums related with democratic and post traditional socio-political coexistence. As Ramchandra Guha said in an interview recently, Gandhi's nationalism was democratically affirmative to the core as it was essentially pluralist and keeping the highest model of social freedom in its core. It is this sense and ideal of democratic diversity that made him address the social and political concepts of his time from deep critical perspectives and strive for the principle of reconciliation of the political with the ethical-spiritual. As Tridip Suhrud points out:

This divide between the religious, spiritual Gandhi and the political one or, more aptly, the divide between Gandhi the *ashramite* and Gandhi the *satyagrahi* has come to shape not only our academic engagement with the life and thought of Gandhi, but also our memory of the man whom we revere, revile or remain indifferent to. The dichotomy is a superficial one. Gandhi saw himself as a *satyagrahi* and an *ashramite*. His politics was imbued with spiritual strivings and his relationship with religion was a deeply political one.<sup>5</sup>

Akeel Bilgrami, in a study on Gandhi highlights the above mentioned divide in a slightly different fashion, “[t]he quality of his thought has sometimes been lost because of the other images Gandhi evolves – a shrewd politician and a deeply spiritual figure.”<sup>6</sup> Though Akeel Bilgrami takes his interpretation of Gandhi into a track which more politically deals with the spiritual image of Gandhi, it seems that the questions related with the uniqueness of Gandhian democratic instruments cannot be answered unless a determining link is established between Gandhi the *ashramite* and Gandhi the *satyagrahi*. The major question in this context, let us

<sup>5</sup> Tridip Suhrud, “Rediscovering Gandhi: New insights from recent books on Gandhi”, 1 February 2013. [www.caravanmagazine.in/profile/468](http://www.caravanmagazine.in/profile/468).

<sup>6</sup> Akeel Bilgrami, “Gandhi, the Philosopher”, *Economic and Political Weekly* 38, 39: (2003).

assume that though it is debatably resilient, can it be beneficial to think that the strong conceptual connective that links Gandhi the *ashramite* and Gandhi the *satyagrahi* is his philosophy of nonviolence or *Ahimsa* and the latter as the primary socio-political category that defines the ontology of democracy according to Gandhi. Gandhi's Principle of *Ahimsa* as that which Determines the Political Gandhi.

Though it may be commented that the observation that Gandhi's legacy will continue to determine the core and ambience of modern democracy is an overemphasized truism, it can sufficiently inform the contemporary thoughts on both the theoretical and practical concepts of democracy. The contemporary critiques of democracy world over will be incomplete without Gandhian critique of liberal democracy.

Firstly, Gandhi challenges the majoritarianism of numbers in democracy. Gandhi achieves the ideal of democracy which can claim its uniqueness when he rejects democracy as majoritarianism of any form. Gandhi agreed to the popular ideal of democracy where the opinion of the majority is counted. But, he captures the core of democracy and the democratic process when he held the view that, "when a respectable minority objects to any rule of conduct it would be dignified for the majority to yield to the minority." The ethic that Gandhi was trying to introduce and inscribe into Indian political life, as pointed out was that, "real *swaraj* will not be the acquisition of authority by a few but the acquisition of the capacity of all to resist authority when it is abused."

Secondly, Gandhi rejects the logic of power that is derived by the liberal model of democracy from the culturally insensitive technological civilization. As Ramin Jahanbegloo tells us:

In response to the totalizing project of modernity exemplified by colonial domination and a discursive dominance of positivist and reductionist science, Gandhi laid down two conditions for the enshrinement of moral civilization in Hind Swaraj. First, his notion of Swaraj, which referred to three philosophical, ethical and political ideas of self examination, self rule and self determination.

Second, his concept of Sarvodaya or welfare of all, which rejected the Utilitarian view of liberal democracy as representing greatest good of the greatest number.<sup>7</sup>

Consequently, Gandhi shows us that the violence involved in the deadly combination of techno-scientific capitalism –its ideal of domination of nature and its brute force and economic greed – which the liberal form of democracy in its failure to recognize becomes the helpless carrier and perpetrator of all the above.

Gandhi's concept of non-violence becomes actively and politically visible here. According to Gandhi, though non-violence never evades violence fully, it carries on a constant struggle against arrogance and violence. It is a very powerful and active force. The followers of non-violence would never retreat at the sight of violence. As A K Saran writes, according to Gandhi, "[v]iolence is negative in nature, for every violent act or thought violates reality. All violence is violence against reality. Non-violence is acceptance of reality as it is."<sup>8</sup> As quoted by Saran, Gandhi explains this as follows:

...When parties to a situation do not see the relevant reality in a mutually acceptable way, the believer in non-violence, that is, the one who wants to accept reality as it is, will voluntarily undertake to suffer for his vision of reality....This will bring about a change of heart and mind of the other party, or in the sufferer, or in both and thus a common vision of reality will emerge, eliminating any imposition of a supervening reality by the use of superior physical force.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps in the writings of thinkers like Bilgrami we can find out how Gandhi's concept of non-violence devises the struggle for *swaraj*, which is a term closest to democracy for Gandhi or a

<sup>7</sup> Ramin Jehanbegloo, *The Decline of Civilization*, (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2017), 44.

<sup>8</sup> A. K Saran, "Gandhi's Theory of Society and Our Times", In Dallmayr & G.N Devy (ed.) *Between Tradition and Modernity*, (London: Sage, 1998), 212.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 212.

concept that which makes Gandhi's concept of democracy distinct. As Bilgrami writes:

It [*Ahimsa*]...became a self conscious instrument in politics in this century...It was studied under different names, first usually as part of religious or contemplative ways of life remote from the public affairs of men and state, and later with the coming of romantic thought in Europe, under the rubric of critiques of industrial civilization. For Gandhi, both these contexts were absolutely essential to his conception of non-violence. Non-violence was central in his nationalist mobilization against British rule in India. But the concept is also situated in an essentially religious temperament as well as in a thoroughgoing critique of ideas and ideologies of the Enlightenment and of an intellectual paradigm of perhaps a century earlier than the Enlightenment.<sup>10</sup>

Gandhi views the perverted combination of – colonialism and the uncritical modernity along with the one dimensional technological domination – act together as violence against human dignity and therefore becomes essentially antidemocratic. *Ahimsa* is in recognizing the cognitive enslavement of colonial modernity and its sibling liberal democracy and critiquing them. The proximity to the above formulated and accomplished conceptual and praxeological Gandhi and Gandhian thought, perhaps makes us to think that it determines the authenticity and seriousness of any theoretical engagement in India after Gandhi.

## II

The present volume as the result of a debate on the relevance of remembering Gandhi comes out with some major and intimate engagements with Gandhian thought and its significance. Siby K George's paper titled, 'Gandhi and the Development Discourse', brings to the fore one of the major engagements that has been endorsed to Gandhi's philosophy and its overall impact on our socio cultural and political life. The paper scrutinizes and

<sup>10</sup> Akeel Bilgrami, "Gandhi, the Philosopher", *Economic and Political Weekly* 38, 39(2003): 4159.

also problematizes Gandhi's cognitive disengagement with the colonizer's moral discourse. The discussion highlights Gandhi's 'counter-narrative and its 'rejection of the modern developmental state and his alternative of an ethical form of development' as the ecological and human crisis of the twentieth century was the direct consequence of the inner morbidity of modernity. However, along with many contemporary thinkers the paper draws our attention to the fact that the problem of modernity that Gandhi has challenged doesn't make him a retrogressive anti-modernist. The paper quite insistently attempts further to show and argue that the alternative development picture that Gandhi has put forward is significant in the face of the dehumanizing impacts of modernity.

George Thadathil in his paper titled 'A Conciliatory Gaze: SNG on MK Gandhi and BR Ambedkar' involves in highlighting the Gandhi-Ambedkar debates in the past decade and attempt to bring in Narayana Guru into the debate and expand to focus more on reinventing the debate and discourse. Narayana Guru as a Keralite/Malayalee Vedantin social reformer and revolutionary campaigner against untouchability and caste system has been a prophetic forerunner to the Gandhian project besides being part of the Gandhain dialogue network later. The paper in its search for potential reconciliation of the irreconcilable positions of Gandhi and Ambedkar brings in the notion of Narayana Guru's *atma sukham* (self-happiness or self-joy or soul-bliss) as a concept that can act as a 'purification process of all religious views and in itself being an alternative conceptualization of spiritual wellbeing'. The attempt to ground such a search draws attention to the somewhat unknown and hidden views and philosophical position of SNG into dialogue with the more elaborately written and argued positions of Ambedkar and Gandhi. The paper tries to show that the failure of 'Gandhi's project for modern India among the Dalits, Adivasis and Women on the one hand, and the circumspection as regards to Ambedkar's version of modern India among the upper castes and strata on the other, pose the need for a new path and advocates.'

These could be drawn out from SNG and SNG movement with its vision of selfhood for a people who can 're-script their identity'.

The paper by Pius V Thomas and Violina Patowary, which discusses 'Gandhi's Legacy: Vandana Shiva as Gandhi's Heir' emphasizes the contemporariness and legacy of the political Gandhi who influences the contemporary concepts of democracy, ethics of plurality and political morality. The paper takes its course of discussion to a radical critique of globalized world, global institutions, the environment and nature in order to locate the democracy proper. In such an effort the paper aligns the notion of political Gandhi with a 'radical and intimate interlocutor like Vandana Shiva who builds up her ecofeminist theoretical environmentalism and the principles of global coexistence and democracy through a Gandhian paradigm. The discussion in the paper convincingly hint at the idea that the concept of earth democracy, which Vandana Shiva puts forward to mediate a major environmental ethical and socio-political ideal in addressing the environmental crisis rests quite credibly on the Gandhian ideal of Swaraj.

'Gandhi in the Tropics: Climate, Disease and Medicine' by Bikash Sarma discusses a historiography of medicine in India and Gandhi's engagement with it through a process of qualitative denunciation and qualitative appreciation. The paper argues that the western medicine in the context of India cannot be cognized without an elaborate historiography that highlights the knowledge production that the colonizer made according to the changing 'perception about the landscape, climate, disease and the natives at the contact zone.' The paper makes an effort to track down the emergence of the colonial discourse on medicine and make Gandhi stand in dialoge with the emerging discourse.

'The Violence of Non-violence: Reading Nirad C Chaudhuri Rereading Gandhi' by Jaydeep Chakrabarty explores and challenges the logic of Gandhi's concept of non-violence with the aim of showing its nexus with its binary opposite, violence. The paper does

it through a 'reading of Nirad C Chaudhuri's critique of Gandhi and Gandhism,' supported by 'Jacques Derrida, John Milton and Rabindranath Tagore's conceptuality of binary opposites.' The discussion, however, aims to address and work out the 'common areas' and of meaning of nonviolence in Gandhi and its binary opposite violence.

Subhra Nag's paper titled, 'Freedom, Authority and Care as Moral Postulates: Reexamining Gandhi's Proposal for Ethical Reconstruction' makes a feminist ethical interrogation of Gandhi and the Gandhain thought. It challenges and interrogates Gandhi's moral thought and ideas in what paper calls in a single frame of analysis in order to attain an alternative moral stance, which could be more in dialogue with the ethics of care.

The paper titled, 'Decoding *Gandhigiri*: A genealogy of a 'popular' Gandhi' by Abhijit Ray makes a critical study of *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* in its effort to explore the popular cultural and filmic representation of Gandhism in Bollywood movies. The paper in this connection takes up Gandhi's critique of modernity and how it ignites debatable post-modernist ideas. The paper observes that the movie *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* 're-engineered' certain ideas of Gandhi without going to the deeper meaning of Gandhian philosophy and created a populist Gandhi. The paper argues that though *Gandhigiri* exhibits certain post-modernist traits of kitch and populism, it also rightly upholds Gandhi and his persona.

Though the volume is slender in terms of the number of the papers, the engagements which take place in the papers presented in situating and encountering Gandhi and Gandhian thought seem to be creatively border crossing the conventional delimitations in discussing Gandhi and conceptually diverse. The volume, I hope, will find its own niche in the efforts to know and remember Gandhi.

# Gandhi and the Development Discourse

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*Siby K. George*

The figure of Gandhi as the man who distrusted, deconstructed and stood up to the colonizer's moral discourse has had abiding significance for the colonized part of the world. The central tenet of the Gandhian counter-narrative is the rejection of developmental modernity and the portrayal of an alternative development model. The human and ecological crises of the twentieth century arose from the problems of modernity for Gandhi. As these problems further amplify, the Gandhian diagnosis becomes increasingly significant. However, a careful reading of the Gandhian critique of developmental modernity shows that he did not reject the moral, political and ontological underpinnings of modernity tout court. The answer to the problems of developmental modernity does not lie in a simple, unproblematic reversal as seen in the debates that Gandhi had with his critics on issues concerning development. The meaning of counter-developmentalism or postdevelopment must, therefore, be the reframing of the 'modern' quest for human freedom, fulfillment and equality without sidestepping the culture of wanton consumption.

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**Keywords:** Development ethics, Post development, Modernity, Crisis, Alternatives.

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## Introduction

The subject matter of this paper is Gandhi's critique of developmental modernity, the contemporary significance of his critique, and the attendant questions of the sense of his critique and of the normative debate that it provoked. I discuss these questions in five sections. First, I emphasize the figure of Gandhi as the man who stood up to the colonizer's moral discourse. Second, I attempt to establish links between Gandhi's critique of developmental modernity and the concerns of contemporary postdevelopment theory, and of the subfield called 'development ethics'. I then move to develop Gandhi's ethical concerns with respect to developmental modernity in terms of his distinctive problematization of (third) the modern

ecological crisis, and (fourth) the modern human crisis. Fifth, I discuss in conversation with Gandhi's critics the conception of an alternative modernity or postmodernity that can be discovered in his works.

### **Gandhi and the Colonial Moral Discourse**

The figure of Gandhi is striking as the colonizer's antagonist, as the man who defied and stood up to the colonial moral discourse. Everyday social, political and personal human action is undergirded by moral discourses that mediate its sense of the good.<sup>1</sup> But to be 'modern' means primarily to be exposed to moral discourses that initially shock our received moral sense. At the dawn of modernity in India, there was this incredible sense of shock, which later yielded to tame acceptance of the colonial moral discourse. Gandhi, however, tore into the colonial moral narrative, famously represented in Rudyard Kipling's verse, "[t]ake up the White Man's burden – / Send forth the best ye breed – ... / To serve your captives' need; ... / Your new-caught, sullen peoples, / Half-devil and half-child."<sup>2</sup> After analyzing the meaning of the word 'civilization', Gandhi hyperbolically declares in the *Hind Swaraj* (1909) that India "has nothing to learn from anybody else."<sup>3</sup> Anticipating current fears, he argues that modern civilization is such that "one has only to be patient and it will be self-destroyed."<sup>4</sup> Gandhi was called the Mahatma and Father of the Nation partly because there was a conscious effort from his part to arguably embody in his life, habits,

<sup>1</sup> The connections between "senses of the self and moral visions, between identity and the good" is developed by Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), x. He emphasizes the inescapability of the sense of the good, and how this sense, like all others, is caught up in the hermeneutical frame of the historical age.

<sup>2</sup> Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden" (1899). In Rudyard Kipling, *The Collected Poems of Rudyard Kipling*, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 2001), 334.

<sup>3</sup> M. K. Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 10, (New Delhi: The Publications Division of the Government of India, 1958-1994), 37. Subsequently these volumes are cited in the footnotes as CWMG, followed by the referred volume and page number(s).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

clothing, body, personality and his enormously influential politics, the most distilled, idealized and thereby also somewhat utopian version of native culture.

Speaking of what comes to mind today with respect to the link between the figure of Gandhi and the development discourse, distanced as we are from his era by over seven decades, I think, he brings to the development discourse what philosopher Paul Ricoeur called 'the hermeneutics of suspicion'. Gandhi tore into the exploitative, condescending and unethical pedagogical mission of the colonizer, and cast a profound suspicion on the colonial discourse by "a tearing off of masks, an interpretation that reduces disguises."<sup>5</sup>What he found fundamentally objectionable in modern civilization was the racist and unsustainable idea of linear, uniform, global progress.<sup>6</sup> It is reported that for Gandhi the core of modern civilization can be expressed in two ways: "One was that it represented ceaseless activity, and the second was that it aimed at the annihilation of space and time. ... He found that the simple life was better than the complex, in that they [people] found time to devote attention to higher pursuits."<sup>7</sup>

I shall now proceed to relate Gandhi's critique to contemporary development critique, and show how the essential message of his critique has relevance for us today, although there is certainly an 'other' side to Gandhi's critique.

### **Gandhi, Post development, Development ethics**

*The Development Dictionary*, an influential collection of critical essays by postdevelopment scholars, begins with a startling declaration, "[t]he last 40 years can be called the age of development. This epoch is coming to an end. The time is ripe to write its

<sup>5</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), 30.

<sup>6</sup> See: Ashis Nancy, "From outside the Imperium: Gandhi's Cultural Critique of the 'West'", *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 7, 2 (1981): 171-194.

<sup>7</sup> M K Gandhi, *CWMG*, 10: 279.

obituary.”<sup>8</sup>Postdevelopment is the deconstruction of the postwar western construction of the discourse of development pertaining to the global south and the reconstruction of development as decentralized, localized practices leading to more humanly fulfilling lives by and for the subjects of development themselves. There is certainly an element of radicalism in this school of thought, but my interest is in pointing out the Gandhian element in that radicalism, which a critical reviewer of four postdevelopment works did not miss, “[i]ndeed, there is not much that is new about post-development thought. For all its protestations of radical difference, there is little in post-development that moves beyond Gandhi or Schumacher, Illich or Fanon.”<sup>9</sup>My point really is not to deny postdevelopment its originality, but to show how at least two of its concerns – the human and the environmental crisis – prefigure in Gandhi’s rejection of the colonizer’s civilizing mission.

Just as postdevelopment critics began to radically question and reject the postwar discourse of development, a second mode of questioning the conception of development began to emerge in the 1970s called ‘development ethics’. If postdevelopment theory is largely influenced by the poststructural traditions of European thought, development ethics is based more in Anglo-American normative theory. Rather than proposing a straightforward rejection of the discourse of development, development ethics advocates normative criticism and re-strategizing of development action. But the concerns of development ethics are no less Gandhian. Denis Goulet, who is often mentioned as the pioneer of the new subdiscipline of development ethics,<sup>10</sup> writes:

Gandhi, who was neither economist nor ethicist, formulated a vision and practice of development for India centered on values of non-

<sup>8</sup> Wolfgang Sachs, “Introduction”, In *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*, Second Edition, ed. Wolfgang Sachs, (London: Zed Books, 2010), xv.

<sup>9</sup> Stuart Corbridge, “‘Beneath the Pavement Only Soil’: The Poverty of Post-development”, *Journal of Development Studies* 34, 6 (1998):145.

<sup>10</sup> David A. Crocker, “Toward Development Ethics”, *World Development* 19, 5 (1991): 458.

violent co-operation among social agents, responsible trusteeship in the ownership and administration of wealth, production by the masses over mass production, village development, and the provision of basic needs over the multiplication of wants... By centering his analysis and policy prescriptions on the values affected, Gandhi was acting, in effect, as a development ethicist.<sup>11</sup>

In the next two sections, my aim is to relate the concerns of development ethics and postdevelopment theory to Gandhi's diagnosis of the two crises of modernity. I begin with the ecological crisis, which for Gandhi arises essentially from a human-centric, developmentalist and unsustainable conception of good life.

### Gandhi and the Ecological Crisis

Modern science and technology came into being in seventeenth-century Europe, and were conceived by Francis Bacon, Descartes and others as useful tools for material human progress. Bacon's sexist metaphor of a 'masculine', virile, generative science helped imagine the ceaseless progress of human society, aided by modern science.<sup>12</sup> The mechanistic Newtonian understanding of the universe progressively emerged from the Baconian reduction of knowledge to its use for relieving 'man's estate', the Galilean mathematization of nature, and the dualistic Cartesian imagination that engraved on modern consciousness a sense of control of the fertile mind over inert matter. The utilitarian moral justification of liberal capitalism and western colonialism was the outcome of the age of reason and science; they were the material expression of the confidence in human progress that the spirit of science and reason gave to westerners. When Gandhi rejects modern civilization as represented in the machine culture, what he rejects is this particular history of the scientific culture that emerged out of the Enlightenment, the age of reason and the industrial revolution. It drove humanity to the

<sup>11</sup> Denis Goulet, "Development Ethics: A New Discipline", *International Journal of Social Economics* 24, 11 (1997): 1161-62.

<sup>12</sup> William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 316.

present ecological crisis in a short span of just about four centuries. The concern about the dialectical antithesis of modern technological culture is a global concern today, and it is undoubtedly a Gandhian concern.

Much before the ecological crisis became the talking point, arguably with the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*(1962), Gandhi sounded ecological alarm bells in such counsel as the following to a capitalist in 1928:

God forbid that India should ever take to industrialism after the manner of the West. The economic imperialism of a single tiny island kingdom (England) is today keeping the world in chains. If an entire nation of 300 million took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like locusts.<sup>13</sup>

Postdevelopment scholars agree that Gandhi's statement has greater relevance today, for "there are no longer 300 million but 1,000 million setting out to imitate Britain... The bio-physical limits to the spread of industrial civilization have impressively confirmed Gandhi's intuition."<sup>14</sup> According to the deep ecologist Arne Næss, Gandhi showed him "the internal relation between self-realization, non-violence and what sometimes has been called biospherical egalitarianism."<sup>15</sup> Gandhi's unwillingness to take the English path to development is rather historic because economic development, as an idea that emerged in seventeenth century England, was received in non-western countries as a short-cut to national power after the manner of the west. Reactive nationalism paved the way for the Meiji Restoration in Japan, and Dr. Sun Yat-Sen's call to

<sup>13</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *CWMG* 38: 243.

<sup>14</sup> Wolfgang Sachs, "Fair Wealth: Pathways into Post-development", In *Rethinking Development in a Carbon-Constrained World: Development Cooperation and Climate Change*, ed. Eija Palosuo, (Helsinki, Finland: The Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2009), 205.

<sup>15</sup> Arne Næss, "Self-realisation: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World", In *Thinking Like a Mountain: Towards a Council of All Beings*, ed. John Seed, Joanna Macy, Pat Fleming and Arne Næss, (Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers, 1988), 26.

modernization in China.<sup>16</sup> Gandhi resisted the temptation, although Nehru and the other architects of independent India placed their faith in modernization after the manner of the west. Even still, it is useful to remember that the Gandhian hermeneutics of suspicion was a significant challenge posed to the idea of industrial modernity. Whenever we think of alternatives to industrial capitalism, we think of Gandhi. And Ramachandra Guha writes that “the life and practice of Gandhi are the single most important influence on the Indian environmental movement.”<sup>17</sup>

The Gandhian alternative appears prophetic when we look at it with the benefit of the hindsight. For Gandhi, a consumerist civilization is not ecologically sustainable; rather, he prescribes a rural civilization in close contact with nature, but without the standard structures of the feudal society. He prescribes production in terms of need and not in terms of the abstract internal logic of the economy. He did not imagine the economy as a sphere that operated under precise, abstract laws, but one that obeyed human requirements and moral regulation. The idea of the productive process as a law unto itself, an abstract field of play with its own rules of the game, Gandhi feared, had led to a consumerist culture. Paul Gilding, an Australian environmentalist, argues in *The Great Disruption* (2011) that since we have only a single planet to support life, as far as we know, and since this planet has reached its breaking point as far as ecological sustainability is concerned, we as humans will soon have to find alternatives to our present mode of life, enmeshed in economism, developmentalism and endless shopping. Gilding writes, “I have no doubt we will respond – with intensity matching the crisis as it emerges – when we end our denial of the obvious logic we can all see if we choose to look.”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Heinz Wolfgang Arndt, *Economic Development: The History of an Idea*, (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 13.

<sup>17</sup> Ramachandra Guha, “Mahatma Gandhi and the Environmental Movement in India”, *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 6, 3 (1995): 48.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Gilding, *The Great Disruption: Why the Climate Crisis Will Bring on the End of Shopping and the Birth of a New World*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 94.

There is today a noticeable degree of consensus across the world regarding the Gandhian ecological vision. We do not have the resources to lead such an expensive, inequitable, and inherently unjust lifestyle. Global justice requires that local abundance is globally distributed because local indulgence has global ramifications. It is true that we are struggling presently to find solutions acceptable across the board, but we know that we are in a crisis. It takes time for us to register and respond to the demands that the crisis makes on our present way of life. The USA pulled out of the Kyoto protocol not because the climate crisis was not perceived as urgent but because, in the words of the senior President Bush, “the American way of life is not up for negotiation,”<sup>19</sup> and in the words of his son, “Kyoto would have wrecked our economy.”<sup>20</sup> When humanity will be absolutely gripped by the crisis, our big shopping and consumerist culture will either come to a halt, or a new regime of terrorizing powerless countries to ecologically subsidize the profligate lifestyles of the rich will have to emerge, a new and ecologically compelled colonialism. What is becoming increasingly clear is that our intellectual window to a broadly Gandhian vision is gradually and ever so unwillingly opening up. The truth of Gandhi’s statement, reported by his secretary Pyarelal, is now becoming unmistakably obvious, “Earth provides enough to satisfy every man’s need but not for everyman’s greed.”<sup>21</sup>

I will now dwell on the human crisis – an instrumentalist, materialistic, self-obsessed and utilitarian disposition – that Gandhi feared was powering modern developmentalism.

<sup>19</sup> Alan Atkisson, *The Sustainability Transformation: How to Accelerate Positive Change in Challenging Times*, (London: Earthscan, 2011), 220.

<sup>20</sup> Marcus G. Raskin, and Robert Spero, *The Four Freedoms Under Siege: The Clear and Present Danger from Our National Security State*, (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2007), 38.

<sup>21</sup> Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. X: The Last Phase, Part-II*, (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1958), 552.

## Gandhi and the Human Crisis

The crisis of modernity, thus, is not predominantly ecological but human. It is human relation to the environment that is in crisis in the modern era. The meaning of the human has changed with modernity's unflinching humanism (human-centrism), in accordance with which unviable, unjust new systems and practices have emerged. With respect to the human crisis regarding developmentalism, Gandhi today appears even more prophetic.

What Gandhi criticizes the most in the modern civilization is the machine. In the *Hind Swaraj* he writes, "[m]achinery is the chief symbol of modern civilization; it represents a great sin."<sup>22</sup> In this, Gandhi was influenced by Tolstoy and Ruskin. But the machine that Gandhi speaks about is not simply iron and steel, but a mode of human understanding, intervention and operation. For Gandhi, instrumental rationality and utilitarian morality are inherent aspects of modern technological civilization: machines make the human hand idle; it represents the evil power to destroy; it brings with its efficiency, superfluity, alienation and disruption of human bond.

Gandhi's philosophy of technology kept changing. In 1909, he wrote in the *Hind Swaraj*, "[i]t is machinery that has impoverished India..."<sup>23</sup> Again, "[i]t is necessary to realize that machinery is bad."<sup>24</sup> But by 1946-47 Gandhi had changed his mind, "[w]e should be careful in using machines as a doctor is in prescribing poisonous medicines. Machine-power can make a valuable contribution towards economic progress. But a few capitalists have employed machine-power regardless of the interests of the common man and that is why our condition has deteriorated today."<sup>25</sup> He is now warning only against misuse, capitalistic greed and layoffs. Gandhi's call to be cautious about replacing the human hand with machine is especially relevant in labor-abundant and capital-scarce economies

<sup>22</sup> M.K. Gandhi, CWMG 10: 58.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>25</sup> M.K. Gandhi, CWMG 87: 249.

like India. It was the human crisis associated with technological culture that bothered Gandhi.

For Gandhi, the various facets of the human crisis included inequality, oppression of the poor and powerless, loss of spiritual orientation, materialism and the blind regimentation of life in accordance with the modern logic of efficiency. A strictly modernist manner of interpreting such a reading of contemporary decadence would make Gandhi appear outmoded and unmodern. But the fact is, he admired and advocated the modern sense of freedom, equality and the human bond, and used to good effect several institutional and instrumental aspects of modernity such as the free press, the railways, the postal and legal systems, and he continuously invoked the modern sense of fairness, justice and the spirit of democracy.

A lot is made out of Gandhi's religion, his piety, saintliness and the spiritual metaphors that fill his writings and speeches. But what is forgotten is his "dislike of organized religion," "detestation of religious fundamentalism of all brands," his injunction to think of this world and not the other, his suspicion of ritualism.<sup>26</sup> For a man who used fascinating metaphors and symbols to connect with the common person, his interreligious prayer meetings were like the 'salt' on Dandi beach - a moral and political symbol of harmony and freedom of spirit.

In fact, Gandhi diagnosed a paradox that concealed itself within the ethics of modernity. If freedom, equality and the human bond are valuable, then achieving the good life (development) and the new social order by means of technologically aided prosperity and bloody revolutions is meaningless. Technological society is neither environmentally sustainable nor humanly desirable; it tends to destroy the very freedom, equality and the human bond it promises to create. This resonates deeply with the Frankfurt School's and Heidegger's critique of technology, "[a] comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom prevails in advanced

<sup>26</sup> Ajit K. Dasgupta, *Gandhi's Economic Thought*, (London: Routledge, 1996), 3-4.

industrial civilization, a token of technical progress."<sup>27</sup>Hence, Gandhi resisted the European's missionary zeal to globalize the ethics of technological modernity. Gandhi was one of the first to systematically critique technological civilization. The more famous critique of technology of the French social critic Ivan Illich, the philosophical problematization of technology by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger and E. F. Schumacher's proposal of appropriate technology are foreshadowed in Gandhi's critique.

From a critique of the modern civilization, Gandhi developed the idea that economics and ethics cannot be separated. "True economics never militates against the highest ethical standard... True economics stands for social justice; it promotes the good of all equally, including the weakest and is indispensable for decent life."<sup>28</sup> The effort of economists such as Amartya Sen to introduce ethical considerations into economic analysis, therefore, has a Gandhian lineage. In *On Ethics and Economics*, Amartya Sen complains, "[i]n the usual economic literature a person is seen as maximizing his utility function, which depends only on his own consumption, and which determines all his choices."<sup>29</sup>Sen goes on to argue that ethical considerations will call for departures from standard behavioral assumptions of economic theory, and laments that at its origin economics was close to ethics and modern economics is 'impoverished' by the distance it maintained from ethics. Gandhi's economic ideas, on the other hand, arise from his deeply moral considerations. It is the concern for social justice that makes Gandhi support alternative technology like the *charka*, reject foreign goods and propose to the rich to act as trustees of their wealth for the benefit of society. Hence, the goal of development is *sarvodaya* or the welfare of all. "The fact is that a votary of ahimsa cannot subscribe to the utilitarian formula. He will strive for the greatest good of all

<sup>27</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, (London: Routledge, 1991), 3.

<sup>28</sup> M.K. Gandhi, CWMG 66: 168.

<sup>29</sup> Amartya K. Sen, *On Ethics and Economics* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1987), 80.

and die in the attempt to realize the ideal.”<sup>30</sup> Gandhian development is the development of all in sharp contrast to the modern economic assumption of the self-interested economic agent, although he did not support the concept of class struggle. He did not believe in the neoliberal formula of trickle-down effect; rather, economic equality is part of his 1941 ‘constructive programme’ towards *Swaraj*. Economic equality is, he wrote, “the master-key to non-violent independence. ...A nonviolent system of government is clearly an impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists.”<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, for Gandhi it is not enough that goods are made available to all, but together with goods the agent of development should also experience a sense of independence and self-respect. The Gandhian development paradigm is incomplete without the *Swaraj* of the agent of development.<sup>32</sup>In the words of the pioneer development ethicist Goulet, “[p]erhaps the only true universal value is the desire of all human persons, living in every place and under every cultural system, to be treated as beings of worth on their own terms and independently of their usefulness to others.”<sup>33</sup>In the words of Amartya Sen ‘development is freedom’, and in the Rawlsian scheme of just distribution, the social bases of self-respect is a primary good. In these ways, Gandhi is refreshingly present in today’s subject-area of development ethics.

Gandhi believed in the connectedness of everything, and held that our actions have a ripple effect that affects the self, the other and all beings as the ethical Advaita of Swami Vivekananda reasoned. Gandhi was a spiritual leader primarily in this sense. For him self-realization was not merely an individual achievement but

<sup>30</sup> M.K. Gandhi, CWMG 32: 402.

<sup>31</sup> M.K. Gandhi, CWMG 75: 158.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Weber, “Gandhi’s Moral Economics: The Sins of Wealth without Work and Commerce without Morality”, In *The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi*, eds. Judith M. Brown and Anthony Parel, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 179.

<sup>33</sup> Denis Goulet, “In Defense of Cultural Rights: Technology, Tradition and Conflicting Models of Rationality,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 3, 4 (1981): 4.

an achievement that had direct connection to reality around the person. "I believe in *Advaita*, I believe in the essential unity of man and for that matter of all that lives. Therefore I believe that if one man gains spiritually, the whole world gains with him and, if one man falls, the whole world falls to that extent.<sup>34</sup> Hence, for Gandhi, the pursuit of development must be ethical; its measure, as in the Rawlsian difference principle, is the gain that it brings to the last person in the social and economic scheme. When in doubt about a scheme, Gandhi's injunction is to think of the face of the weakest and the poorest person and the scheme's use to her or him, whether it will lead to his or her *Swaraj*.<sup>35</sup>

Gandhi is said to have idealized rural life, but it is to be emphasized that he was aware of criticism and did not endorse rural feudalism and despotism. He rather endorsed a network of interconnected and highly democratized village republics. Gandhi did not idealize the typical Indian village of his time. And so, the rural life Gandhi imagined was a category of its own. "We have got to be ideal villagers, not the villagers with their queer ideas, or absence of ideas, about sanitation and giving no thought to how they eat and what they eat ... We have to teach them how to economize in time, health and money.<sup>36</sup> A frugal, dignified, satisfied, healthy life within considerably egalitarian rural republics was Gandhi's idea of development. While Gandhi valued community life, the cooperative scheme of society, and the interconnectedness of existence in general, he was not a communitarian like Charles Taylor. "Swaraj has to be experienced by each one for himself,"<sup>37</sup> remarks Gandhi, and the central focus of evaluation of wellbeing, as in the capabilities approach, should rest on the individual. Gandhi wrote the following to Nehru in 1945 while discussing the nature of the republic about to be free, "[t]he sum and substance of what I want to say is that the individual person should have control

<sup>34</sup> M.K. Gandhi, CWMG 25: 390.

<sup>35</sup> Weber, "Gandhi's Moral Economics," 150.

<sup>36</sup> M.K. Gandhi, CWMG 60: 251-52.

<sup>37</sup> M.K. Gandhi, CWMG 10: 39.

over the things that are necessary for the sustenance of life. If he cannot have such control the individual cannot survive. Ultimately, the world is made up only of individuals. If there were no drops there would be no ocean.”<sup>38</sup> Gandhi’s ethical individualism is one aspect of his thought that strongly connects him with modern philosophy of the subject and development ethics. (I will discuss certain problems with this view of Gandhi in the next section.) In his debate with Nehru, Gandhi is aware that Nehruvian India may not follow his prescriptions. Reiterating his *Hind Swaraj* position of 1909, Gandhi tells Nehru that for the sake of true freedom for India and the world, people will have to live in villages and huts, not in cities and palaces, and pursue small-scale industries. Gandhi compares the mad rush for industrial progress with the dance of the proverbial moth around the flame that finally consumes it. He, therefore, considered it his bounden duty to set the alarm bells ringing. In his letter to Nehru, Gandhi goes on to describe the village of his imagination:

While I appreciate modern thought, I find that an ancient thing, considered in the light of this thought looks so sweet. You will not be able to understand me if you think that I am talking about the villages of today. My ideal village still exists only in my imagination. After all every human being lives in the world of his own imagination. In this village of my dreams the villager will not be dull – he will be all awareness. He will not live like an animal in filth and darkness. Men and women will live in freedom, prepared to face the whole world. There will be no plague, no cholera and no smallpox. Nobody will be allowed to be idle or to wallow in luxury. Everyone will have to do body labour. Granting all this, I can still envisage a number of things that will have to be organized on a large scale. Perhaps there will even be railways and also post and telegraph offices. I do not know what things there will be or will not be. Nor am I bothered about it. If I can make sure of the essential thing, other things will follow in due course. But if I give up the essential thing, I give up everything.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> M.K. Gandhi, CWMG 81: 320.

<sup>39</sup> M.K. Gandhi, CWMG 81: 320.

For Gandhi, this portrait of social life is necessary because a life of truth, nonviolence and self-realization can be fulfilled in the best fashion only in the simplicity of village democracies. Violence and destruction, he held, would be the result of the accumulation of unnecessary wealth, giving rise to unsustainable structures and systems. This sort of localized, rural or at least hybrid forms of development that Gandhi imagined has gained currency in its postmodern, postdevelopment avatar. In *Encountering Development*, arguably the best known postdevelopment text, Arturo Escobar argues that:

Instead of searching for grand alternative models or strategies [of development], what is needed is the investigation of alternative representations and practices in concrete local settings, particularly as they exist in contexts of hybridization, collective action, and political mobilization. This proposal is developed in the context of the ecological phase of capital and the struggles over the world's biological diversity.<sup>40</sup>

Notice that while rejecting the metanarrative of modernist development and the controlling, top-down developmental State, Gandhi did not reject the modern ideals of freedom, equality and solidarity, and he did not reject modern technology tout court. Hence, Escobar's 'contexts of hybridization' can be understood without undue interpretive violence through the eyes of the Gandhian development vision. Gandhi's solutions and yearnings were neither postmodern, or modern nor simply premodern; they were rather hybrid attempts of all these forms arising from his dissatisfaction with their contradictions.

My focus in the following closing section is on what could be concluded regarding alternative futures for humanity at large from the above discussion on Gandhi's relation to the contemporary critique of the discourse of development.

<sup>40</sup> Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 19.

### **Conclusion: Gandhi and Alternative Modernity**

The thin account of Gandhian alternative is simple. To achieve a free, healthy, self-actualizing, good life for everyone today and for generations to come, we need an austere regime of disciplined resource use. And in order to cultivate such discipline in a massive social scale, we need to reject the standard discourse of developmental modernity, its many (though not all) values and assumptions, and accept an alternative model of good life. The assumption that human beings function at best as self-centered atoms (individuals) who can cooperate only to get the best for their own self-gratification is a wrong way of procedure; this is neither the only way nor the best way of imagining social life. We can conceive society on a different set of assumptions of morally aware individuals, who willingly enter into a social scheme of cooperation. We cannot go on with the assumption that a highly technological civilization will do nothing to us, embodied, affective beings; we are affected by the phenomena of our world at every step. A technological mindset – a tendency to reduce things and people to their efficient use or resourcefulness – which is a consequence of the technological civilization, has led both to the human and the ecological crisis. Therefore, the technological discourse of development ought to be rejected in important ways, and a locally meaningful and democratized development practice should instead be embraced. I have argued that this Gandhian message has important connections with the concerns of postdevelopment as well as of development ethics.

My first response to the Gandhian alternative is that it is often jeered at or at best respectfully set aside as utopian and unfeasible because global humanity in contemporary times is swayed unmistakably by the postwar discourse of development and its promise of prosperity for all in equal measure. This aspiration is not simply a matter of western cultural imperialism alone, but a typically ‘modern’ aspiration and modern subjects all over the world are enthralled by it. The editor of *The Development Dictionary*, who projected postdevelopment as the obituary to the western development discourse in 1992, writes in his preface to the second *Salesian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, X(2019) 2: 1-22

edition in 2010 that postdevelopment scholars had not anticipated the fact that the global south is 'the staunchest defender of development', despite the fact that it was an invention and initially an imposition of the west. "Countries in general do not aspire to become more 'Indian', more 'Brazilian' or for that matter more 'Islamic'; instead, assertions to the contrary notwithstanding, they long to achieve industrial modernity."<sup>41</sup>Gandhi's reconstruction of alternative modernity – a society that lives in free collaboration, friendship, trust, social equality, health and harmony with nature – is unfeasible to the extent that there is a deep, uncritical penetration of the postwar development discourse in societies all over the world.

My second response, however, is that in revisiting Gandhi, his shocking views on modern civilization's developmental project and his alternative paradigm, there is the need to exercise caution because in invoking Gandhi for one's projects in a piecemeal fashion – say, in saving trees – it must be remembered that the Gandhian approach implies a deep and radical confrontation with modernity. Such is the vision of the *Hind Swaraj*, which he is said to have defended till the end. We need to discover for ourselves the meaning of his radical vision. Intellectually, Gandhi was an eclectic assimilationist, who always experimented with his 'truths', especially the truths he set forth in 1909 in the *Hind Swaraj*. In practicing this vision, Gandhi himself engaged with it continuously; his was a constant interpretive project. So while the *Hind Swaraj* rejects the railways, the lawyers, the doctors, the postmen/women and the media – all symbols of modern civilization – Gandhi used them himself and, as I have noted above, gradually tempered his views on technology. That is, the vision was coming alive in Gandhi's life too. His writings and his life together form a text for us to read, reflect over and interpret in the Derridean sense. If anything, a genuinely Gandhian approach is that of the searcher, who is willing to risk one's own interpretation of events, goals and life.

<sup>41</sup> Wolfgang Sachs, "Preface to the New Edition", In *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*, Second Edition, ed. Wolfgang Sachs, (London: Zed Books, 2010), viii-ix.

Gandhi's confrontational approach to modernity is variously criticized. His glorification of rural civilization was objectionable to Ambedkar. He famously castigated Gandhians, who eulogized the Indian village, in the Constituent Assembly on 4 November 1948, "[w]hat is the village but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism?"<sup>42</sup> Although Gandhi was painting an imagined ideal village as I have shown in the last section, if the Indian village was to form the organizing nucleus of Indian politics, this would then have real consequences. Moreover, Gandhi's reluctance in addressing the issue of radically transforming the caste structure of society hanged like the sword of Damocles on his alternative social vision. It must be kept in mind that marginalized Indians, Dalits and Adivasis, consider the modern period as the best in their history.<sup>43</sup> As late as in 1936 Gandhi's article "The Ideal

<sup>42</sup> B. R. Ambedkar, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 13, ed. Vasant Moon, (Bombay: Education Department of the Government of Maharashtra, 1994), 62. In Nehru's reply to Gandhi's letter of 1945, which I have discussed in the last section, he also agrees with Ambedkar. "I do not understand why a village should necessarily embody truth and non-violence. A village, normally speaking, is backward intellectually and culturally and no progress can be made from a backward environment. Narrow-minded people are much more likely to be untruthful and violent." Jawaharlal Nehru, "Nehru's Reply to Gandhi." In M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj and other Writings*, ed. Anthony P. Parel, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 152. Nehru also adds: "I do not think it is possible for India to be really independent unless she is a technically advanced country" (153). On the debate between Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar on this problem, see: Surinder S. Jodhka, "Nation and Village: Images of Rural India in Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar", *Economic and Political Weekly* 37, 32 (2002): 3343-3353.

<sup>43</sup> Partha Chatterjee recalls a Dalit activist's disdain for intellectual discourse about the collapse of political morality in contemporary India. "[T]he latter half of the twentieth century had been the brightest period in the entire history of the Dalits, since they had got rid of the worst forms of untouchability, mobilized themselves politically as a community, and were now making strategic alliances with other oppressed groups in order to get a share of governmental power." Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 25. Similarly, Ramachandra Guha recalls the Kannada Dalit poet Devanur Mahadeva's comparison between Gandhi and Ambedkar. "Modernity, not tradition; development, not stagnation, were responsible for Ambedkar as sartorial inversion of Gandhi, for his successful yet all-too-infrequent storming of the upper-caste citadel." Guha, *How much should a Person Consume?*, 243.

Bhangi", appears to condescendingly idealize the demeaning caste-based occupation of hereditary manual scavenging.<sup>44</sup> Gandhi did not seem to have believed in the destruction of the caste system. In 1925, when he was told about Narayana Guru from Travancore as a great Sanskrit scholar from a Shudra caste, Gandhi dissuaded his readers in a published note from considering him a Brahmin. "He who performs the duty of a Brahmin will easily become one in the next incarnation. But a translation from one *varna* to another in the present incarnation must result in a great deal of fraud. The natural consequence must be the obliteration [of] *varna*. I have seen no reason to justify its destruction."<sup>45</sup> Ambedkar's confrontations with Gandhi regarding the Poona Pact (1932) are well-known. Considering Gandhi's views on caste, therefore, Ambedkar's bone of contention with the Gandhian objection to modern civilization and technology is noteworthy, it is born from an unwillingness to address unjust social organization so that "benefits will not be usurped by the few but will accrue to all."<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, the Marxist critique of Gandhi's approach to class-structure is also well-known. Regarding the notion of trusteeship, Phyllis Rolnick argues that for Gandhi, removal of class distinction was neither possible nor desirable, and so he, "laid the burden of giving to the poor upon the rich, and discouraged the poor from showing impatience or taking any action bordering on violence."<sup>47</sup> Gandhi's reply to Zamindars in 1934, reassuring them that class war will not be permitted in India, shows a certain reluctance to transform land relations, which still remains an unjust and thorny issue in India:

<sup>44</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *CWMG* 64: 86-88; For an analysis of Ambedkar's confrontation with Gandhi on caste-related politics, see: Arundhati Roy, "The Doctor and the Saint", In B.R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition*, (New Delhi: Navayana, 2014), 15-179.

<sup>45</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *CWMG* 26: 538.

<sup>46</sup> B. R. Ambedkar, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 9, ed. Vasant Moon (Bombay: Education Department of the Government of Maharashtra, 1991), 283.

<sup>47</sup> Phyllis J. Rolnick, "Charity, Trusteeship, and Social Change in India: A Study of a Political Ideology." *World Politics* 14, 3 (1962): 448.

You may be sure that I shall throw the whole weight of my influence in preventing class war... But supposing that there is an attempt unjustly to deprive you of your property, you will find me fighting on your side... Our socialism or communism should therefore be based on non-violence and on the harmonious co-operation of labour and capital and the landlord and the tenant.<sup>48</sup>

In his conversation with the Zamindars, Gandhi held that class conflict was opposed to the 'essential genius of India', and that the *Ramarajya* of his dreams was a rule that would ensure 'rights alike of prince and pauper'. Such views cast doubt on the Gandhian approach towards social justice.

Tagore made a case against unreason in his debate with Gandhi on the call to spin and weave the *charka* and burn foreign clothes. The blind call to spin the *charka* is, for Tagore, no different from offering tomatoes to Lord Jagannath.<sup>49</sup> While denouncing with Gandhi the mechanical, regimental logic of technological systems, organizations and modern machinery, Tagore also held that, "the machine has its place in this world. And not only this material universe, but human beings also, may be used as machines and made to yield powerful results. This aspect of truth cannot be ignored; it has to be known and mastered. Europe has done so and has reaped a rich harvest."<sup>50</sup> Thus, all things considered, in critically reassessing postwar developmentalism, the Gandhian diagnosis of the ecological and human crisis is perfectly accurate, but his reluctance to transform traditional systems of social relations is problematic. The ecological Gandhi is paradigmatic, but the sociopolitical Gandhi is flawed because his solutions are individual-centered rather than structurally transformative. Gandhi's anxiety about violence makes him appear a conservative gradualist.

Guha discusses the above problem in connection with Indian environmentalism. He argues that Gandhi's life is an example of

<sup>48</sup> M.K. Gandhi, CWMG 58: 248.

<sup>49</sup> See: Rabindranath Tagore, "Creative Unity", In *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Vol. 3, ed. Sisir Kumar Das, (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996), 538-548.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 512.

making “remarkably few demands on the earth.”<sup>51</sup> At the same time, Guha maintains, it is incorrect to romanticize Gandhi’s idealization of rural life as the Chipko and the Narmada movements have done. That is, it is unfair to think that people who live near the ecosystem, rural Indians and Adivasis, want to (and should) remain where they are because they abhor the city and its opportunities. For Guha, the more just and practical manner of addressing politically the asymmetries of distribution of the world’s resources, would be to empower, “ecological refugees and ecosystem people, strengthening their ability to govern their lives and gain from the transformation of nature to artifact.”<sup>52</sup> According to Guha, the social ecological question of how equitably are natural resources/ produces distributed, which is the question of development, and a politics centered on that question would force people who lead a resource-intensive lifestyle – the global omnivores – to bear the cost of their profligate lifestyle. If overconsumption is a problem, so is under-consumption. Violence is unethical not only when it is employed to rectify injustice. Unjust social systems themselves are violent. Thus, the politics of frugality and equality must go together. In a similar vein, if we were to envisage sociopolitical solutions to any development-related concern such as redistribution of land and opportunities, our solutions must be necessarily structural rather than based on individual largesse, acts of good will and heroism. Solutions must also be ‘modern’ even as the dark sides of modernity are critically rejected.

The Gandhi who said no to the moral discourse of the imperialist colonial empire is today reconsidered by some as the Postmodern Gandhi because he challenged three established orders, “the ritual order of upper caste Hinduism,” “the high modernism of the Nehruvian Congress,” and “modern civilization.”<sup>53</sup> I have argued

<sup>51</sup> Guha, “Mahatma Gandhi and the Environmental Movement in India,” 60.

<sup>52</sup> Ramachandra Guha, *How much should a Person Consume? : Thinking through the Environment*, (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2006), 244.

<sup>53</sup> Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *Postmodern Gandhi and Other Essays: Gandhi in the World and at Home*, (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 3.

that the alternative modernity or postmodernity of frugality and equality that Gandhi proposed could be reconsidered by envisaging social changes structurally rather than in terms of individual forms of simple living. This would, however, demand reconsideration of Gandhian gradualism and fetishism of non-violent methods of appeasing errant social agents and groups.

# A Conciliatory Gaze: SNG on MK Gandhi and BR Ambedkar

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*George Thadathil*

The paper is a continuation of the research undertaken nearly 20 years ago motivated by the conviction that in the contemporary socio-political scenario of the country, the vision of Narayana Guru has a contribution to make. Though his name finds a place among others like Jyoti Rao Phule, Periyar and Ambedkar on the one side, and RamaKrishna, Aurobindo, Gandhi and Tagore on the other, a mediation is yet to be effected: a mediation between a dominant vision and a subjugated people within the philosophical history of India. In other words, the disillusionment as regards Gandhi's project for modern India among the Dalits, Adivasis and Women on the one hand, and the circumspection as regards Ambedkar's version of modern India among the upper castes and strata on the other, pose the need for a new path. There could possibly be in SNGM vision an answer to the search for selfhood of a people to re-script the nation. The paper explores the theme by looking at the following: first, the emergence of SNG movement and thought; second the question of religious conversion within socio-cultural specter of Ambedkar-Gandhi; third the contemporary flow of religious wisdom into politics; fourth the opening to the resurgence of religion for humanity that SNG offers.

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**Keywords:** Gandhi-Ambedkar debate, Caste, Conversion, Narayana Guru.

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## **Introduction**

Pursuing, more than returning to, the research undertaken nearly 20 years ago is indeed an occasion to look more squarely at what motivated it then as now. There was then and even now, this conviction that in the contemporary socio-political scenario of the country, the vision of Narayana Guru has a contribution to make. Though his name finds a place among others like Jyoti Rao Phule, Periyar and Ambedkar on the one side, and Ramakrishna, Aurobindo, Gandhi and Tagore on the other, a mediation is yet to be effected: a mediation between a dominant vision and a subjugated

people within the philosophical history of India. In other words, the disillusionment as regards Gandhi's project for modern India among the Dalits, Adivasis and Women on the one hand, and the circumspection as regards to Ambedkar's version of modern India among the upper castes and strata on the other, pose the need for a new path. There could possibly be in SNGM vision an answer to the search for selfhood of a people to re-script their identity.

Therefore, in this paper I would like to visit the renewed interest in Gandhi-Ambedkar debate triggered in the past decade and attempt to insert Narayana Guru into the constellation so as to expand and focus on the discourse. In doing so I shall limit to their contestation on the issue of conversion within their respective understanding of religion and God for humanity. In the search for potential reconciliation of the irreconcilable positions of Gandhi and Ambedkar possibly lies the future of Indian cultural, civilizational contribution to the ongoing human journey. The notion of Narayana Guru's *atma sukham* (self-happiness or self-joy or soul-bliss) can be conceived as a purification process of all religious views and in itself being an alternative conceptualization of spiritual wellbeing. The attempt to ground such search for wellbeing individually as well as collectively within the frame of rationality and soulfulness, the inner life force pulsating in the body-mind complex of selfhood is probably the metaphysics that brings them into a political constellation enabling to view the future of humanity better and clearer. This is an attempt to bring the somewhat unknown and hidden views and philosophical position of SNG into dialogue with the more elaborately written and argued positions of Ambedkar and Gandhi.

I will explore the theme by looking at the following: first, the emergence of SNG movement and thought; second, the question of religious conversion within socio-cultural specter of Ambedkar-Gandhi; third, the contemporary flow of religious wisdom into politics; fourth, the opening to the resurgence of religion for humanity that SNG offers.

## SNG: The Apostle of Casteless Consciousness

In this first part, instead of narrating the movement's history, I retrieve snippets from the life and times and sayings of SNG from authors who have collected and used them with differing perspectives. Those who attempt to read the tradition literally and focus on the value he is communicating and also those who critically read the tradition to analyze the origin or sources of his own texts. Secondly, my focus is on Narayana Guru and his ideas as carried forward by his disciples, especially of the gurukula foundation lineage. Thirdly, my own study and reading has been to locate the movement as an offshoot of the community but having wider attractive force and adherents. If the corpus of writings by him and on him are scouted, one can clearly see the two sides of the person of SNG: the soft, passive, philosophically and mystically oriented spiritual persona, and on the other an active, agent of engagement with social and religious structures of the prevailing socio-political context arguing for and demanding action to rectify and modify society - his own community (*samudayam*),<sup>1</sup> in the narrow sense as well as in the larger sense of the whole human society.

The following quotes from other authors who have studied Guru, justify the first part of the Guru persona:

When we open our hearts to the suffering of human beings, of other beings, and even the Earth herself, it is easy to become discouraged and sad. Even Narayana Guru himself experienced the pure sorrow that comes to a true lover of life. Once Rabindranath Tagore, the well-known poet, visited Narayana Guru in Kerala. The followers of the Guru arranged a great procession including elephants and music. The Guru had the best carpets of the hermitage spread on the ashram verandah where the visitor would sit. The crowd thronged around to hear what the two leaders would say to each other. When silence finally came, Tagore congratulated the Guru on the great work he was doing for the people. Guru replied with great earnestness, "Neither have we done anything in the past nor is it

<sup>1</sup> Cf. The distinction made below by Udaya Kumar in his study on the word as used in the original language, Malayalam.

possible to do anything in the future. Powerlessness fills us with sorrow.<sup>2</sup>

In example after example, from the large scale to the small, Narayana Guru manifested a supremely effective and thoroughly gentle way of life that each individual can practice, in any circumstance. In *Scriptures of Mercy (Anukampa Dasakam)*, the Guru gives beautiful expression to the core of that way of life:

Grace yields blessedness; a heart Love-empty

Disaster spells of every kind.

Darkness as love's effacer and as suffering's core,

Is seed to everything.

Grace, Love, Mercy – all the three –

Stand for one same reality – Life's Star.

"He who loves is he who really lives."<sup>3</sup>

One who loves is one who really lives: these few words—compassionately given to us by Narayana Guru—invite us all to embrace a life of passion and compassion.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, in the following quotes from other scholars on Narayana Guru's war on caste, one gets the latter view of the person:

Authors of caste may say that it will prevent unhealthy competition. Those who get all the benefit of the system may say so. Probably their happiness is built on the sufferings of others. Man is not made for castes, for the world or any such thing. All these are for men. If men are degenerating, what is the good of talking about less competition and so forth? Caste degenerates man and so it is not wanted. There is no caste; it is foolishness to think there is."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Nancy Yielding, "Passion and Compassion of Narayana Guru," in *Philosophy, Vision and Work of Narayana Guru as an Instrument of Egalitarian Social Change*, Shimla, IAS Conference Papers, 7-9 June 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Nataraja Guru (translator), *Anthology of the Poems of Narayana Guru*, (Narayana Gurukula, 1977), 41.

<sup>4</sup> Nancy Yielding, op cit.

<sup>5</sup> T.K. Ravindran, *Vaikom Satyagraha and Gandhi*, Sri Narayana Institute of Social Salesian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, X(2019) 2: 23-50

Narayana Guru had once remarked, "If you consider me an incarnation, tell all the people that the purpose of this incarnation is to annihilate the demon of caste".<sup>6</sup> This declaration clearly reveals the attitude of the Guru towards the issue of caste, an attitude of total negation and disapproval, and a sense of commitment for its annihilation. Being fully aware of the Hindu scriptural injunction on caste, often misinterpreted, its historic development as part of the Hindu religion, and its stifling effect on the development of human potential, his war on caste was based on a very strong philosophical substratum which became the well-spring of rational practical action.<sup>7</sup>

According to him, caste is a state of mind, with a long history. When examined objectively, it dissolves into nothingness. Caste would taste bitter or sweet alternately depending on who is losing or gaining in the process. Caste difference is imaginary, not actual. Caste is Brahmin versus Paraiyah dialectics. The false notion of caste has arisen out of the interaction between these two group identities. These two ideas are super-imposed on one reality that is human nature, which is essentially one.

The ultimate objective of the Movement was to achieve integration of the society, realization of the unity of mankind by recognizing the divinity hidden in all, reformation of the society by uprooting evil and inhuman practices and superstitions, emancipation and uplift of the downtrodden spiritually, socially and economically. Abolition (demolition?) of caste, is the prime factor in this great endeavour, as caste was the stumbling block in every aspect, dispiriting the people through petrified slavishness.

On several occasions he had revealed his *contempt for the system*, and the frustration of his soul in this issue. A casual incident in a train on his way to Madras throws light on his attitude. A young Indian in European dress (some biographers say that he was a

and Cultural Development, Trichur, 1975, 13. (taken from Nancy Yielding, op.cit).

<sup>6</sup> Sathyabai Sivasdas, "Casteism as Redefined by the Guru" in IIAS Conference Papers, 7-9 June 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Nambudiri) was sitting in the same compartment. He asked the Guru seriously,

What is your name ?

Narayanan.

Of what caste are you?

What do you think? Guess.

I cannot make out from your appearance

If you cannot know by sight, how can you through hearing?

On hearing a report of this from the Guru at Madras, a young firebrand blurted out that the so-called sacred thread of the twice born should be burnt. The Guru commented:

If there are half a dozen youths of such enthusiasm, the curse of caste can be exorcised in no time. No special proof is required to believe that all human beings belong to the same *jati*. A dog, on seeing another, recognizes it as one of its own kind. Every animal has this instinct except man. Only he has doubts. He is inferior to beasts.<sup>8</sup>

These words do not humiliate human beings, rather, they are the flames of agony that emanate from his frustration about the miserable state of ignorance that has enveloped mankind. These are glimpses into the life and mission of an individual who spearheaded a movement and a social revolution in Kerala in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and its after effects continue to define Kerala society.

The details of the emergence of the movement have already been detailed in my earlier work. Therefore, I do not repeat other than stating that Sri Narayana Guru and his immediate disciples and the lineage continued in the Gurukula Movement have played a significant role in keeping alive the inner dynamics of the Guru Message in critiquing society for its reclamation of true welfare.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

## The Issue of Conversion, Christianity and Gandhi

The book on Gandhi by Stanly Jones<sup>9</sup> has a chapter in it, "Gandhi and the Christian Faith" wherein the focus is Gandhi and his attachment-detachment towards Christianity, and helps to see the differing lens with which Ambedkar and Gandhi views the question of conversion. The 'Christian' spirit in him observed by most of the westerners and Christians who came close to him, and by assertion of his own experiences with the Christian friends he had and the attempts he made to understand Christianity, are what made him desire, and come close to appreciate the vision of the equality that Ambedkar saw as the quintessence of a 'free' and 'democratic' society. The means to achieve it, either by preservation of his ascribed identity 'as Hindu', as seen by Gandhi, or, by the negation of it, 'I shall not die a Hindu,' as asserted by Ambedkar, became the platform of contestation.

The question of conversion can be taken at various levels. Firstly, as alluded in what Felix Wilfred asks: "why is conversion for the sake of spiritual illumination necessarily superior to what is done for the realization of one's survival?" Herein the assumption being that whether be it for spiritual or material motives a person decides to 'convert' (change one's belief or faith or religion) need not discredit the veracity of that choice. Secondly, as Walter Fernandes takes it in the particular context of those communities that decided to change their religion from one to the other as having done it because, 'conversion' is not "an encounter between Hinduism and Christianity but a protest on the part of Dalits against social injustice"<sup>10</sup> and as having the right to take recourse to actions to redress the injustice or escape the injustice, or challenge the injustice. Thirdly, for Anantha Kumar Giri, Gandhi "looked at Jesus as a *Satyagrahi* and in his engagement with and challenge to Christianity

<sup>9</sup> Stanley E Jones, *Mahatma Gandhi: An Interpretation*, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1948).

<sup>10</sup> Walter Fernandes quoted in Ananta Kumar Giri, "Hindu Engagement with Christianity" in Wilfred (ed), *Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia*, (London: OUP,2014), 401.

brought out the different implications of the cross in societies and histories."<sup>11</sup> In his reading Gandhi was opposed to conversion to Christianity though "he himself was wavering between Hinduism and Christianity seriously considering conversion to the latter at one time" because his first priority was reform of one's religion and the responsibility revolving around it.

Fourthly, as Aishwary Kumar engaging with the Ambedkarian critique of the system of caste and the logic he unveils in the *Annihilation of Caste*, comments "if there was a central lesson...an irreducible 'principle' that underpinned its formula of 'truly religious act' it was the conviction of Ambedkar that 'the democratization of religion - the duty to make faith accessible to everyone freely and equally - was a people's highest obligation toward itself."<sup>12</sup> He admired Karl Marx who saw religion as alienation, but unlike Marx's views on religion, the above stand is his testament in the possibilities of religion in a democracy. He believes in religion, is significant, just like Stanly Jones' observation that Gandhi did not reject Christianity and Jesus is a great thing. Kumar interprets Gandhian *ahimsa* as not 'nonviolence' but as non indifference,<sup>13</sup> and thus would leave room for the possibility of being committed to a cause as also to a religious faith by choice. In contrast, applying force of any kind to ensure that someone changes his or her life position would be violence and against the principle of *ahimsa*. Ambedkar was contesting this stand on the part of Gandhi 'of not wanting others to change their life position' as condemning them to their misery, seen as he does from the position of the depressed classes.

The aspiration for equality is at the base of the choice for conversion. Equality is seen differently by both Gandhi and Ambedkar, as shown by Kumar in the two different words - *samadarshi* and *samata*: *Samadarshi*, for Gandhi is the one who is

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 395.

<sup>12</sup> Aishwary Kumar, *Radical Equality: Ambedkar, Gandhi, and the Risk of Democracy*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2015), 40.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 45.

capable of practicing equality being visibly moved to act differently but justly to different persons. It is a matter of principled judgment, the notion of equality is a visible movement towards each from a presence filled equanimity that brings about the ideal of equality. For Ambedkar 'caste is a notion, it is a state of mind'. The destruction of caste does not therefore mean destruction of (visible walls/barriers) physical barriers. It means a more than notional, a moral change. On the other hand, "[t]rue equality requires autonomy and freedom, a renunciation of measure and limits that politics imposes on it",<sup>14</sup> and can be attained only in a state of *samata* - by equal citizens. The faith in the possibility of such a state of affairs is the highest responsibility and thus 'the faith' of the citizen in the world. Conversion to such a faith therefore is quintessential to being a good citizen.

In understanding the objection raised by Gandhi to conversion, the very understanding of the concept within western religio-cultural thought, and the conflation that Gandhi does of interpreting it from his own religio-cultural frame and for the western audience, or those supposedly preaching Christianity for the welfare of Indians, needs unpacking is the argument that Sarah Claerhout makes in her study on Gandhi and conversion.<sup>15</sup> In Gandhi's various statements about Conversion she sees three possible assertions: first, that it is possible and justifiable if it is towards a better moral wellbeing of the person concerned, though, for Indians in becoming Christians the possibility of becoming morally better is not assured by Gandhi, and not only, he sees such endeavours as divisive of the community and the tradition into which one has been born; secondly, every individual has the responsibility to reform and improve, purify the faith of his or her own tradition, and it is in this sense that the act of conversion touches on the issue of undoing 'untouchability' and it is about this act of reform and its possibility within the 'faith frame' and not by going outside or deserting it, is where Gandhi positions himself. Whereas, for Ambedkar, if the purification of the tradition,

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 47. He calls caste 'a non violent art of physical and cognitive enslavement' perpetrated over millions.

<sup>15</sup> Sarah Claerhout, "Gandhi, Conversion and Equality of Religions: More Experiments with Truth", *Numen*, 61(2014): 53-82.

the given religion, is not feasible, viable, and not achieved, as seen even in the commitment of Gandhi towards it, what else is the option than to convert, or in other words, than to conceive of radical step of stepping out? Gandhi sees Hinduism perishing if this conversion is not willingly undertaken by the caste Hindus, and Ambedkar sees the demise of Hinduism in its present form of 'discrimination on the basis of birth' as the only way forward for the Indian society to become modern; the third meaning of conversion for him is in attempting to bring someone else to a new truth commitment through 'preaching or proclamation', and this is not possible, as he sees, because truth is to be lived and morally made binding in one's life, and life becomes the 'preacher' or medium of proclamation. It is in this sense too that Ambedkar, and Roy after him, is trying to expose the flaw in Gandhi, his lack of sincerity, as not having lived the truth of 'equality' that he purportedly avowed to do, ever since his confrontation with Ambedkar in the Round Table Conference and at the Poona Pact.<sup>16</sup>

Shane Gannon, taking up the studies on Conversion of Ambedkar by Gauri, Rodrigues, Susantha Goonatilake and others, applies a hermeneutic of conversion to read them from the Lacanian *point de capiton* (also known as nodal point or quilting point) or 'thematic site' (as introduced by Anna Klosowska) wherein there is the visible pointing towards the invisible meaning between the signifieds in the symbolic order. She uses this scheme to identify the colonial framework of thought hidden behind the very critique of colonial knowledge by Gauri and Rodrigues, and in order to do so refers to the repeated association with Gandhi and his view of Hinduism being pitted against Ambedkar and his Buddhist turn as a modernist turn, and thereby privileging the West over East and as reinscribing the Saidian Orientalist frame of inferiority of the east/traditional against the superiority of west/modern. It is in this

<sup>16</sup> Cf. George Thadathil, "Reading Gandhi in Ambedkar's Shoes: Reclaiming Democracy," in Johnson Puthenpurackal (ed.), *Enhancing Our Home: Re-claiming and Re-reading the Gandhian Thought*, (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation-ACPI Festschrift, 2016), 193-214.

case, reversely deployed as the non-western academics mentioned above, are the ones taking on non-western protagonists like Gandhi and Ambedkar.

Gannon shows how invariably in every commentary on Ambedkar's decision to convert, whether it is political, social, or personal, there is a comparison with the stand of Gandhi. Further this thematic of interpreting Ambedkar's choice of Buddhism against the Gandhian reformed version of Hinduism as a choice for the modern in its democratic ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity is shown as a choice against the retrieval of the past with its caste hierarchy albeit only in new shades within the Gandhian conservative vision. Though her effort is to show how colonial thinking is underlying this attempt to escape the colonial discourse using Lacanian structuralism, our intent is twofold: first, though the western theoretical inspiration lay behind his critique of caste and its pitfalls, that alone is not the source of his critique; secondly, that behind both Gandhi and Ambedkar's reading of tradition as well as its critique there is an experiential content in the knowledge construction over and above what is available to a monocultural, monolingual reader or interpreter, and this latter component is what makes most western-author/reader's critique of Gandhi-Ambedkar debate though compelling in argumentation, fall short of grasping the total picture. The crux of the debate as we have hinted earlier is in the Gandhian rejection of the Ambedkarian possibility of conversion and vice versa. Here the ascribed identity as non-reversible, as for Gandhi, does not hold the water against the Ambedkarian understanding of religious identity as the most fundamental and subscribed to of all identities.

This claim needs a rider in that, it is the western modernity as understood and appreciated by the east/Indian. Secondly in the above assertion of Ambedkar being seen purely making a western modernity critique, the point of his experiential understanding of what is wrong with the Indian traditional (casteist world) and this understanding underlying his critique is not acknowledged.

Therefore, his critique is both western modern and indigenous/ Indian modern in as much as he is making it not only in terms of ideological frames gained from the theories of his mentor, Dewey, but also from his own experiential critique of what is inadequate and wrong in the Indian-traditional.<sup>17</sup> The latter angle of perception is missed in this critique. Having scouted some of the more recent studies on the Gandh-Ambedkar debate on the issue of conversion, bringing the duo into conflation with SNG is the forthcoming task.

### **On Caste & Conversion: SNG vis-a-vis Gandhi-Ambedkar**

As seen in the above quote, at the end of section one, on “*Jati*” he inverts the logic of Gandhi, who challenged by Ambedkar says no to *Jati* and yes to “*varna*” as an ideal system of division of labour. Instead SNG asks, why not reduce everyone to the same caste, understood in its primordial, biological sense to which all other nuances of it are at the end of the day, reverted to, whether one accepts it or not. If so, just as dogs and cows recognize each other as belonging to one kind (*inam/jati/species*) why not educate or deconstruct the falsely added notions of ‘difference’ is what he poses. Underlying it is therefore, where and how does the differentiation originate? Ambedkar in his analysis, takes it back to the scriptural sanctioning on the strength of which one community/caste group gets the pre-eminence to decide on the fate of the others, as he refers to in the case of Shivaji being disclaimed by the Brahmins and having had to import a Brahmin from Benares to sanction his Kingly status. In other words, just as Kingship and Monarchy have been done away with in order to introduce democracy, the undoing of the brahminic ideological stranglehold on social mores and practices alone can redeem Hindu society. What we then have is an alliance of the frame of reference of Ambedkar and SNG against the forces that want to retain the traditional mould, as represented in the voice and partial concerns of Gandhi.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. The argument made by Gopal Guru, “From Bhakti to Buddhism: The Mahars of Maharashtra” in the Metaphysics and Politics, Cochin Conference 2013 of the Backwaters Collective. It substantiates this reading.

Even here, though a detailed elaboration of the debate has already been dealt with in another recent article, the intent of the discussion is to profile the three significant voices on the issue of Caste and Conversion which is being debated to date in the Indian public sphere. A good place to start would be the first and only encounter between MK Gandhi and Narayana Guru when the latter came to Travancore in connection with the Vaikom Sathyagraha, and visited the Guru on 12<sup>th</sup> March, 1925 at Sivagiri, stayed overnight and addressed the Public on the morning of 13<sup>th</sup> March 1925. By then Gandhi had established his credentials as the voice of Indian nationalism and was onto strengthen this hold by garnering support from various quarters – regional and linguistic and caste diversities that characterized the Indian scene.

It could be averred that he was a supporter of caste system from the fact that his *Hind Swaraj*, the manifesto for Indian Liberation had no mention of the problem of caste and untouchability plaguing the country. He seemed to have moved on to a position of accepting caste if untouchability was done away with and therefore initiates plans for the same. Their encounter and his visit to Kerala, probably had something to do in this change of position on the part of Gandhi. He pointed to a mango tree in the courtyard and tried to justify the caste system by expressing that, as the difference in the size and shapes of the leaves is a natural phenomenon, difference between human beings is also natural. But the Guru negated this argument with the fact that though the leaves are different in size and shape, their juice tastes the same, similarly all human beings are similar in essence. Gandhi makes no mention of the logic in this argument in his speech at Varkala in response to the SNDP Yogam's memorandum submitted to him, but uses the tree and leaves to claim his point of differences and accommodation of differences as a people. He rides on two boats very dexterously, trying to appease the listeners in their eagerness to gain equality of access to public roads and at the same time lulls their awakening consciousness by harping on the need for patience and moral character by being able to live with the

orthodox and their resistances till they come to change the point of view and accept the claims placed by the weaker sections.

On this incident Joseph Lelyveld comments that the view outside Kerala and inside are different, one as giving the general acceptance of the Gandhian position on *satyagraha* by its practitioners in Kerala, and the other, that of those within Kerala who knew better of the ambivalence Gandhi showed towards the cause and thereby reinscribing his own bias towards perpetuation of caste barriers than its eradication, as desired by the satyagrahis at Vaikom. He also notes that the Kerala Guru followers interpret the encounter to the extent of Gandhi having learned from the Guru while in actuality he came out the same as he went in to meet the Guru,<sup>18</sup> as substantiated by the text of the speech he delivered the following morning which is available from the police sources.<sup>19</sup>

In the light of difference of approach to the issue of 'caste' the question we keep exploring is whether Narayana Guru was for or against utilizing the religious conversion plank as a means to get the community's rights redressed. In this regard, there seems to be the possibility of a double interpretation of Guru, depending on who and for what purpose one is attempting to read into his statements and assertions in different contexts. As for contradictory statements, whether or not the overriding stand on premise and principles by which a person lived and have left testaments to that effect should precede over contextual exceptional statements. It is this sort of an exercise Udaya Kumar does in his study of the usage of the word 'community' (*samudayam*) and religion (*matam*) by Narayana guru and takes the position that he did not endorse 'conversion' as an option for caste eradication.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Lelyveld, *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and his Struggle with India*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 192-194.

<sup>19</sup> Selected Documents on Vaikom Satyagraha, The Speech delivered by MK Gandhi at Varkalai Mutt (*madom*) at 7.05 am on 13 March 1925. Reported by the Police Department and submitted to the Chief Secretary of Government of India.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Udaya Kumar, "Differences in Conversation: Ethics, History and the Community in Sree Narayana Guru and P. Palpu," submitted at the Metaphysics and Politics Conference, Backwaters Collective Varkala, 28-30 July 2012, wherein

Sree Narayanan also distinguished the concept of *matam* from that of *samudāyam*. It is wrong to subordinate matters of the community (*samudāyam*) to religion (*matam*) or religious matters to the community. There should be no connection between community affairs and religion. Religion is a matter of the mind. These views also meant that Sree Narayanan did not endorse conversion as a strategy in anti-caste struggles. In the early 1920s, Ezhava leaders like C. Krishnan, C. V. Kunjuraman, and Sahodaran Ayyappan argued that Ezhavas should leave the Hindu fold in order to free themselves from the disadvantages of the caste system. Narayana Guru clarified his position on conversion in two conversations - with C. V. Kunjuraman and with Sahodaran Ayyappan. In these exchanges Sree Narayanan used the word *samudāyam* in another sense. 'Religion (*matam*) has two sides: one internal and the other external,' he says, 'Which of these sides would you like to see changed?' He continues: 'If the desire is for change in the external aspect, it is not really religious conversion (*mataparivarttanam*), but change in community (*samudāyaparivarttanam*). As for internal religion (*abhyantara matam*, also meaning inner belief, inner opinion), it is subject to constant and gradual change in all thoughtful people.'....<sup>21</sup>

I have in an earlier work attempted to interpret the *jati* (caste) word used by Sri Narayana Guru as to mean 'community' (*samudayam*).<sup>22</sup> In my reading of this Malayalam word it gives the opening to both a restricted understanding as well as a larger and broader understanding: it could, for instance, refer to a community in the localised geographical sense as to mean the *samudayam* of a *desam* or of a *nadu*; as also to mean the conglomeration of all people. Narayana Guru in utilizing the word *samudayam* is opening up to the universalisation of the notion of community, as Udaya too hints at the reference Narayana Guru and Dr Palpu makes to the notion of Ezhava as referring to those who hail from Ceylon, and therefore

he quotes from *Vivekodayam*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1905), p. 41, a magazine of the SNDP Yogam which printed certain statements attributed to Sri Narayana Guru.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> George Thadathil, *Guru Vision: The Study of SNGM in the Literature of NCY*, (Bangalore-Sonada: ATC & Salesian College Publication, 2007), 101-3.

as needing not the restricted understanding of a *jati*/caste but as the broader understanding of the 'only *jati* there can be' that of the one *samudayam*. In the same vein, *matam* too as shown by Udaya as being argued by Narayana Guru is a conglomeration of all opinions, and every opinion has a space in the '*oru matam*' /one religion he is speaking of and wanting people to rise up to appropriate.

In order to return to the question of conversion *vis-a-vis* Ambedkar's stand and that of Gandhi, in attempting to position Sri Narayana Guru, I want once again to go back to an earlier paper by Udaya Kumar. In his comparison and contrast of the two personalities of Sri Narayanan and Dr. P. Palpu he places Guru in the camp of Gandhi, establishing the non-necessity of conversion to overcome caste disabilities, and quotes the statements of Guru from Vivekodayam (1914-15) issues to hint at the restricted sense of community (*samudayam*) to which he subscribed as also to the stand against conversion taken in the particular instances of people seeking re-affiliation having converted. In his well orchestrated paper, the study on *samudayam*/community, caste as more than body marker and *matham* as more than opinion referring to the broader community of *manushya samudayam*, and affinity to that sense of the progressive religion which is a summation of all religions'; and, in his recovery of the Buddhist empire and its linkages with the Izhava community that Dr Palpu tried to emphasize in his various speeches, I am in agreement with Udaya. However, on the question of conversion and the religion issue, I would differ from the interpretation he offers, going by the broader angle of Guru's overall stand on the issue. I would like to place him in the camp of Ambedkar and argue that taking a step along the Ambedkarian critique is the better path to understand his own position, as a socio-political as well as religio-cultural theoretician. I shall use his most prominent and uniquely his own conceptualizations in order to argue my case.

The two most prominent verses of SNG are: *Matam etayalum manushyan nannayal mati; oru jati oru matam or daivam manushanu* (whatever be the religion man/woman should become better;

one God, one religion, one caste for humankind). When one says 'whatever be the religion' it spontaneously implies no preference for any one religion; it also implies that one may move from where one is to where one would like to be. Or in the reverse, it could also refer, that wherever you are is good enough to become better. The possibility of becoming better - as understood as equal to any other - is denied, by the caste order, is what Ambedkar highlights. SNG is stating that 'becoming better' if it calls for 'changing ones belief', one ought to do so. In either way what is the best state of mind? Where does one find the flowering and fulfillment of the goal of being human seen as realized/realizable - and there is the 'one religion'. One may say, this does no good, as it can take us back to where we began, with each follower of each religion claiming his or her path as that 'one true path/religion' to make oneself and everyone else better.

At this point we need to restate the bone of contention between Ambedkar and Gandhi. For Gandhi, one cannot conceive of changing one's religion, because it is an ascribed identity, an identity one is born into and cannot escape from accepting its premises and implications by status of being positioned where one is born - just like the language, the race/caste and the location, one is also born into a religion. For Ambedkar, the most fundamental of all human rights, by dint of being a human being, is the *right to choose*; the most inalienable and foundational of all choices, is the choice; that is, the ability and the necessity to choose, appropriate one's religion. Therefore his assertion, 'I was born a Hindu but I won't Die a Hindu'; or that of his argumentation building upto that foundational choice, by clarifying the necessity of *The annihilation of Caste*, through his critique of *Who were the Sudras?* and *The Origin of Caste System in India*.

It would seem, therefore, that the position of Gandhi is constricted, seen from the Ambedkarian viewpoint: what constricts it is the inevitability of religion being tradition bound, accepted just because of the weight of tradition and the inability on the part of the individual to critique and think through the premises and the

implications of one's derived 'religion', religious beliefs. On the other hand can we equally say that there is something lacking in Ambedkar's position: probably, theoretically, the need to receive or appropriate a religious belief and practice after having understood and accepted it freely as a personal choice, one cannot contest; but may be, the difficulty that could arise as to one not having the time and the resources to critically analyze and view each of the available religions, before coming to the *best one can have*, or that of not being in a position to found, or, follow a path on finding all of what one sees around oneself as being inadequate, there could be a problem of limit. Besides, given the contingencies of culture and the rubrics of the weight of tradition and the societal compulsions, one may subscribe to one or the other without being fully drawn into it as a personal choice, but rather attempting to understand and live it ever better. Both these situations, does not diminish the argument of Ambedkar that having been born into Hinduism and seen its flaws in the outright discrimination of the community (caste) into which he was born, he has arrived on close scrutiny and detailed analysis at the conclusion that he would not die a Hindu (implying therefore a conversion).

Even if one were to give the benefit of the doubt and grant that both Gandhi and SNG agree on the issue of the non-necessity of conversion - seen from their position of agreement that one need not change one's religion in order to become better - gives the adherent to any religion a free starting point. It could also be noted for the sake of the argument that 'agreeing that one *need not* change ones religion does not mean that one *may not* change one's religion. However, the condition that one should become better and in this process also attempt to make the religion better is an injunction inbuilt into their position. Coming to Ambedkar's view, there is the right to change one's religion - if, as it is practiced - is not in keeping with the notion of freedom, justice and equality. Therefore, the responsibility to change it and change from it leads him to

attempt to reframe a religious basis for India that challenges and replaces the inegalitarian assumption of the caste premises inbuilt into the Hinduism he was born into and saw practiced all through his life. We have to ask how do we mitigate this commitment with that of 'having to become better' or being called to 'become better' whatever be one's religion? Applying this conditionality/premise to Ambedkar himself, he could be seen as attempting to follow the very injunction in trying to revive and recreate out of the old a new religion. A religion that does not sanction discrimination by birth and does not sanction and necessitate the professional continuity across the generations. In this attempt he arrives at Buddhism and leaves an incomplete task of tracing the history of revolution and counter revolution as dealt with in the 'essay on Gita' as Aishwary Kumar reminds in his piece "Ambedkar's Inheritances."<sup>23</sup>

SNG's *atmasukham* is an exposition of his *atmavidya*, his mode of reinterpreting a tradition for modern man and modern times. Therefore, one way to see the relation between SNG and Ambedkar, is to see in SNG the culmination of the rewriting of a new religious basis for India that Ambedkar wanted accomplished. Had he come across the literature of SNG and read his works, probably he would have had an answer to his vexed mind. The explication of 'atmasukham' calls for an understanding of *Atmopadesasatakam* which was earlier named as *atmabodham* and can mean 'instructions to the self' or 'advice/instruction on the doctrine of self'. Both meanings are legitimate from the title. The instruction aspect is evident in the reference in each stanza to *practice* - 'may be uttered,' 'may be remembered', 'may be practiced'! It can be seen as enunciated by the Guru or the sishya: in other words, the subject who gives the advice can also be the subject who practices the instruction. There is an element of performativity: a set of actions performed by the

<sup>23</sup> Aishwary Kumar. "Ambedkar's Inheritances," in Faisal Devji and Shruti Kapila (eds.), *Political Thought in Action: The Bhagavad Gita and Modern India*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

self, or, instructed and observed as effecting transformation. It is this transformative dimension that takes us to the 'metaphysics of politics' and vice versa.

### **The Politics of Religious Wisdom (Metaphysics)**

Is the above ideal, a simplistic, wishful, almost inspired mystical vision of a sage or does it have the teeth to overcome hardcore problems of multi-religious societies and communities the world has actually come to be?

In order to answer the above question and also to take forward the question of conversion thereby, I want to reinterpret *matham* as to mean faith, the most fundamental opinion, self-aware-self-declaration a person can make. Faith is gifted to the human being without any colouring or coding; faith is pure possibility. Faith is the human condition of being born and having to die. It is this dire existential flow and necessity that is being acknowledged without 'conditionalities', clauses, insertions and interpolations – all of which are games of the human mind as a collective effort to group and regroup. It is a consequence of the search for comfort and consolation, providing a feeling of security. A security amidst 'so called perceived strangers' that comes from the trumped up knowledge that one is from one country or the other, one race or the other, one language group or the other, one region in the world or the other, one religious sect/group or the other, one gender or the other. It comforts especially, when one has been through racial discrimination, religious discrimination, caste discrimination, linguistic discrimination, political discrimination, gender discrimination. Besides, there is the prevailing notion of politically asserting one's voice and gaining one's rights, precisely by organizing around these identities.

The desire to belong to the human family in its entirety gets bifurcated and actualized in smaller dissected bits of region, country, languages, ethnicities, sects and religions. The responsiveness to the human contact, the warmth of human affection and the possibility

of connecting emotionally and spiritually with one another given the spaciousness and the closeness it brings is something that needs no 'restriction', where it not for the linguistic inability to connect or the geographical distances and hurdles that prevent, or the economic and political barricades that are created purposively. This possibility of a 'one world citizenship' as argued for by Gary Davis<sup>24</sup> and endorsed as the very actualization of the vision of Sri Narayana Guru, by Nataraja Guru, is where the applicability of the vision and its pragmatics can begin to operate as a counter logic and counter theory to the world's problems. What Narayana Guru tradition and the SNGM provides is the theoretical underpinnings of such a world vision: *oru jati, oru matam, oru daivam manushyanu*.<sup>25</sup>

The unalloyed state of being is the state of bliss, of *ananda*, of *atmasukham*. From being attained in flashes, if succeeded to be retained for prolonged duration, and if accomplished as the state from which one consistently acts, then it is equivalent to being in state of grace, state of pure consciousness. In just "being" the energy of being thrusts forward in the direction it is to go. Therefore, what the Guru propagates is a mode of living that captures the essence of life-flow, and without undue obstruction, or earnestness in

<sup>24</sup> Sol Gareth "Garry" Davis (1921-2013) was an international peace activist who created the World Passport, a fantasy travel document based on his interpretation of Article 13, Universal Declaration of Human Rights and on the concept of world citizenship. Author of *My Country is the World* (1962) and *Passport to Freedom* (1992) and other works is the founder of the World Service Authority. For more information Cf. <https://oneworld.network> > world-citizenship; <https://www.worldservice.org/gov.html>

<sup>25</sup> The 'one caste, one religion, one God, for Mankind', the *Kundalini Pattu* are seen as having parallels in the Tirumantiram of Tirumular. cfr Udayakumar, *Self, Body and Inner Sense: Some Reflections on Sri Narayana Guru and Kumaran Asan*, in *Studies in History*, 13(1997). Sree Narayanan argued that there was no "Hindu" religion: what we called Hindu *matam* was but a collection of various religions such as *Sankhya*, *Advaita*, or *Mimamsaka matam*. If Hindu religion is presumed to be one in spite of such substantial differences, could one not overcome the seeming diversity and conflict among various religions in the world by bringing them all under a common name, "One religion" (Ekamatam)? This is an important sense in which the phrase "one religion" in Guru's motto, "One caste, one religion, one God for man" may need to be read. (cited from Udaya Kumar, Varkala Conference Paper, 2012 op cit.)

rectifying the state of affairs, an action which arises from inaction surges forward in the power and thrust of being.

In SNG the possibility of conversion is the quintessence of originality and flowering of fullness of personhood. It is political and spiritual. Political, like that of Ambedkar, and spiritual, as hinted at by Gandhi. The liberation from the tentacles of tradition to which Gandhi was frighteningly subservient and non-radical in the sense of being politically aggressive as to be progressive like Ambedkar. But conversion is a possibility, it is a necessity, it is a mode of appropriating the quintessence of 'freedom', bliss, *atma sukham*.' Conversion is feared and reviled by Gandhi not because he does not see the plight of those excluded from the hindufold and humiliated in not being granted an equal status as demanded by Ambedkar, but rather because he does not want to liquidate Hinduism (Hindu *dharma*) and instead wants to retain its hold on society and keep it as an alternative to Christianity and Islam. If this anti-Christian and anti-Muslim tenor is the operating premise for not encouraging conversion and bringing forth traditional arguments in favour of ascribed religious identity, what places SNG above Gandhi and as a Guru (despite the attempt by Gandhi to score a point over SNG and to downsize him and place his supposedly superior conception foisted on his listeners),<sup>26</sup> it is the fact that the position of religious identity *vis-a-vis* human search for happiness and wellbeing is a much more thought out and liberated stand on the part of SNG as it comes from a point of no animosity and no privileged position granted to any – neither the indigenious, nor the major religions, nor the Hindu. It is worth noting that SNG is to have stated that the Hindus have no right to claim freedom from the British when for centuries it has held others, the lower castes, under domination.<sup>27</sup>

The outcome of Gandhi's question and the answer, as if he is eliciting it from SNG, seems to be in the direction of wanting confirmation from SNG as to his own position of there having to be no need for a Hindu or anyone to convert for salvation. Ambedkar's

<sup>26</sup> Cf. The police record of Gandhi's speech at Varkala in 1925, as noted earlier.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. G Thadathil, *Vision From the Margin*, 202.

influence on him can be gauged indirectly through all those who among Ambedkar's admirers and those desperate with not making due political mileage, given the caste mentality ridden authorities,<sup>28</sup> demanding that Ezhavas should follow his lead and convert. SNG's position was categorically not against conversion, as we showed going by his own ideological stand. Even in the case of young Nitya, who lived in the ashram with Gandhi for a while was put off by the subtly coercive tendencies and the prevarication before power and authority and the obnoxious title he chose for the oppressed classes 'harijan' that he decides to dissociate himself from Gandhi and returns to SNG's camp.<sup>29</sup>

Gandhi's fear of Hinduism being overridden by the Islamic and Western Christian forces is being played out in the anti-minority diatribe and violent flare ups ranging from the ideological warfare to the street violence orchestrated by agents who not are hard to be pinned down. The clash of civilizations approach to history as series of culture wars being perpetrated again and again as in the Crusades, in the reformation, in the Spanish wars or in the confrontation of colonial invasion of Americas or in the Chinese invasion of Tibet, or the wiping out of Buddhism from India, or in more contemporary global events targeting terrorism and fundamentalism, offers an explanation that might legitimize its repetition. There is, however, an alternative interpretation and visualizing of the possible future of humanity beginning with what SNG's mystical experience and that of many others. The choice of being with the other and for the other with no fear of the other.

Narayana Guru's negotiations or syncretic assimilations are visible at all levels making him a true advaitin, a non-dualist as we have argued elsewhere.<sup>30</sup> He refers to 'Arivu' as Brahman,

<sup>28</sup> Nairs and Namboothris and Kings/Queens who followed their dictates/sensibilities more than the weaker sections.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Scott Teitsworth (ed.), *Love and Blessings: The Biography of Nitya Chaitanya Yati* (second edition): "Moreover, I hated the word "Harijan" that Gandhi had coined as an alternative to "untouchable." Harijan means "son of God," but in practice the pretentious upper caste Hindu makes it sound like "son of a bitch."

<sup>30</sup> G Thadathil, *Vision from the Margin*, 213-5.

uses unconventional idols/representations for God such as mirror, lamps, alphabets, and action oriented texts as in Siddha tradition. The notion of *arivu* and its equation to Brahman has a *saiva siddhanta* and *siddha* tradition origins: *arivu* (knowledge), *ahantha* (ego-centric), *anthakalangal* (inner-voices) – body as the shadow of the soul. The non-duality characteristic of him is not only in his theoretical expositions but in the balance he maintained between the transformation effective contextual engagements and the theoretical expositions. The discourses being made out as the central aspect with the intention to create a literary corpus can thus disfigure or erase a significant part of his astute engagements.

History shows that caste considerations reappear in texts after texts accommodating and defanging the attempts to equalize society attempted, be it by Buddha, Asoka, Kabir, the Bakhti saints, Siddhas or the most recent apostles like Phule, Periyar, Ambedkar and SNG. This incorporation or assimilation process needs resistance. Partly because of the complexity of the process itself. SNG and his views on female body, Ambedkar and his views on Tribals, Gandhi and his patriarchy all go for showing how the status quo makes a comeback. SNG himself saw the probability of him being appropriated by the caste and religion bound tradition, and therefore, in 1916, he clarified through a declaration that he did not belong to any caste or religion and that his founding of temples did not entail his belonging to Hindu religion.<sup>31</sup> He was concerned with the progress of the human soul towards spiritual happiness. For him religion is a matter of the mind. He engaged himself in both religious transformation and social transformation (*mathaparivarthanam* and *samudaya parivarthanam*). In this conception the Ezhava is a society in the human society and *lokam* is for him the world society as experienced by the individual. The way one is, so, is one's world. Each state in the universe is firmly rooted in our inner experience of that state. It is not important to look at the

<sup>31</sup> cfr Uday Kumar, op.cit., 259, Downloaded from sih.sagepub.com at PRINCETON UNIV LIBRARY on March 16, 2016.

external because it is a reflected image of the state of our inner sense *anthakarana*.<sup>32</sup>

## Conclusion

The ideological frame within which cultural studies are moving onward is in the direction of restructuring the cultural-civilization legacy of India. This cannot be attempted as a simple return to the past but as an overcoming of the modern civilizational thrust that has come its way in the past 300 years and is ongoing. The engagement with modernity undertaken by the Indian cultural intelligentsia while condemning the objectification and subjectivization of the colonized done by the imperialistic ideologies does acknowledge its service in bringing modernity to India. While availing of the modernity and its benefits especially in an increasingly globalizing world there is a simultaneous attempt to restrict the impact of this modernity within India, as to resuscitate the old and preserve the pristine past and its legacies. This is also accompanied by the efforts to maintain the tastes and technologies of the West and its superiority – through money, and ideological warfare than (yet) through technological lead or weaponry. The latter aspiration of dominance too are not far behind. It is this contestation for hegemony that characterizes civilizational forces – be it Judeo-Christian, Chinese-Confucian, Islamic, or Indian-Hindu.

It is amidst these contesting visions of supremacy at the global level that a spontaneous merger of these various visions themselves as the true heritage of humanity and its potential future that is being unveiled by SNG. It is not a programmatic action in the sense of occupying someone else's space or supremacy or dominance, but, as Nataraja Guru used to say, 'a matter of understanding' the true nature of the human heritage and the path to that world of wellbeing-for-all in its truest sense. *Atmopadesasatakam* is a perspectival lens, to see the world through, irrespective of the layers of opaqueness that

<sup>32</sup> cf. NK Damodran, *Kumaran Asante Lekhanangal*, 1982, vol2, p.137 quoted in Udaya Kumar, op.cit., p.268. (Downloaded from sih.sagepub.com at PRINCETON UNIV LIBRARY on March 16, 2016).

surrounds the clarity of vision underlying it. It divests the layers of codings and colourings to see humanity struggling to be born.

Guru parampara is a carrier of civilizational legacy. This legacy consists in the indigenous genius to let free people in each generation from the contradicting and at times debilitating strangleholds of tradition and blind beliefs which probably in any earlier generation might have been liberating as a legitimate expression of creative aspirations. Seen from this perspective of streamlining and modulating the 'rectitude' of the civilizational/cultural flow, the contributions of SNG can be seen in the way he offers another hermeneutic key to interpret the world.

The significance of his apparently simplistic but profound assertions are to be seen as a spring sourcing from within a cultural sedimentation of over 1500 years of four religions co-living in and around Cochin-Travancore and over 2 millennia of three religions - this cultural narrative of co-living without combativeness but may be superiority claims by each<sup>33</sup> (as Ashis Nandy has shown) is what is being challenged by SNG. It does not matter your path, provided you keep walking (whatever be the religion the human person should become better). The second significance to his dictum and its hermeneutic value arises from the contemporary combative stand that religions have taken towards one another. While the truth of the religion ought to bring them together to journey together, the non-essentials of religion - given the political and economic expedience - take on the combative mode. Underlying such civilizational clashes of religions is also an immature collective ego that claims to achieve something *more* because of its 'racial/casteist' predicament.

The question arises as to why Ambedkar has not been taken up as an intellectual voice. The same could also be asked of Sri Narayana Guru Tradition. One answer that surfaced in a discussion with a Stanford Scholar on the issue is that at the independence decade the concern with the nationalist frame overshadowed his critique.

<sup>33</sup> Ashis Nandy, *Time Warps: Silent and Evasive Pasts in Indian Politics and Religion*, (London: Hurst & Co, 2002).

Then the developmental agenda of the 50s and 60s overshadowed the social concern, letting his vision being submerged. Then the secularism debate ensued culminating in the 9/11 episode giving further push to the anti-fundamentalist, and anti-terrorist moves and a resurgence of the pacifist ideas and a return to Gandhi. It is probably time to listen to voices like that of Ambedkar and SNG in order to explore answers to the question of religious fundamentalism in the critique of religion provided by them. The Gandhian critique needs to be reframed against their critique thus far unheeded. It is the voice and critique of the true relevancy of religion to be discovered in the counter voice of a purified and rationalized religion. The religion in search for human happiness in the depth of one's soul as well as in the enhancement of the welfare of the bodies of the other enshrining one's very soul.



# Gandhi's Legacy: Vandana Shiva as Gandhi's Heir

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*Pius V Thomas & Violina Patowary*

The paper highlights the contemporariness and legacy of Gandhian thought in its influence on the concepts of democracy, ethics of plurality and political morality. The paper, however, routes its discussion about democracy to show how it assumes the status of a radical critique of globalized world, global institutions, the environment and nature. The discussion that is carried out in the paper tries to see how a very radical and intimate interlocutor of our time like Vandana Shiva builds up her ecofeminist theoretical environmentalism and the principles of global coexistence and democracy through a paradigm that can be called Gandhian. The paper further argues to show up that the concept of earth democracy, which Vandana Shiva puts forward to mediate a major environmental ethical and socio-political ideal in addressing what we call broadly the environmental crisis, as it articulates an important ecosophical framework, precipitates the Gandhian ideal of Swaraj. The paper, therefore, tries to draw attention to the delicate conceptual positions that Vandana Shiva establishes in her main arguments in linking the global environmental thought or ecological philosophy with the principles of earth democracy and the unique principle of biospherical equality to make them stand in intimate dialogue with the world of Gandhian ideas.

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**Key words:** Political Gandhi, Swaraj, Earth Democracy, Ecological Democracy, Earth Citizenship.

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## **Introduction: Situating Gandhi**

In one of the current articles which discuss a well-known Malayalam Poet's understanding of Gandhi, the author wrote that the Poet was following a political Gandhi and not Gandhi as a symbol or image. What the author meant was that very many discourses on Gandhi resort to Gandhi as symbol or image, created out of a culturally and socially hybrid discourse.<sup>1</sup> Ram Puniyani reflects the same when he observed recently as he was commenting on the view of a section

<sup>1</sup> Gopikrishmnan P N, *Mahakaviyum Mahatmavum* (Poet and the Mahatma), Mathrubhoomi Weekly, June, 30, 2019,12-19.

of people, writers and intellectuals who are labelling Gandhi as racist and casteist, the one who harmed the cause of Dalits in India, in connection with the 'Black Lives Matter' agitation worldwide. Puniyani writes, "Nothing can be farther from truth. These elements are not seeing the whole journey of the man but do the cherry picking from his early writings, when he was in the early phases of his work against prevalent injustices in the name of race and caste."<sup>2</sup> Puniyani continues to write:

Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of Indian Nation, has the unique distinction of leading the biggest ever mass movement in the World and leading the strong anti-colonial movement. In this direction he contributed two major tools as the basis of the mass movements, the one of non-violence and other of *Satyagraha*. He also stated that while making the policies what one should keep in mind is the last, weakest person in the society. His life, which he called as his message became the inspiration of many anti-colonial, anti-racial struggles in different parts of the World. He strongly supported the concept of equality in India, where eradication of caste also became one of the aims of his life.<sup>3</sup>

As Gandhi himself appeared to have said – warning those who want to follow his ideas – that he might have modified his views according to the latest understanding and therefore stick to the last view in this regard. Gandhi here was gently admitting his fallibility and the possible self-contradiction in him. As Gandhi writes:

The opinions I have formed the conclusions that I have arrived at are not final. I may change tomorrow; I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and nonviolence are as old as the hills. All I have done is to try experiments in both on as vast scale as I could do. In doing so, I have sometimes erred and learnt by my errors. Life and its problems have thus become to me so many experiments in the practice of truth and nonviolence.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Ram Puniyani, 'Gandhi Race and Caste', [http://www.group.google.com/msgid/secular\\_perspective](http://www.group.google.com/msgid/secular_perspective).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Gandhi M K., *Harijan*, March 28, 1936.

As Ananda Kumarasamy beautifully observes, "He was constantly on the lookout for any traces of deception within him, so that he could root them out. He strived to become authentic, which is the ability to be oneself in front of others. Gandhi did not wear any masks – he always displayed his real self. He was not afraid of letting others know who he really was."<sup>5</sup> What we see here can be called the virtue of democratic challenge to conceptual deification and political infallibility. The paper proposes to affirm here that the authenticity in Gandhi blends with the 'the virtue of democratic challenge to conceptual and ideological deification and political infallibility' to shape and ground the 'political Gandhi'. Gandhi becomes undoubtedly a contemporary political, social and cultural icon, world over.

Therefore, the legacy of Gandhian thought as its influence on contemporary philosophy and social theory is—simultaneously—chastising and obscurantist. Nonetheless, Gandhi and his philosophy prominently figures in all discussions about democracy, ethics of plurality and political morality.

### **The Core of Gandhi's Thought**

Deeper than the iconic ideals celebrated after Gandhi, such as, Nonviolence as Personal Ethics, Religion as Truth and Morality, it is more important to see how Gandhi diagnostically views and challenges the perverted combination of colonialism and the uncritical modernity as the one dimensional technological domination of the natural and the cultural domains as the real violence. Ahimsa/Nonviolence is in recognizing them as they are and critiquing them. As pointed out by Ramin Jahanbegloo:

In response to the totalizing project of modernity exemplified by colonial domination and a discursive dominance of positivist and reductionist science, Gandhi laid down two conditions for the enshrinement of moral civilization in Hind Swaraj. First, his

<sup>5</sup> Anand Kumarasamy, *Gandhi On Personal Leadership*, (New Delhi: Jaico Books, 2005), 163.

notion of Swaraj, which referred to three philosophical, ethical and political ideas of self examination, self rule and self determination. Second, his concept of Sarvodaya or welfare of all, which rejected the Utilitarian view of liberal democracy as representing greatest good of the greatest number.<sup>6</sup>

Consequently, Gandhi shows us the violence involved in the deadly combination of techno-scientific capitalism and its ideal of domination of nature, brute force and economic greed.

A K Saran sums up Gandhi's ideals of Swaraj, Sarvodaya and Satyagraha (Socio-economic and political philosophy) in tandem with the root ideal that is Ahimsa:

1. Means and ends should be seen as parts of a whole which has transcendental reference.
2. The production system should be based on the ideal of progressive and regulated minimization of needs (and not on that of multiplication of wants).
3. The economy should be life centered and not one that is commodity centered. It should be based on a non-exploitative economy based on simple and limited technology.
4. Social and economic organization should be based on decentralized, based on the principle of optimum autonomy.
5. Truth and Ahimsa should be the foundation of the political order.
6. Satyagraha (the determined pursuit of truth) should be chief form of political vigilance and protest.
7. The social and the economic systems should be hierarchical, non competitive, and non acquisitive, based on the principle of trusteeship (Social trusteeship- People's rights). Ideally it should be a stateless society.<sup>7</sup>

However, Gandhian concept of democracy which presumes non-violence as its guiding principle has been intensely criticized by many thinkers like Ambedkar, Marxists, recently very prominently, Arundhati Roy as well as the recent critics of institutionalized democracy. They criticize Gandhi's concept of democracy and non-

<sup>6</sup> Ramin Jahanbegloo, *The Decline of Civilization*, (New Delhi: Aleph Books, 2017), 44-45.

<sup>7</sup> Saran A K, "Gandhi's Theory of Society and Our Times", In Fred Dallmayr and Devy(ed) *Between Tradition and Modernity*, (New Delhi: Sage,1998), 210.

violence finally stands for the social violence (*Himsa*) like caste/Dalit freedom issue, the lose areas of the idealized uncertainty of minorities' and political plurality's issue and the loosely understood question of language-identity.

The present paper as it gives due credit to the limitations of Gandhian thought, presumes that the precincts that the political Gandhi draws and the debate such conceptual determinants summon, opens an epochal grounding for Gandhian thought(s). In other words, as very well debated figure of the contemporary thinking, let us assume that there are many tenors in locating and triggering off the contemporariness of Gandhian thought and also many ways of approaching his thought and its significance. The present paper, in such an attempt, draws attention to how Vandana Shiva, one of the most discussed present day ecophilosopher-ecofeminist and ecological activists, situates Gandhi and his philosophy in formulating and articulating her theory of earth democracy.

### **Vandana Shiva's Gandhi**

Vandana Shiva is a world-renowned environmental thinker and campaigner. A former physicist, feminists and philosopher, a leader and innovator in development theory, she is prominent in citizen's actions against environmental destruction, and critical of the latest agricultural and genetic engineering technologies and the giant corporations which control them.<sup>8</sup> Shiva plays a prominent role in

<sup>8</sup> Vandana Shiva, a well-known environmentalist and an Ecofeminist, was born on 5th November, 1952 in Dehra Dun, Uttaranchal. As born and brought up in Dehra Dun, which is near the foothills of the Himalayas, she has developed an interest in environmentalism. Her father was a forestry official and a farmer, from whom she was able to know about both the positive outcome and the negativity that surrounds in the farming profession. After completion of her master degree in the Philosophy of Science, and also having her doctorate degree in "Hidden Variables and Non-locality in Quantum Theory" from the department of Philosophy at the University of Western Ontario in 1978, she returned home with a view to work for the environmental related issues and save earth from illness. She preceded her work from grass-root movements and campaigns to prevent construction of clear cut loggings, deforestation, over uses of pesticides and chemical fertilizers

in farming etc. She was the Indian environmentalist, whose name is related to the Chipko Movement, which literally means the tree-hugging movement. She is best known as a critic of Asia's Green Revolution. Green revolution was an international attempt to increase food production through high yielding food, organisms stock which further needs high level of chemical fertilisers, preservatives etc. These high yielding seeds, foods again destroy the local and indigenous varieties of seeds and also give troubles in the poor farmers. As a response to this, she with the help of her foundation named Research Foundation for Science and Technology and Ecology (RFSTE), established by her in 1982, RFSTE scientists established seed banks throughout India to preserve agricultural heritage and train farmers about sustainable farming techniques.

Along with Ralph Nader and Jeremy Rifkin, Vandana Shiva won the Alternative Nobel Peace Prize (the Right Livelihood Award) in 1993. This is an annual award given to individuals for "outstanding vision and work on behalf of our work on planet and people" (The Right Livelihood Award, 20 Oct. 2008). This award was conferred upon Shiva for her leadership in ".....placing women and ecology at the heart of modern development discourse" (The Right Livelihood Award, V. Shiva. 20 Oct. 2008). In India she is Director of the Research Foundation of Science, Technology and Ecology, which led to the creation of Navdanya: network of seed keepers and organic producers spread across 17 states in India. She is also the founder of BijaVidyapeeth which offers conference and seminar facilities in an ambiance which reinvigorates our vital link with Nature at the Navdanya Biodiversity Conservation and Agro Ecology Farm in the foothills of the Himalayas. Now to the primary question, what is Navadanya; its stated mission is to "protect nature's and people's rights to knowledge, biodiversity, water and food" (NavdanyaSeed Sovereignty 15 Jan 2009). A multidimensional work is to be done by it. But its primary focus is to seed saving and chemical free agriculture. Apart from this organic farming, sustainable forest and agriculture, biodiversity conservation, food security of people etc. are come under the province of it. Again in the broader sense it too tries to focus on to see women and nature; and men and women equally and supports grassroots women movements. Finally, Navdanyamotivates education and research regarding various practices in agriculture. It tries to teach farmers about uses to organic agricultural mechanism for disease free environment and health hazards, and teaches about the harmful effects of chemical uses and biodiversity's impact on farming.

Vandana Shiva has written many books and articles related to environmental protections. Her major works includes: *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (1990), *The Violence of the Green Revolution: Third World Agriculture, Ecology and Politics* (1991), *Ecology and Politics of Survival: Conflicts over Natural Resources in India* (1991), *Ecology and Politics of Survival: Conflicts over Natural Resources in India* (1991), *Biodiversity: Social and Ecological Perspectives* (1992), *Women, Ecology and Health: Rebuilding Connections* (1993), *Close to Home: Women Reconnect Ecology, Health and Development* (1994), *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply* (2000), *Tomorrows Biodiversity: Prospects for Tomorrow* (2000), *Water Wars: Privatisation and Profit* (2000), *Protect or Plunder: Understanding Intellectual Property Rights* (2001), *Plants, Myths and Reality* (2001), *India Divided* (2005), *Globalisation's*

International Forum on Globalisation which creates constructive response towards various issue related to globalisation. She discusses how globalisation affects the poorest countries, farmers and people living in rural area. It is like capitalism i.e. rich becomes richer and poor becomes poorer. She scrutinizes that the progressive ideals of free trade and globalization actually inhibit growth for the poorest in the world, while encouraging excess wealth to the rich capitalist.

Inspired by women's struggles for the protection of nature as a condition for human survival Shiva shows how ecological destruction and the marginalization of women are linked. They are not inevitable, economically or scientifically. She argues that "maldevelopment" or the violation and exploitation of natural processes into corporate interest make the nature too mechanical, which in turn to destroy not only the human survival on earth, but also will destroy the whole earth one day. Every area of human activity now-a-days downgrades and burdens both nature and women. There is only one path, according to Shiva, to survival and liberation of women (and men) and nature. And that is the ecological path of harmony, sustainability and diversity. She explores the unique place of women in the environment of India in particular, both as its saviours and as victims of maldevelopment.

For Shiva destruction of biodiversity and marginalization of women go hand in hand. Therefore, women have to come forward to control both. In this era of monocultural capitalism, the soil suffers a lot. It can't help but bear the illness. In the same way the (women)

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*New Wars: Seeds, Water and Life Forms* (2005), *Manifestos on the Future of Food and Seed* (2007), *Democratizing Biology: Reinventing Biology from a Feminists, Ecological and Third World Perspective* (2007), *Cargill and Corporate Hijack of India's Food and Agriculture* (2007), *Soil not Oil: Environmental Justice in a Time of Climate Crisis* (2008), *Monoculture of the Mind: Perspectives on Biodiversity* (2011), *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability and Peace* (2011), *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (2011), *Making Peace with the Earth* (2013), *The Vandana Shiva Reader* (2015), *Seed Sovereignty, Food Security: Women in the Vanguard* (2016), *Who Really Feeds the World: The Failures of Agribusiness and the Promise of Agroecology* (2016), *Another important book she written with Maria Miles is Ecofeminism* (1993), *Biopolitics with Ingunn Moser* (1995), Apart from this she has written many articles, papers etc.

farmers also suffers. Women are often most directly involved person with subsistence work, and are safeguards of natural resources needed to sustain both her family as well as the community sector. Shiva argues that “women’s work and knowledge is central to biodiversity conservation and utilisation both because they work between ‘sectors’ and because they perform multiple tasks,”<sup>9</sup> It is said that to develop a society it is necessary to develop it from the root. So Shiva tries to organise the house worker women to come forward for dual liberation of women as well as nature. Shiva summed the situation by saying, “liberation is best to begin from the colonised and end with the coloniser.”<sup>10</sup>

By mentioning the irony of the Third World women, Shiva says many of the problems faced by the third world women today are the historical result of colonial relations between the first and the third worlds. In her work *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*, Shiva offers a paradigmatic analysis of the dilemma of third world women everywhere. The erosion of traditional land-use rights by the introduction of cash cropping strips these women from having control over their means of production. For centuries women engaged hands-on with habitat to provide food and shelter. But technologically transferred development ruptures this re/productive nature women- labour nexus, leaving starvation and ecological destruction in its place. In the same way Green Revolution of agriculture (seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, dams, irrigation equipment and tractors), plantation forestry (fast-growing, non-indigenous species, herbicides, chip harvesters, and mills), capitalist ranching (land conversion, imported grasses, fertilizers and factory farms) and reproductive technologies (potentially harmful contraceptive drugs, sterilization, and bottle feeding) have further disrupted native ecologies and people. As subsistence farmers, urban workers and middle class professionals, their ability to provide basic subsistence and healthy living condition is threatened; therefore the third world women have born to challenge of eco

<sup>9</sup> Miles, and Shiva, *Ecofeminism*, (New Delhi: Zed Books, 2004), 166.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 165.

degradation and ecologically unsustainable developments projects as well as their human rights. They have organized movements to transform maldevelopment into sustainable development. Chipko is one such example of movements later organized by Shiva to protect tree for felling and balance ecology.

Regarding forestry Shiva says that forest has two paradigms: positive and negative. Positively it is life-enhancing and negatively it is life-destroying. The life-enhancing paradigm emerges from the forest itself and the feminine principle; and life-destroying from the factory and the market. Since the maximising of profits is consequent upon the destruction of conditions of renewability, the two paradigms are cognitively and ecologically can never be judged with same standard. Life-enhancing factor has emerged from India's ancient forest culture, in all its diversity, and has been renewed in contemporary times by Chipko effort. Shiva was a participant in the Chipko movement in 1970 (and onwards). Food security and seed freedom is another area where Shiva's philosophy of life moves around. She rejects the corporate patents on seeds, by calling it 'Biopiracy'. As Schell contends:

She has campaign against the implementation of the WTO 1994 Trade related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement which broadens the scope of patents to include life forms. Shiva has criticised the agreement as having closed ties with the business sector and opening the door to further patents on life. Shiva fought against attempted patents of several indigenous plants, such as Basmati, Neem etc.<sup>11</sup>

From the aforementioned points we can sum up her philosophy. Her philosophy is to democratize the whole earth. If we go for the roots we can find that she grounds her work on Gandhian philosophy. She tries to challenge today's problems of the whole world by following Gandhi's mantra 'be the change you want to see in the world'.

<sup>11</sup> E. Schell, *The Megarhetorics of Global Development*, (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 170.

### Gandhi's Philosophy: Vandana Shiva's Affinities

According to Vandana Shiva, Gandhi's philosophy is a living philosophy. It gives hope, freedom, and way of life in the negative situations. Shiva admits that the impact of Gandhi in her life, towards way of democratisation of earth helps a lot. His creative vision of Swadeshi (self-reliance); Swaraj (self-rule); Satyagraha (struggle for truth) and Sarvodaya (upliftment of all) inspires Shiva in her creative vision of earth democracy. By wishing good of ours satyagraha and localising good and services i.e. (swadeshi) we can have self-rule (swaraj) and avoid corporate rule on us, so that our people can have uplift (sarvodaya) without any corporation. Relating to the three amendments of our patent act, Shiva remembers Gandhi's work, "as long as the superstition that people should obey unjust laws exists, so long will slavery exist."<sup>12</sup> So to avoid such laws, Navdanya comes forward to protect against all these unjust laws towards our nature.

In one of her interview with Scott London, Shiva expresses that, "Gandhi is the only person who knew about real democracy - not democracy as the right to go and buy what you want but democracy as the responsibility to be accountable to everyone around you. Democracy begins with freedom from hunger, freedom from unemployment, freedom from fear, and freedom from hatred. To me, those are the real freedoms on the basis of which good human societies are based."<sup>13</sup> To respond various environmental issues Navdanya (nine seeds) movement was started by Vandana Shiva in the year 1984 which tries to give support and direction towards various kinds of environmental activism. To minimise or to end environmental negative conditions Navdanya does many works. Branching off from Gandhi's thought she advocate her own strong philosophy i.e. Earth democracy which based on the thinking

<sup>12</sup> V. Shiva, "The practice of Earth Democracy: Looking Ahead- Experiences from 30 years of Participatory Research and Community Action", *Development Dialogue*, 52(2009): 94.

<sup>13</sup> "In the Footprints of Gandhi: An Interview with V. Shiva", Scott London, February 3, 2016. [www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca)

'VasudhaivaKutumvakam' which means the whole earth is one family. Shiva calls it the "community of all beings supported by the earth."<sup>14</sup> In earth democracy, Shiva explains, "the concern for human and non-human species comes together in a coherent, non-conflicting whole that provides an alternative to the world view of corporate globalisation, which gives right only to corporations and which sees humans and other beings as exploitable raw material or disposable waste."<sup>15</sup> Earth democracy is that which includes peace, justice, sustainability with total rejection of violence. Things that belong to nature, we cannot have the right to buy or sell it. We can just use it in sustainable way.

### **Earth Democracy: From Suicidal Economy to Life Saving Economy**

Due to corporations like Monsanto, Cargill the monocropping seeds enters into the firms of the poor peasants which needs many chemical based fertilizers and pesticides and cannot be saved for further, replacing their save seeds. Farmers are seduced with false promise of becoming rich and forced every year to buy these engineered seeds. As a result they fall in indebtness and poverty which further leads to the selling of their kidneys and ultimately to suicide of the peasants as Shiva points. "The privatisation of public goods and services and the commodization of the life support systems of the poor is a double theft which robs people of both economic and cultural security."<sup>16</sup> These imply that the survivals of the small farmers are incompatible with profit-motivated-global-corporations. Another problem is the trade related laws which allows these corporations to ruin our farmers as well as biodiversity. So the reason for failure of dominant economic model can be seen in two ways:

Reduction of the visible economy to only market economy and all the related activities are controlled by corporate ignoring the

<sup>14</sup> Shiva, V, *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability and Peace*, (New Delhi: Natraj Publishers, 2011), 1.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 3.

nature's economy and sustenance economy where actually all of them depend.

The legal rights of corporations have increased at the cost of real people and natural heritage.

Earth Democracy is in short a response towards all these profit oriented destructive motives. Earth democracy movement demonstrate a new society which will return 'everything to everyone', which actually their own and can be realised through "can begin with constructive action and turn it into our best resistance."<sup>17</sup> What Eco-socialist tries for is justice for all people and protest against mono-crop and mono-thought. The earth democracy movement shows us way how we can get our nature back from destructive foundation. By intuiting and upholding democratically established laws against dominant models and also government who allows such things to us and through overturning "superstition that people should obey unjust laws."<sup>18</sup> However Shiva's concept of Earth Democracy is not a concept born out of nothing. Broadly speaking, we can relate it to many theories like Marxian, Gandhian etc. She is inspired by many. But Gandhi's concepts are seen as most relatable to her many concepts which together give birth to Earth Democracy.

### **Sovereignty to End Slavery: Navdanya's Outlook**

To respond the various negative issues related to the environment and illness of the earth Navdanya started a new paradigm to respond to these problems. It helps us to shift from dominant and pervasive culture to a peaceful culture with non-violent ways. This response is broadly termed as 'earth democracy' by Vandana Shiva: "It is not just about the next protest or the next World Social Forum; it is about what we do in between. It addresses the global in our

<sup>17</sup> Shiva, V. "The practice of Earth Democracy: Looking Ahead- Experiences from 30 years of Participatory Research and Community Action", *Development Dialogue*, 52(2009): 94.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 94.

everyday lives, our everyday realities, and creates change globally by making change locally.”<sup>19</sup> Here humans are embedded in earth family where every human beings and non-human organisms have collectivity in various forms such as ecological, economical – and whereby – greed and consumerism are replaced by sustainable livelihood. Shiva highlights the sovereignty movement by pronouncing that, “Our world is not for sale, our water is not for sale, our seeds and biodiversity are not for sale.”<sup>20</sup>

### Seed and Food Sovereignty

“Seed is not just the source of life. It is the very foundation of our being.”<sup>21</sup> Following Gandhi’s concept of non-violence and salt satyagraha, earth democracy also launched seed sovereignty against various seed related issues like genetic engineering, seed laws and patents laws which make farmers slave of their own farming due to corporate ruling – as the farmers have to pay royalties to the companies for using hybrid seeds. Farmers only work as means to gain profit for the large companies like Monsanto, Syngenta, and Cargill. “The seed, for the farmer, is not merely the source of future plants and food; it is the storage place of culture and history. Seed is the first link in the food chain. Seed is the ultimate symbol of food security.”<sup>22</sup> Seed sovereignty movement demands that Indian laws do not legalise patents on seeds and food, and Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) is reviewed to exclude patents on seed and food. “The system of seeds based on monoculture is wrong and inappropriate. The bio diverse system has produced more food, and biodiversity means that seeds must be in the

<sup>19</sup> Shiva, V, *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability and Peace*, (New Delhi: Natraj Publishers, 2011), 4.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>21</sup> Shiva, V, *The Vandana Shiva Reader*, (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 35.

<sup>22</sup> Shiva, V. *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply*, (Boston: South End Press, 2000), 8.

hands of farmers.”<sup>23</sup> Bija Swaraj extends its hands to save seeds from other problematic issues like protect seeds from virus and other infection attack, campaign for localising the seed markets. Genetically modified seeds have many negative effects, so it tries to ban it and to save biodiversity by saving the earth from transgenic seeds and its all harmful effects on soil, ecology and human health and exploitation of farmers. Because of these genetic pollution and other normal problems related to pollution, healthy and organic food processing also is in danger and difficulty. The other reason of these toxic spreading is that they are cheap. But if we account for the true costs of these chemical based seeds and food, we realise that they are unaffordable; because nothing can be achieved at the cost of the environment. So the seed satyagraha says public money that is used in biotechnology’s high projects like GMO, it should be used in organic farming and nourishment. “In every application of genetic engineering, food is being stolen from other species for the maximisation of corporate profits.”<sup>24</sup>

Denying people the right to healthy life and poison-free food by enacting anti-people laws and policies; using public money in non-sustainable farming is termed as ‘food-dictatorship’. Navdanya has established 54 seeds banks in 16 different states and it has climatic resilient properties which helps local farmers and it also established a conservation and training centre to train farmers about organic and local farming.

For the democratic and decentralised food system, Navdanya launched its campaign on food rights and food sovereignty (Anna Swaraj) at the Anna Panchayat (Public Tribunal on Hunger) in May 2001.<sup>25</sup> Organic foods have many health benefits too. But global food markets use various preservative to preserve food for longer. Preservative has many side effects on health. Again entry of

<sup>23</sup> “Vandana Shiva: Seeds must be in the Hands of Farmers”, interview with Mark Trans, February 25, 2013. [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com)

<sup>24</sup> Shiva, V, *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply*, (Boston: South End Press, 2000), 16.

<sup>25</sup> [navdanya.org/earth-democracy](http://navdanya.org/earth-democracy).

large companies like Cargill into direct procurements, processing, transportation it directly affects the small local food industry and its employees. Food is our fundamental human rights, so we have the right to good and beneficial food. Large sale business related to food at the cost of local food market and health should not be allowed.

### **Water Sovereignty**

Navdanya also work for the Jal Swaraj i.e. Water Sovereignty. "Water must be free for sustenance needs. Since nature gives water to us free of cost buying and selling it for profit violates our inherent right to nature's gift and denies the poor of their human rights"<sup>26</sup>. So, in 2000, Navdanya launched the water sovereignty movement to protect our water from privatisation, commodification and to promote traditional water harvesting system and establish excess to water. Water is the most commercial product now-a-days. Since growing population demands more fresh water and industrial works, agricultural sector also needs water, so there becomes scarcity of water, which motivated commercial workers to commercialise the water. In some rural areas women have to walk 2/3 kilometres to get water. Draught is another reason to water scarcity. As a protest, World Bank scheme of privatising Delhi's water supply to Svez are stopped by RFSTE and Citizen Font of Water Democracy; Coca-Cola's thievery of Kerala's ground water; river linking projects like Ken Betwa and Sharda-Yamuna of Bundelkhand and Uttrakhand accordingly, which are nothing but theft of our water and water heritage.

### **Land Sovereignty**

For the development of any country proper land use is important. Land is basically used for agriculture and food production. So, sustainable land use is very much important. Vandana Shiva stood against land ceiling, sale of agricultural land for non-agricultural purpose, multinational company's grabbing of land from small

<sup>26</sup> Shiva, V, *Water Wars: Privatisation and Profit*, (Boston: South End Press, 2000), 35.

farmers and Dalit's to earn tax benefits in the name of exports etc. The big multinational companies like Monsanto, Cargill that attracts marginal farmers into monocropping and hybrid seeds that in turn ruin soil fertility and damage the land, driving the farmers deeper into debt and finally leading to suicide. These also gives birth other related issues like increased unemployment, migration, hunger problem, malnutrition, disease and death. So to protect land and community rights, economic and food security in broader sense are dealt with by Bhu Swaraj. Land must belong to those who nurture it, not for those who use it unsustainably.

Shiva's Earth Democracy is the response towards all these sufferings of nature. To respond these it has some principles of its own. Vandana Shiva in her book *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability and Peace* mention about ten principles of Earth Democracy. They are outlined in the next point.

### **Principle of Earth Democracy**

Vandana Shiva's earth democracy has 10 major principles, i.e. with these 10 principles we can better understand what exactly earth democracy is according to Shiva. They are briefly outlined below:

Ecological Democracy- Democracy of all life:

This implies all the species of the earth including human and non-human organisms have equal right over the earth. Though human beings are the highest kind of animal yet it does not mean that she/he has the sole right on earth and treat others cruelly and with violence. Everything has the right of same ecological space.

Intrinsic Worth of all Species and People:

All organisms: human and non-humans have intrinsic worth of their own. Nothing can be used as one's own need and object of manipulation. No human have a right to destroy or own nature's species at the cost of so called patents or intellectual property rights. All are free – all have worth.

#### Diversity in Nature and Culture:

Earth is full of biological as well as cultural diversity. We should defend all as it is our duty. Considering it as separate, having value and richness of its own we should respect both nature and culture equally. Nothing is higher than that of the other.

#### Natural Rights to Sustenance:

Earth is a world family having its diversified species. All have some birth-rights on nature like right to live, right to food and water, security on ecological space, habitat, and usage of natural resources in short, towards healthy sustenance. These are the rights as we get as an earth citizen. Nobody has the right to snatch them. These rights are not given by corporate or state, so nor can they be deprived by them. They have no right to privatization or monopoly control of our nature and natural rights.

#### Earth Economy is based on Economic Democracy and Living Economy:

Economic democracy is the basis of earth democracy. Economic system deals with overall livelihood of people, including basic needs, removal of worldwide hunger problem, economic sustainability etc. Protection of the integrity of the natural ecosystem also comes under the ambit of eco-democracy. Earth's economy is a living economy which includes various areas of healthy living i.e. sustainability, diversity, pluralistic system that protect peoples, natures and work for the overall benefits of the world.

#### Living Economies are based on Local Economies:

Our earth is blessed with many resources for the smooth running of the people's life. But they are not extremely available – as they are handy for needy not for greedy. So for the better uses of resources, conservation of earth's resources and creation of sustainable and satisfying livelihood is most caringly, creatively, efficiently and equitably achieved at the local level. Localisation of economies is a

social and ecological necessity for the preservation of nature. Think globally act locally should be the motto of people. Only those goods which cannot be produced locally due to climate and other reasons are to be imported or produced non-locally. Earth democracy is based on vibrant, resilient local economies, and rich tribal foods. We should respect them and should not allow global economy to destroy local economy.

*Living Democracy:*

Earth democracy is based on local living democracy. It includes all the local communities, their similarities, diversities, their involvement towards local ecology, rights, concept of sustainable development and right decision making towards the nature and natural resources; and livelihoods of all sorts of people. Authority is no doubt given on government but it should be based on the principle of subsidiarity. Earth democracy is living democracy.

*Living Knowledge:*

Living knowledge implies up-to-date knowledge system according to ages, differences subsides in the world. It maintains and reviews living processes and contributes towards the stability and the goodness of the planet. Earth democracy is based on this community centred and earth centred knowledge which is further based on life centeredness and embedded in nature and society. It is not abstract or reductionist – rather – it allows all communities to create various such types of knowledge and keep it alive. It is knowledge of the earth, not of corporations. They have no right to change or have authority over this knowledge.

*Balancing Rights with Responsibilities:*

In earth democracy rights are derived from and balanced with responsibilities. One who can take the consequences of good or bad kind of result, of any actions is to be allowed for taking or making decisions. So called rich or authoritative people or many corporate sector are not allowed to take decision for the natural issues and

common people's life. Responsibility in the sense of life giving, nature protection, sustainability in all sector are on the shoulders on the decision maker in any nature related issues.

Globalising Peace, Care and Compassion:

Earth democracy wants to connect peoples of various tribes, communities with the circle of care, cooperation and compassion. It does not agree with so called conflict and competition among communities. Conflict should be replaced with peace and greed with compassion globally, earth democracy pronounces.

After the discussion of these ten principles of Earth Democracy it is necessary to deal with Shiva's school of Bija Vidyapeetha, where she and her co-environmentalist teach about how to treat nature and our fellow human beings, what is the duty of every rational beings towards their surroundings, how to react and give response towards the reconstruction of the nature or environment that has already damaged.

### **BijaVidyapeetha for Earth Citizenship**

Vandana Shiva with her co-environmentalists established BijaVidyapeetha – the school for seeds in 2002 at Navdanya firm. BijaVidyapeetha teaches us the human values of love and reverence for all life and personal involvement in nature and natural work to sustain it. Self-participation to stand against natural dilemma, various human problems can cure earth from illness. Ignorance or escaping from these also is a crime – a crime not to protect nature. It is the education of our earth identity i.e. our commonality with other humans and natural things. We human beings are not the highest of all – rather we are the members of the earth family, where everything has equal value. All have different appearance, aims, habits, works but all are same in the sense that all shares their livelihood on earth. So it's not conflict but cooperation should be the guiding principle of human nature.

Shiva says that embodied learning is unable to teach us real values, motives of our lives. But learning from nature and biodiversity helps us to understand and teaches us value of life i.e. connection, generosity, partnership, sharing, openness, celebration, protection, cooperation etc. which are essential for our survival. By mentioning about John Locke's view of mind as a 'tabula rasa' i.e. empty, Shiva says that we have to fill this emptiness with right kind of education. Learning for ecological consciousness and earth-citizenship is the main motto of Bija Vidyapeetha. Like Bija Vidyapeetha, there is a movement called Living Democracy Movement, related to the rethinking about environmental degradation and searching for the solutions of such problems. As a part of the broad vision of Earth Democracy movement it is also a movement against TRIPs and GMO.

### **Living Democracy Movement**

Living Democracy Movement otherwise known as Jaiva Panchayat is the movement against exploitation. Taking Gandhi's words as inspiration, "[i]t is necessary for us to emphasise the fact that no one need to wait for anyone else in order to adopt a right course. People generally hesitate to make a beginning, if they feel that the objective cannot be had in its entirety. Such an attitude of mind is in reality a bar to progress"<sup>27</sup>; living democracy says that we can begin our protest when we feel necessity. Following the principles of earth democracy, protection of all life and nature on earth is the main objective of this movement. "The declaration of Jaiva Panchayat was made by 200 villages in June 2000. Since then the movement has spread to more than 6000 villages. It has been a major instrument for defending the seed and biodiversity sovereignty of the communities."<sup>28</sup> They aim at not to allow any illegal means to enter into natural resources to exploit it, and they associate themselves in conservation, sustenance and just use of natural resources. They

<sup>27</sup> M.K. Gandhi, "Equal Distribution", *Harijan*, 15 August, 1940.

<sup>28</sup> V. Shiva, *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability and Peace*, (Uttarakhand: Natraj Publishers, 2011), 97.

deal with all the matters that are related to biodiversity. Through a decentralised democratic decision only one can realise the true democracy for life. Not only plants and seeds, they try to protect animal exploitation and conserve medicinal plants.

Living democracy movement was a series of actions taken against WTO and its TRIPs agreement. Through Intellectual Property Rights corporations pirated everything. They give notice to then director general of WTO to see the matter. They continue their movement against GMO also and stood against non-cooperation in biopiracy and destruction of mother earth. Jaiv Panchayat also forwards their hands to stop water privatisation in Orissa and Uttrakhand. Jaiv Panchayat tries to symbiosis local-global in positive sense. Starting from local level protest against TRIPs and GMO and saying people about its negativity, now it becomes global protest. Ecological farming method and indigenous crops are far better than that of modified crops. This living democracy can continue till all the people realise nature, we-human, non-humans organisms are nothing but the members of the earth family and we all should think good of all irrespective of greed, conflict, war.

## Conclusion

David Cortright<sup>29</sup> in one of his books on Gandhi's philosophy and its influence on the world discussed different classical and contemporary examples of Gandhian thinking which have been contextualized world over. Gandhi's influence in the USA, Cortright calls that a cross fertilized tool for social justice, which was made use of for the struggle for peace. He presents Martin Luther King Jr. as an American who re-Christianized Gandhi in order to achieve a 'Realist Pacifism'. Cortright further takes us to the applied Gandhism in reinventing the boycott as a powerful instrument in the field, how the Gandhian faith became a 'mission of love', and 'peace devotion' in thinkers and activists like Dorothy Day and Barbara Deming, who invents the power of revolutionary

<sup>29</sup> David Cortright, *Gandhi and Beyond*, (New Delhi: Viva Books, 2007).

non-violence. We also cannot forget the celebrated Gandhians like Nelson Mandela, Robert Hart and Bernard Lefayette and scores of others whose list may run into hundreds of names.

As we have discussed, when we come to Vandana Shiva's concept of earth democracy we can see that it is an organic elaboration and deepening of Gandhi's ideal of Swaraj. In order to aim to achieve earth democracy as decentred democracy and coexistence, Vandana Shiva grounds the ideal of Swaraj into the sovereignty of the world of the ordinary men and women, which challenges the state of ecological slavery. It ultimately affects our day to day lives to economic lives and eventually the whole of existence.

Vandana Shiva's ecological democracy as earth democracy endorses a grass-root level model of Gandhi's 'Swaraj, Sarvodaya and Satyagraha'. The concepts such as earth economy based on economic democracy and living economy engenders local economies supported by food security. As we have seen earth economy based on economic democracy is managed by an enlightened and liberated notion of gender equality. It leads to living democracy enriched with living knowledge which balances rights with responsibilities and with an idea of earth citizenship. Earth citizenship as a category of earth democracy supports and sustains a more spontaneous and just principle of coexistence.

# Gandhi in the Tropics: Climate, Disease and Medicine

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*Bikash Sarma*

The paper draws on a historiography of medicine in India and Gandhi's engagement with it through a process of qualitative denunciation and qualitative appreciation. To position western medicine in the context of India requires an elaborate historiography underlining a series of knowledge production about the land the colonizer encountered and their constantly changing perception about the landscape, climate, disease and the natives at the contact zone. The paper would attempt to locate the emergence of the discourse on medicine within these changing perceptions of the colonizer and to position Gandhi within this emerging discourse.

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**Key words:** Gandhi, medicine, tropics, climate, disease.

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## Introduction

One way to approach colonial encounter is to understand it as a process of representations and geographical imaginations. These representations and imaginations were informed by a form 'knowing' of the colonizer – what is already known and what was experienced and seen at these contact zones. The "contact zones" as Mary Louise Pratt argues are "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other."<sup>1</sup> These were also spaces of asymmetrical exchanges between the colonizer and the colonized and it is here the presumed differences between the west and the rest became manifested in different forms.

This mode of producing difference was possible through a series of representations enacted by numerous agents of the colonial state. Colonial expeditions produced the real as, to borrow from Heidegger, "a standing reserve". The colonial descriptions were an act of ordering "to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to

<sup>1</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, (London: Routledge, 1992), 4.

stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering."<sup>2</sup> The modern subject of the west is thought to have 'emancipated' herself from mysterious nature and is entrusted to discover the real through multiple 'rational' practices and performances. "Enframing" enables a discourse of domination of the 'errant universe' of the colonized – both humans and non-humans clubbed together by placing them at the bottom of the hierarchy. Modern enframing of nature and colonial representations both have the same terminus and are "coercive, invasive, appropriative...it makes nature available for inspection, codification, calculation, and regulation."<sup>3</sup> Enframing not only enabled a domination of the *unruly* nature but also the *savage child* of this unruly nature. For the Europeans, their cultural practices transcended the nature and its caprice creating a chronological gap between nature and culture. And all other societies are conditioned by nature alone – 'savages' or the 'children of mother earth'.

This colonial modernity as expressed through subjugation of nature that calls for destroying and separating the unity of human and non-humans. With the destruction of the unity and as a result of the binary created between humans and non-humans an unprecedented violence is unleashed against this nature. Nature's resources were "ruthlessly exploited and its rhythm and balance disturbed, and animals were freely killed or tortured for food, sport, fancy clothes, and medical experiments. In Gandhi's view violence 'oozed from every pore' of modern society,"<sup>4</sup> and gradually became all pervasive in the life of people.

Colonial modernity in India was decidedly a geographical project that created difference and a desire to order these produced

<sup>2</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1954), 17.

<sup>3</sup> Derek Gregory, "Post (colonialism) and the Production of Nature", in N. Castree and B. Barun (ed.) *Social Nature: Theory, Practice, and Politics*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy: A Critical Examination*, (London: Palgrave, 1989), 25.

differences. Every aspect of climate, vegetation, land, water, and the characteristics of the natives played a role in the geographical project of creating an “antipodal division”<sup>5</sup> of the world between England and the *Tropics*. Meteorological understanding of disease in the nineteenth century became an extension of this geographical project. The epidemiological figured prominently within this colonial project of medicine and sanitation.

The idea of India started with statements of “idealization.” Exuberant tropical nature and primitiveness of its people as a ‘child of mother earth’ gradually transformed into statements about diseases and miasma of tropical jungles and indolence and degeneration of the natives. So the paradise turned into ferocity and degeneration. Stuart Hall summarizes the discursive strategies of othering into the phases of idealization followed by projection of fantasies, failure to recognize and respect difference and to see difference through mode of perception of the west by imposing European categories.<sup>6</sup> A tropic in that sense is a hierarchal positionality of delimiting and demarcating between the East and the West.

Environmental determinism remained a dominant paradigm not only as cause of diseases prevalent but also to ascribe on to the natives as the cause of degeneracy, effeminacy and indolence. Their inability to understand the cause of diseases perpetuated it. This dominant paradigm to understand diseases thought to be caused by ‘tropical’ climate was supplemented by enumerated social and cultural practices of the natives. Along with climate, race, health and medicine formed the core of an assertive idea of imperial expansion and domination and to certain extent hegemony.

The outbreak of a series of epidemics in the nineteenth century further accentuated an epidemiological difference with the tropics.

<sup>5</sup> Harish Naraindas, “Poisons, Putrescence, and the Weather: Genealogy of the Advent of Tropical Medicine”, *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 30,1(1996): 32.

<sup>6</sup> Stuart Hall, “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power”, In *Formations of Modernity*, (Cambridge: Polity Press,1992), 215.

Climate and now epidemics thought to be a threat to the European constitution in the tropics. Not only that, western medicine and science acquired a new meaning in the tropics. It was based on the landscape of disease as well as moral and cultural landscapes. Western medicine and science for the colonizer came as a rescue to *tame* wild tropical nature and also to control epidemic diseases, however, often met with failures in case of the latter. Towards the second half of the nineteenth century a number of discourses proliferated on sanitation, quarantine, hygiene, architecture and a series of movements connected with these 'moral meteorologies'.<sup>7</sup>

This concern of the colonial state was reflected in the rise of medical literature in the nineteenth century and the emergence of a series of medico-topographical surveys that started with Francis Buchanan who was assigned the task in 1807 to conduct a survey in eastern India.<sup>8</sup> In subsequent years this volume of literature increased and these medico-topographical surveys constituted one of the chief sources of knowledge about health, hygiene and disease.

### **Colonized bodies: Gandhi and Medicine**

Gandhi metaphorically represented the 'body politic' under colonialism with that of the human body. Indian body politic has become so weak and diseased to resist foreign rule as that of the human body to resist desires and indulgence that is accentuated by medicine in general and colonial medicine in particular.<sup>9</sup> Gandhi's emphasis on health, sanitation could also be translated as a contestation over the colonized bodies. Gandhi still expressed optimism that the human soul can escape the 'deadly knife' of the surgeons. In a lecture delivered at Ashtanga Ayurveda Vidyalaya in 1925 he said: "Little do they know that soul survives the knife and

<sup>7</sup> Harish Naraiandas, "Poisons, Putrescence and the Weather", *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 30: 1-35.

<sup>8</sup> David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 25.

<sup>9</sup> Parekh Cited in Arnold, *Colonizing Body*, 285.

that the soul is not to be found in any probing of knife, however, deep it may be".<sup>10</sup>

However, Gandhi's engagement with the discourse of different variants of medicine and its effects on the colonized body calls for an understanding of his qualified denunciation and qualified appreciation of the former. The dictum of experience forms the core of Gandhi's apprehension about modernity and medicine both western and indigenous. His experiential thought occupies this liminal space between modern and anti-modern; western medicine and indigenous medicine. This liminal space of his thought in turn is mediated by everyday experiences with a constant flow and of not being trapped by any categorical determinism. Gandhi's understanding of medicine appears to be contradictory but is mutually constitutive. Knowing well aware of these inconsistencies he in a letter to Kalishankar Chakravarti wrote:

Where you find contradictions in my writings, I find nothing but a due fulfillment or elaboration of a previous position. But I am not so much concerned with showing consistency in my writing as with stating that I have given to the readers the truth as I have known at the time of writing.<sup>11</sup>

In a different account he further writes:

I have never made a fetish of consistency. I am a votary of truth and I must say what I feel and think at a given moment on question...<sup>12</sup>

However, this method of approaching medicine in the context of the body is also ethical. Further, a careful reading of Gandhi – underlining this method concerning the discourse on medicine – would enable one to move beyond fixing Gandhi on an either/or category and to understand the divergences and reflexivity conforming to his everyday experiences.

<sup>10</sup> Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. 27, 45.

<sup>11</sup> Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. 59, 55-56.

<sup>12</sup> Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. 65, 62.

Gandhi elaborated modern system with a metaphor of Upas tree in *Hind Swaraj*, as he contends:

Its branches are by parasitical professions, including those, of law and medicine...Immorality is the root of the tree...I was at time a great lover of medical profession. It was my intention to become a great doctor for the sake of the country. I no longer hold that opinion. I now understand why the medicine men among us have not occupied a very honourable status.<sup>13</sup>

His change of opinion about the medical profession can be traced to an intervention by his family. That happened after his matriculation (1887) when Mavji Dave, an old friend and adviser to the Gandhi family was in discussion with Gandhi's mother and brother about his career, among other things. Mavji Dave wanted Gandhi to be sent off to England to pursue his professional studies. Gandhi immediately 'jumped at the proposal' and expressed his desire to pursue a medical profession but his brother interrupted and said:

Father never liked it. He had you in mind when he said that we Vaishnavas should have nothing to do with dissection of dead bodies.<sup>14</sup>

In fact Mavji insisted that Gandhi should become a barrister as a medical degree would not make him a Diwan.<sup>15</sup>

The discussion from the Gandhi family also reflects on the professional career opportunities as the educated Indians perceived in the nineteenth century colonial India. As David Arnold argues:

<sup>13</sup> Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, (New Delhi: Rajpal Publications, 2009), 77.

<sup>14</sup> Gandhi, *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truths*, (New Delhi: Fingerprint Publishing, 2009), 47.

<sup>15</sup> Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, 47.

Medicine had been far less successful in this regard than the legal profession which, with a minimum of state sponsorship and regulation, had flourished like a hothouse plant in the steamily litigious atmosphere of colonial India.<sup>16</sup>

For Gandhi the medical discourse that was already penetrating into Indian society was essentially manifestation of colonialism over the body and the mind. As he articulated:

The English have certainly effectively used the medical profession for holding us. English physicians are known to have used their profession with several Asiatic potentates for political gain.<sup>17</sup>

Medicine by making the body subservient to the self-indulgence and negligence further weakens the mind preventing its escape from the vices that otherwise could have been transcended in its absence. In *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi constantly reminded the reader that the cause of diseases as to be negligence, indulgence and the doctors, medicine and hospitals – as an institution propagates this ‘sin’ of indulgence. Medicine significantly diminishes the prospects for self-reflexivity and traps the body and the mind into a chain of illness and cure. For Gandhi good health meant control over bodily desires as he writes:

Men take less care of their bodies and immorality increases... European doctors are worst of all...They practice vivisection...Most of their medical preparations contain either animal fat or spurious liquors...The fact remains that the doctors induce us to indulge in what we like, and the result is that we have become deprived of self-control and have become effeminate. In these circumstances, we are unfit to serve the country. To study European medicine is to deepen our slavery.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Arnold, *Colonizing Body*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 77.

<sup>18</sup> Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 78-9.

Medical profession for Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj* is a spectacle of immorality run by a group of imposters and a competition for prestige and wealth among the professionals resulting in the impoverishment of humanity.

He further writes:

The population, in its credulity and in the hope of ridding itself of some diseases, allows itself to be cheated. Are not quacks then whom we know, better than the doctors who put on an air of humaneness.<sup>19</sup>

In *An Autobiography* Gandhi reiterated that one way to practice simplicity of life is to gradually de-colonize oneself from medicines. However, this does not qualify to categorize Gandhi as anti-modern but emphasis should be on his 'qualitative' denunciation. He did not altogether reject medicine. There were instances where he in fact acknowledged the help received from doctors to fight occasional illnesses. He writes:

While practicing in Durban, I suffered for sometime from debility and rheumatic inflammation. Dr. P.J. Mehta, who came to see me gave some treatment, and I got well...I kept myself fit with occasional laxatives and well regulated diet. But I could hardly call myself healthy, and always wondered when I should get myself free from the incubus of these laxative medicines.<sup>20</sup>

Subsequently, as an alternative Gandhi drew inspiration from 'No Breakfast Association' in Manchester of not taking the breakfast as that constituted overeating for him and to subsequently return to earth treatment. Gandhi's search for alternative cautiously evaded dichotomy of the west and the east as his learning through experiences were qualitatively drawn from both the contexts on the condition of not letting these experiences to lose self-control. As he contends:

<sup>19</sup> Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 79.

<sup>20</sup> Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, 244.

He who runs to the doctor, *vaidya* or *hakim* for very little ailment, and swallows all kinds of vegetable and mineral drugs, not only curtails his life, but, by becoming the slave of his body instead of remaining its master, loses self-control...<sup>21</sup>

Though Gandhi was influenced by movements and the works mentioned above that rejected conformism to modernity and its universalist tendencies on the one hand, and advocated a 'regression' to nature on the other, he was not hostile to modernity wholeheartedly but was constantly in open dialogue with it. Though these often led to ambivalences but Gandhi thought it to be the way to incorporate one's learning and experiences in the journey for truth. For Gandhi process of learning should be interwoven with the course of life, guided by principles rather than some external authority. One reference point would be his encounter with one Dr. Kanuga in the extreme case of sickness Gandhi was undergoing. He narrates:

Dr. Kanuga came and pleaded with me to take medicine. I declined. He offered to give me an injection. I declined that too. My ignorance about injections was in those days quite ridiculous. I believed that an injection must be some kind of serum. Later I discovered that the injection that the doctor suggested was a vegetable substance, but the discovery was too late to be put to use.<sup>22</sup>

### **Gandhi's dialogue with Medicine and its Variants**

If Gandhi's qualitative denunciation of western medicine rests on its colonization of the mind through colonizing the body his critique of indigenous medicine was based on its supposed anachronism. In the same speech, whereby through the metaphor of deadly knife he expressed his desire to resist the colonization of the soul propagated by western medicine he cautioned the audience about the current state of indigenous medicine:

<sup>21</sup> Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, 245.

<sup>22</sup> Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, 401.

I have hitherto confined my remarks to medicine and surgery in general, but when I come to Ayurvedic and Unani systems, I am filled with greater doubts...There was a time when I used to swear by the Ayurvedic medicine and used to commend it to all my friends, who went in for Western medicine, to go to these Ayurvedic physicians. But I feel sorry to have to own to you that I was deceived and I found that our Ayurvedic and Unani physicians lack sanity. They lack humility. Instead of that I found in them an arrogance that they knew everything, that there was no disease which they could not cure. I found that they believed that the mere feeling of the pulse could enable them to understand whether the patient was suffering from appendicitis or some such other disease. When I found that their diagnosis was false, that it was incomplete in most cases, I felt that it was nothing short of humbug.<sup>23</sup>

Gandhi's submission to the Ashtanga Ayurveda Vidyalaya, Calcutta where he was delivering the speech on the occasion of foundation-stone laying ceremony in 1925 was to improve the soul what he thought to be 'imperishable'. As he spoke:

May this institution take care not merely of the need of the body but of the imperishable soul that resides in the body. May it never be said of this institution that it panders to the basest taste of humanity, that it panders to the basest taste of the youths of Bengal...I know how their fair life is being shaped by the medicines that are poured down their throats by physicians...<sup>24</sup>

As Gandhi understood it, all variants of medicine and its practitioners have not analyzed the mind but emphasized more on the body – the changes occurring to the body as the basis of their diagnosis. As against external remedies Gandhi's concern was prevention of diseases through controlling the mind and senses.

<sup>23</sup> Gandhi, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol 27, (Ahmedabad: Navjivan Trust, 1968), 45.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 45-6.

According to him this method of prevention and discoveries has been long forgotten and the challenge as Gandhi put it is to revive these great discoveries:

If the modern *vaid*s and *hakims* kept in mind the *atman* while examining physical ailments, the body would, I am sure, revive the method of treating the mind rather than apply external remedies. Instead of polluting the body by injecting all sorts of serums, which are in fact forms of infection, they would be ready to explain natural laws...<sup>25</sup>

*Vaid*s themselves have to 'acquire honesty of purpose' and discover methods and medicines to earn merits – spiritual rather and material. However, qualitatively appreciating the 'research spirit' of the west but at the same time denouncing the greed western medicine is perpetuating writes:

Today the *vaid*s are intent on demanding a rupee for service worth a pie; they have nothing of the research spirit of the West, but imitate the West's greed for money, learn by rote old verses and dispense medicines and add to the number of diseases instead of reducing it.<sup>26</sup>

## Conclusion

Gandhi's views on medicine should be understood as a part of the discourse on modernity and asymmetrical relation between the east and the west that transpired at the contact zone. It came as a reaction to the genealogy of colonial medicine, moral hygiene, and population enumeration and control. Gandhi's experientialist understanding on medicine is rooted in the discourse on colonialism and nationalism and the allegory of the mind and body dualism. As the paper argues control

<sup>25</sup> Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. 24, 324.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 544.

over the body and mind via the discourse on medicine is experienced and expressed as the site of contestation between the colonizer and the colonized.

# The Violence of Non-violence: Reading Nirad C Chaudhuri Rereading Gandhi

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Jaydeep Chakrabarty

The paper tries to explore the conceptuality of Gandhi's non-violence through its binary opposite violence. The conceptuality of the opposition to their opposites in Gandhi is undertaken in the paper through a reading of Nirad C Chaudhuri's critique of Gandhi and Gandhism, and taking cue from Jacques Derrida, John Milton and Rabindranath Tagore's conceptuality of binary opposites. However, this introspection is not at the cost of idiosyncrasy and negation of Gandhi's core ideology but to make the concept of non-violence express its meaning through its binary opposite.

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**Keywords:** Non-violence, Ahimsa, Silencing, Hinduism, Gita.

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## Introduction: Reading the conceptuality of binary opposites

*Gandhi's non-violence was conceived in London from Tolstoy's interpretation of the New Testament. Of course, he already had Vaishnava non-violence in him, but that was transformed into a new attitude during his three years' stay in England. (Nirad C Chaudhuri Autobiography)*

It may appear idiosyncratic, or even idiotic, to entitle a paper on Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi who is famous for his dedication to the ideas and ideals of truth and non-violence in such a way that it seems to negate his core ideology itself. But a deeper insight would reveal, it is argued here, that this is not so. This is primarily because of the fact that words are not meaningful in themselves so much as they are in opposition to their opposites—especially binary opposites. This idea has been famously made available in the second half of the twentieth century by Jacques Derrida, although the concept dates back to the *sat* and *asat* of the Vedic imaginary and *apoha* of the Buddhist tradition—to limit the instances within India as of now. In fact, Derrida has argued that the attempt to give any

definitive meaning to a sign, especially a contemporary one, is an act of violence in itself. To quote Derrida: "To dream of reducing it to a sign of the times is to dream of violence".<sup>1</sup>

I am further going to refer to two significant authors from literature in this connection which would further validate the strategy of attempting to know non-violence through violence. One is John Milton, the writer of arguably the only English epic worth that name. In his equally well-known advocacy of the writer's freedom titled *Areopagitica*, Milton categorically states that there is no other way to know "good" or God without knowledge of the evil. The other is Rabindranath Tagore who aphoristically put it thus: If you close your doors to stop falsehood at the gate, truth too is unable to enter ("Dvar bandha kore diye bhramtare rukhi/Satya bole ami tobe kotha diye dhuki"). All these visibly justify the proposition that a more comprehensive analysis of non-violence must entail an analysis of the violence that it silences, and also the violent way it is done. This paper seeks to explore the violent faces of the Gandhian non-violence with special focus on the critique of Gandhi and Gandhism offered by the famous unknown Indian Nirad C Chauduri. This will also occasionally refer to relevant critiques of Gandhism by his prominent contemporaries. The paper is expected to inundate further discussion in this light bringing in the critiques of Gandhi his other prominent contemporaries. By critiques, however, I don't refer to the detractors of Gandhi as such, but only those who have been involved in complex socio-political and cultural dialogues with him in spite of their differences. I have the deepest regards for Gandhi and Gandhism, but as a democratic thinker, I believe other views too should be engaged with and contemplated upon. That is the non-violence or *ahimsa* at the level of ideas.

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*. 1967. Trans. Alan Bass, (London: Routledge, 2001), 2.

### Nirad C's introspection of Gandhi

There hasn't been much engaged research on Nirad C Chaudhuri's assessment of Gandhi which spreads across the length and breadth of Chaudhuri's works. This could be primarily due to the fact that Nirad C's credentials suffered a lot in India due to his being labelled as an imperialist, which of course is not in sync with the letter and spirit of his complete oeuvre. Interestingly, Nirad C, it may be noted, was one of the few scholars who was alive up to the last year of the twentieth century who also has had close connection with Gandhi and Nehru in person and in his capacity as the Private Secretary of Sarat Chandra Bose. (Details of this period have been minutely recorded in the pages of Chaudhuri's *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!*, republished later as *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, Part II.) Sarat Chandra Bose, the elder brother of Subhash Chandra Bose, was, for a long period of time, the undisputed leader of Bengal Congress, to whose residence cum office Gandhi, Nehru and other senior national leaders of Congress were frequent visitors. Lest one jumps into the conclusion that Nirad C's criticism of Gandhi results from his love of Subhash Bose with whom he would identify more readily as a Bengali, I want to make it very clear that Nirad C was equally, or even more dismissive of Subhash as the ideal political leader whom he found lacking not in love for and dedication to India, but in political and strategic understanding.

An associated misconception popularised by partial reading and hasty conclusion is that Nirad C stated Gandhi to be a thorough hypocrite. This is far from being true. In actuality, Nirad C has frequently forged a distinction between Gandhi's personal commitments and political strategies. So far as the pursuit of truth, God and *ahimsa* in his personal life is concerned, Nirad C finds Gandhi as great as any Saint of the highest order. However, in his political strategies, Nirad C finds Gandhi to be a highly manipulative man of strategy who left no stone unturned to achieve what he wanted to achieve, and the way he wanted it; albeit he may have turned the stones in a "non violent, Vaishnavite" way (Nirad C, *Shatavarshiki*).

A glaring instance of what Nirad C wants to suggest by killing in the “non violent, Vaishnavite” way is the removal of Subhash Bose from the INC. Nirad C argues:

So far as Gandhi’s political equations are concerned, he was nothing more than a typical Gujarati *bania* (businessman). He could correctly calculate prospective gains and losses of any given situation, personal or political, way ahead of others. Gandhi took no political decision emotionally. Even his intolerance of the British was always profit based. If he could foresee that any British would be of help or use to him in future, Gandhi used to befriend him in no time. He showed this talent of befriending the profitable person in preferring Jawaharlal over Subhash. The preference given to Jawaharlal benefitted him, Subhash would have only brought about losses for him.<sup>2</sup>

The fiery speeches, zealous organisation and unstinted patriotism of Subhash Bose made him the undisputed leader and spokesperson of the Indian National Congress at one point of time. Unfortunately, as is well known, in spite of his love and respect for Gandhi (Subhash was the first one to address Gandhi as *Rashtrapita* or Father of the Nation); Subhash had no faith in Gandhi’s ideas and ideals of passive-resistance based on *ahimsa*. With the second world war looming large in the background, Subhash thought it would be the opportune moment to threaten the British government to leave India within six months, failing which they should face dire consequences. However, this idea didn’t find favour with Gandhi. Consequently, in the Congress Presidential Election of 1939 held at Tripuri, Gandhi posited Pattabhi Sitaramaiya as his chosen candidate against Subhash Chandra Bose. Subhash defeated Sitaramaiya in the election, which Gandhi took as a personal defeat: his words on this occasion “Pattavi Sitaramaiya’s defeat is my defeat”<sup>3</sup> have become proverbial. This came as a heavy blow to

<sup>2</sup> Nirad C Chaudhuri, *Niradchandra Chaudhuri Shatavarshiki Sankalan: An omnibus of Bengali writings of Nirad C Chaudhuri on account of the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of the author*, (Kolkata: Mitra and Ghosh, 2012), 559.

<sup>3</sup> Poddar, Arabinda, *The Bewildered Leader: M K Gandhi*, (Trans. Sujata Ghosh. Xlibris Publishing, 2013), 28.

Subhash which finally led him to leave Congress and form a political group of his own. Some commentators have read this as the direct expression of Gandhi as indicative of his personal insecurities about the Congress leadership, while others have attempted to interpret it as symptomatic of Gandhi's dedication to the causes of *ahimsa*. Irrespective of the difference of interpretations, this is a case in point which amply illustrates the "violence of non-violence," which is not accommodative of other views and opinions. This, in other words, is an instance that signals at the basic problematic of the Gandhian formulation of *ahimsa* or non-violence: is it an absolute non-violence, which is an end in itself; or a strategy to counter imperialism and the like?

A further and more deeply problematic issue is Chaudhuri's argument regarding the irreconcilability of the Gandhian non-violence and the philosophy of the *Bhagavad-Gita* – also known as the *Gita* – which has been the most representative and most widely accepted Hindu Scripture since the 8th century. Gandhi himself has documented his unstinted dedication to this book on a number of occasions. In fact, there are two commentaries on the *Gita* by Gandhi himself. The larger and the more well known one is called "Gandhi Bhashya" (Bhashya means commentary in Sanskrit and its descendant languages) and is generally published in English under the title *The Bhagavad-Gita according to Gandhi*. Earlier it was called *The Gospel of Selfless Action*. There is a shorter commentary named *Discourses on the Gita*, which recasts the essentials of the larger version without going into the analogical and analytical details. In both the versions, Gandhi's basic contention is that the *Gita* is a, or the, gospel of *ahimsa* or non-violence. This is diametrically opposite to the popular and scholarly views which identify the *Gita* as an exhortation for just war or *dharmayuddha*. As the *Gita* forms part of the Epic *Mahabharata*, the course of action in the epic after the discourse seems not to be supporting the view of Gandhi. Considering all these arguments and evidences, Nirad C reads the spirit of the *Gita* to have nothing much to do with the Gandhian non-violence:

There was a misconception among the educated Indians that Mahatma Gandhi's Philosophy of non-violence has its origins in the *Gita*. No misconception and fallacious idea greater than this... Mahatmaji used the *Gita* to establish his ideology because he knew that the Hindus do not accept anything unless they are convinced that it is sanctified by or is at least mentioned in their *sastras* or scriptures. However, I don't want to comment on whether it was a pure political strategy on the part of Gandhi or he himself genuinely believed that the *Gita* was a scripture of non-violence. I will just introduce the reader to what is there in the *Gita* regarding non-violence, and then they can judge for themselves.<sup>4</sup> (Author's translation)

Chaudhuri goes on to stake that out of the 700 *slokas* or verses that are there in the *Gita*, only 4 *slokas* mention: 10/5, 13/7, 16/2, 17/14. In that too, there is no explanation or definition of the term, which signifies that it was too well known to the target readers and audiences of the epic. To quote a little more from Nirad C in this regard:

The *ahimsa* that the *Gita* speaks of is purely a matter of a very personal ethical conduct: it mandates not to harm others being driven by desire, lust and anger; or motivated by purely selfish interests. *This does not at all imply non-killing* (emphasis added). Unlike the Buddhist and the Jain scriptures which clearly and unambiguously mandate their votaries to abstain from killing, there are no such guidelines or commands in the Hindu Shastras. Hindu Sastras sanctify animal sacrifice, which include human sacrifice too. (The *Shatapath Brahmana* says: Sa etan pancha pashun apashyan—purusham, Ashvam, Gam, Abhim, Ajam—Purusham prathamam alabhate, purushohi prathamah pashunam.") Consequently, the prohibition of killing and war cannot be part of Hinduism. Rather, fighting and killing for the rights of the individual and his state, which may eventually include the killing of friends and relatives,

<sup>4</sup> Nirad C Chaudhuri, *Niradchandra Chaudhuri Shatavarshiki Sankalan: An omnibus of Bengali writings of Nirad C Chaudhuri on account of the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of the author*, (Kolkata: Mitra and Ghosh, 2012), 546.

is sanctified by all Hindu scriptures, including the *Gita*.<sup>5</sup> (Author's translation)

In his highly controversial *Autobiography of An Unknown Indian*, Part-II (originally published as *thy Hand, Great Anarch!*), Nirad C has further traced Gandhi's allegedly fallacious interpretation of the *Gita* and other Hindu scriptures to Gandhi's unfamiliarity with what may be provisionally called the "Higher Hinduism." This comprises the serene poetry and intricate philosophy of the Vedas, Upanishads, the Six Darshanas, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata (the original Sanskrit epics.) As is well known, a familiarity with all these is a must for anyone who would like to be known as an advocate or even practitioner of *sashtric* or classical, canonical Hinduism. This tradition was of course distributed among the three upper castes of Hindus – *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas* and *Vaishyas*; though by the time of Gandhi's advent these texts were made available to each and all, at least in principle, by the reformers like Swami Dayananda and Swami Vivekananda on the one hand, and the Orientalist scholars William Jones and Friedrich Max Müller. Also, hailing from the *Vaishya* community, Gandhi had traditionally bestowed rights on these scriptures. However, he was more drawn to the popular Hinduism that was mainly based on the *Puranas* and was primarily devotional in nature. This form of Hinduism was primarily a product of the medieval Bhakti Movement which can be traced back to Sri Ramanujan (1017-1137). During the medieval times, it had become almost a pan-Indian movement having Saints and poets like Nanak, Kabir, Chainya, Tukaram, Shankardev and Meera Bai across the length and breadth of India. In Gujarat, the leading representative of the Bhakti movement was Narsi Mehta who had composed the very famous and popular song which was close to Gandhi's heart, namely "Vaishnava jana to teni kahiye je." However, this kind of popular Hinduism or Neo-Vaishnavite

<sup>5</sup> Nirad C Chaudhuri, *Niradchandra Chaudhuri Shatavarshiki Sankalan: An omnibus of Bengali writings of Nirad C Chaudhuri on account of the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of the author*, (Kolkata: Mitra and Ghosh, 2012), 546.

Hinduism espoused by Gandhi does not find favour from Nirad C Chaudhuri. It is not only interesting but even imperative to read what Nirad C. has to say in this regard:

Like the career envisaged for Gandhi, his moral and religious development was also very traditional. The Hinduism in which he was brought up, and quite naturally brought up as a member of the Bania or trading caste, was the popular Hinduism created and preached by the popular prophets of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, especially by those of the Vaishnava persuasion, without any affiliation to the higher forms of Hinduism. The religious life of those who belonged to these sects was very simple - it was quietist and, above all, passive in its attitudes. There was nothing in it of the sophistication, complexity, and power of the higher Brahmanic Hinduism. In spite of all that has been said about Gandhi's reverence for the *Upanishads* or the *Gita*, there was nothing in his religious sentiment which could be traced to those ancient texts. If he had known much of them he could not have made the crude *Ram-Dhun*, the intoning of a hymn to Rama, his prayer. The particular form of Hinduism which was Gandhi's could have made him a Puran Bhagat at the end of his life if it had run the course intended for him. But that could never have made him what he became - a Hindu holy man concerned with political and moral evils of a colossal magnitude.<sup>6</sup>

In fact, what Nirad C Chaudhuri has staked here is well known to all Hindus who are aware of their cultural and religious heritage. The kind of non-violence that Gandhi wanted to instil among the Indians, the majority of whom were Hindus, was not as per the indigenous and authentic Hindu traditions. Hinduism basically thrives on the principle of plurality – no one shoe fits all feet. Hence, duties and vows have been distributed among especially among four *varnas* and four *ashramas* or stages of life. Further, so far as dharma means ways of worship, it has three primary sects – that is *Shaiva*, *Shakta* and *Vaishnava* – and many others. It should be made clear at

<sup>6</sup> Nirad C Chaudhuri, *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, Part II, (Mumbai: Jaico, 2008), 44.

this point that I am writing neither in support of *Varnashram Dharma* (Gandhi though he was a defender of it), nor opposing non-violence as a significant approach to life. What I am trying to foreground is the difficulty in reconciling the Gandhian non-violence with the overall scheme of things in Hinduism. Having said this, one may justly observe that the kind of *ahimsa* Gandhi was preaching as a *sanatan* value would only be applicable to Brahmins on the one hand, and *Vaishnavas* and some *Shaivaites* on the other, within the received tradition. (Even the rise of vegetarianism among Brahmins and some *Vaishnavas* in the medieval period has been attributed to the appropriation of Jain and Buddhist values within Hinduism, whereby the spread of the latter two religions in India was kept in check. Persons as diverse as Swami Vivekananda and Dr B R Ambedkar have testified to this). For the other castes, non-violence is not only non-mandatory, but it is essential for the *Kshatriya* caste or *varna*, whose prime identity was linked with violent wars, albeit they were “just wars.” Ashis Nandy, the justly famous and erudite Indian intellectual, has elaborated on the threats to the *Kshatriya* that the Gandhian values posed:

To the extent that Gandhi rejected the *Kshatriya* identity by his constant emphasis on pacifism and self-control, he posed a threat to the warrior cultures of India. In addition, by constantly stressing the feminine, nurturing, non-violent aspects of men’s personality, he challenged the *Kshatriya* identity....<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusion

It is quite clear that Gandhi was forcing an interpretation not only to a key text of Hinduism, but indeed to the entire gamut of Hindu cultural traditions which was not in sync with the received tradition to “forge the consciousness of his race,” to use a very famous Joycean phrase. To the extent that he was never ready to compromise with or enter into a dialogue about possible and existing alternative to

<sup>7</sup> Nandy, Ashis, *At the Edge of Psychology: Essays in Politics and Culture*, (New Delhi: Oxford,1980), 78.

what he thought to be the inevitability of *ahimsa* or non-violence, he himself used what may be called at hindsight an “epistemic violence.” The case of the removal of Subhash Basu and a violently non-violent misreading of the *Gita* amply illustrate what is at stake in the title of this paper. Another important point of Nirad C’s critique of Gandhi is the latter’s alleged rejection of what Chaudhuri calls “the regenerative side of the British Imperialism.” Other scholars and researchers may take this lead for explorations and further explorations.

# Freedom, Authority and Care as Moral Postulates: Reexamining Gandhi's Proposal for Ethical Reconstruction

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*Subhra Nag*

This paper aims at addressing the points of emphasis laid down by Gandhi in the dispersed frame of his ethical thoughts. Our venture tries to draw the scattered elements of Gandhi's moral thought and ideas in a single frame of analysis and attempts to reflect on the intertwined aspects of them for exploring the potential of an alternative moral stance. Our task is two-fold then: developing a discourse on Gandhi's understanding of ethics, and going beyond the same to examine its significance in a broader context.

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**Key words:** Freedom, authority, care, ethical reconstruction.

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## Prologue

Gandhi is known well to be one such personage whose life and activities led people, both ordinary and scholarly, to take interest in him for multiple reasons. If his cherished goals are found to be inviting of appreciations on different counts, a good number of critiques took interest in highlighting upon the personal limitations of Gandhi which obstructed him to act on his own prescribed norms. To be honest, an act of easy ascertainment of Gandhi's life-philosophy seems to be difficult enough because of the *prima facie* simplicity of his thought and ideas on the one hand and the toughness realized in their application to the real life situations on the other. Much of the contemporary scholarship developed on Gandhi has taken up the task of unearthing the foundational roots of Gandhi's religious cum political ideas and ideals. In order to grasp the crux of Gandhi's life-philosophy it is desirable that his beliefs and convictions are given both a holistic and an impartial treatment to the extent possible. There is no doubt that the vast spectrum of the life experiences of Gandhi and his envisioned goals are continuing to provide the researchers with ample scope for developing fresh readings of him.

Plenty of those readings intend not only to explore the historical Gandhi but also to map the relevance and implications of Gandhi's thoughts and ideas in a broader global context. The present concern of ours shall form a part of the second trajectory.

Admittedly, Gandhi has played an exemplary role in the formative stage of Indian Polity. Notwithstanding the contentious nature of Gandhi's various personal and the political moves his recommendation for practicing the values non-violence and also love in all ordinary spheres of human life could earn wide acceptability among the peace lovers and the masses in a like manner. Gandhi makes the pursuits of peace and harmony dependent on the culturing of those values that enhance the level of mutual respect and reciprocity in human relations. This particular recommendation of Gandhi could easily obtain global prominence since least alternatives are available with human kind for reaching at the said goal. The inalienability of the value/virtue of non-violence in human condition for a peaceful and harmonious co-existence is, therefore, ascertained beyond doubt. But while the thesis goes uncontested in principle doubts are expressed in various corners in respect of the kind and the extent of its implementation.

This paper aims at addressing the points of emphasis laid down by Gandhi in the dispersed frame of his ethical thoughts. Since Gandhi never attempted to theorize the problematic(s) of moral situations, quite obviously, developing any systemic discourse in this regard would not form a part of his personal cum political agenda. Nevertheless Gandhi was not lacking in clarity in devising necessary *decision procedure*, which helps in outlining the practical aims of his moral project. In our view, an analysis of the rudimentary state of affairs that has contributed to the construal of the edifice of Gandhi's moral thought shall provide us with a tacit understanding of the theoretical base of his project too. Our venture tries to draw the scattered elements of Gandhi's moral thought and ideas in a single frame of analysis and attempts to reflect on the intertwined aspects of them for exploring the potential of an alternative moral

stance. Analyzing the viability of the application of the same in a global context also becomes due on our part. As a strategy to do justice to the present concern, we would like to comprehend and evaluate Gandhi's proposed scheme stretching it beyond the level of his personal bias or frailties. Hence, the success and failure of Gandhi in person will not much count to us. In a Popperian<sup>1</sup> way we would like to see Gandhi's ideas as part of the 'World 3' and hence as independent of the process of the subjective conditioning of him (as the author/creator of the same). This is required for undertaking an objective enquiry into the matter. Our task is two-fold then: developing a discourse on Gandhi's understanding of ethics, and going beyond the same to examine its significance in a broader context.

### **Edifice of Morality in Gandhi's Understanding**

Looking back and drawing from those cultural, religious or secular belief systems that propagated the philosophy of love, care and non-violence, down the time line of history, have always been a highly rewarding job for the posterity. While bringing the eastern life tradition under the purview of discussion one can take obvious note of the fact that Gandhi is in no way the first thinker to pioneer the practicing values of non-violence, love or compassion in Indian context. In the classical Jaina and the Buddhist traditions such values were made the centre of ethical pursuits centuries back. Even then one finds good reason to read Gandhi because of the significant contribution to the contemporary discourse of non-violence on his part. Gandhi's insistence for practicing non-violence in all ordinary spheres of life and in politics particularly posits a demand for qualitative transformation of the personal and the political self. This attempt of him for setting the values of love and non-violence beyond their usual spiritual and moral ambit has created the occasion for delving deep into serious discussions. A significant

<sup>1</sup> Karl Popper, *Three Worlds*, The Tanner Lecture on Human Values, Delivered at the University of Michigan, April 17, 1978.

part of the contemporary debates on Gandhi primarily centers round the questions of viability and mechanism for materialization of Gandhi's specific agenda for so-called *spiritualization of politics*.

Gandhi believes that cultivation of a moral character is mandatory for causing individual and social transformation. Gandhi's understanding of ethics begins by positing the virtues of non-violence along with self-abstinence, non-possession and the like as cardinal virtues of a human being and urges upon their practice at different spheres of human existence. Though all the virtues are equally emphasized by Gandhi – yet in the order of priority he places non-violence as the first one. Love, which seems to be co-adjacent with non-violence, though supreme as value, does not form a part of this list of virtues for him since Gandhi considers love to be the law of life. In *The Gospel of Love*<sup>2</sup> Gandhi writes: "I believe in the sovereign rule of the Law of Love which makes no distinctions" (*Harijan*. 25-5-1947, p. 165). In the same vein he continues:

I cannot claim this as a special virtue, as it is in my very nature, rather than a result of any effort on my part, whereas in the case of AHIMSA (non-violence), BRAHMACHARYA (celibacy), APARIGRAHA (non-possession) and other cardinal virtues, I am fully conscious of a continuous striving for their cultivation.<sup>3</sup>

For Gandhi, therefore, love is more basic to and precedes non-violence. Whatever be the cardinal virtues of human life, the pursuit for the same on the part of a human individual seems to depend on the fulfillment of certain basic conditions. These conditions serve as pre-requisites to the choice of any moral course of actions – technically called – they are the moral postulates. In respect of Gandhi's ethics it becomes pertinent to ask: what could be the moral postulates in Gandhi's devised scheme then? Analysis of a moral situation where an individual self resolves to act on the principles of non-violence and the like reveals that the subject concerned can do so provided that finds itself *free* to act so, has the *authority* to give

<sup>2</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *The Gospel of Love, The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*. <http://www.mkgandhi.org/momgandhi/chap 88.htm>

<sup>3</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, 204.

expressions to one's freedom, and has a loving/*caring concern* for the so-called *others*. Undertaking any course of action in compliance with the moral principles would require an operational frame of *freedom, authority* and *care/love* trio. As per our observation these three have served as the core presumptions of morality in Gandhi's thought frame basing on which Gandhi tries to formulate his agenda for an overall social, political and economic transformation. Whatever values or moral tactics Gandhi has devised as the practicing code for a citizen of a moral polity like *satyagraha* or passive resistance etc., have derived their sanctions from the three postulates as referred above. While the first two (freedom and authority) are crucial to the constitution of a moral agency, the last one (i.e., care/love) in addition to its constitutive role also offers a characterizing feature to the moral self and defines/sets the limits of a person's obligations towards humanity and the cosmos at large.

Gandhi's understanding of ethics depicts a point of departure from the orthodox conventional understanding of the same. It bears a non-conventional nuance in evolving an inclusionary frame. We have identified the unique features of Gandhi's ethics in its upheld presumptions and in the adopted approach to follow a particular decision procedure. Accommodation of those sets of values and virtues, which are still treated to be feminine in a masculine tradition and left primarily for the pursuits of women, specifies this point of departure in Gandhi's scheme. We hold this view while having the following considerations before us --- the five identified spheres where ethics of Gandhi can claim its maiden status while depicting its affinity with feminist ethics. Gandhi's ethics portrays its novelty:

- In emphasizing a care ethical perspective - exhibited in terms of an empathic concern (Gandhi preferred to use the word love and *sympathy* instead of *empathy* to implicate the same nuance). The faculty of care taken either as a disposition or a virtue is well capable of accommodating non-violence and other modes of self control. In addition to which Gandhi's usage (of care perspective) covers the elements of trust, respect and tolerance too.

- In postulating a relational self as the subject or agent of moral actions that finds itself operative in an inter-personal set up of mutuality and interdependence,
- In choosing the *kind of authority* to be exercised by the moral agency – the *kind* to be exercised *with* or to come from *within* as distinguished from the *authority of domination* or *authority over*.
- In tracing the root of politics in morality implicating in the construal of a moral self vis-à-vis the formation of a moral polity running together.
- The compliance with the above-mentioned four conditions would entail that neither truth nor knowledge can be given an impersonal or context independent treatment in Gandhi. Truth shall, therefore, be personalized and derived through a desirable level of human connectivity and interdependence mediated through love and non-violence. As he considers truth as the end and non-violence as the means. And speaking on non-violence Gandhi often asserts it to be a kind of infinite love. A moral agent though begins with the exercise of a personal loving relationship yet is capable of stretching it up to the level of infinity through conscious pursuits.

In this venture of ours we have no specific intention as such of digging out any feminist agenda in Gandhi. There are visible points of disagreement on various grounds on Gandhi from the feminist thinkers. Gandhi seems to have sustained lot of puritanical beliefs in respect of woman, sexuality, marital relation, reproductive functions and the like. Taking into due cognizance the biased stance upheld by Gandhi in outlining women's role in men's life, society and the state, we still wish to contend that the core idea and the points of emphasis in Gandhi's moral and political philosophy can find out a closest counterpart in the contemporary discourse of care ethics. Relating care to public/social policy constitutes one prime agenda in care ethics. In Gandhi the same prescription is issued for materializing a participatory democracy. Moreover, his confidence

upon women's strength in working out a non-violent mode of the individual and the collective existence is an indicator of Gandhi's post-conventional attempt for moral reconstruction. What becomes most urgent in Gandhi's proposal is to relate ethics at the personal level to that at the political and the global levels – a pursuit equally targeted by the second generation care ethicists like Joan Tronto, Selma Sevenhuijsen, Michael Slote among others.

### **Personal as the Political and the Global: Swaraj, Freedom and Authority**

Gandhi initially begins with the concept of *Swaraj* and then substantiates the notion with a far more enriching nuance of it by calling it *Poorna Swaraj* as the goal for India's independence movement. The term *Swaraj* meaning self-rule or self-government is known to have an indigenous root. As is known, to give independence a common Indian coinage Gandhi brings the concept in use. *Swaraj* is named so because it is envisioned as a state of civil and political existence which is free from exploitation and domination by the others or the foreign rule. But Gandhi wishes to enrich the prevalent nuance of the concept of *Swaraj* by stating that it is something more than complete independence. As he says: "My notion of Poorna Swaraj (that is complete self-rule) is not isolated independence but healthy and dignified independence."<sup>4</sup> This independence is, however not exclusive but wholly compatible with interdependence within or without according to Gandhi.<sup>5</sup>

*Swaraj* is viewed as a counter concept of exploitation both at the national/social and the individual levels. It is equally meaningful and extendable in the international contexts too. Gandhi's view on nationalism is worth mentioning here: "Our nationalism can be no peril to other nations in as much as we will exploit none just as we will allow none to exploit us. Through *Swaraj* we would serve the whole world."<sup>6</sup> Gandhi scarcely visualizes isolated independence

<sup>4</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *Young India*, March 1931, 51.

<sup>5</sup> *Constructive Programme*, 1961, 7.

<sup>6</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *Young India*, April 1931, 79.

to be the goal of the world states, rather he argues in favour of voluntary interdependence.<sup>7</sup>

This non-exploitative nature of self-ruling prescribed by Gandhi pleads for the formation of a moral polity where all political agenda shall have to merge with the moral. There is another important dimension of *Swaraj* which finds expression in resisting the abusive nature of authority coming from external forces. Gandhi opines: "Real Swaraj will come not by acquisition of authority by a few, but by acquisition of the all to resist authority when it is abused. In other words, Swaraj is to be attained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority."<sup>8</sup>

Acquisition of *Swaraj* as freedom, as a 'liberatory' and self regulatory principle shall require to be based on the acquisition of a moral authority too that comes from within. This authority must have the strength to dissipate self-other distinctions and shall stand against all discriminatory practices. Gandhi reiterates the idea that attainment of *Swaraj* never closes down at any still point. On the contrary it continues to provide fresh engagements to people for bringing their fellow-beings within its contour – who are still lagging behind – socially, economically, politically, or culturally marginalized sections.

*Swaraj* is viewed by Gandhi not as a mere political goal to free the nation from foreign ruling. It bears clear prescriptions for individual morality. In answering the question what is moral action? as Gandhi contends, "[a] moral act must be our own act: it must spring from our own will. If we act mechanically, there is no moral content in our act".<sup>9</sup>

Gandhi has added further that for an act to be moral it must be free from fear and compulsion and should not be coercive in

<sup>7</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *Young India*, July 1924, 236.

<sup>8</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *Young India*, January 1925, 41.

<sup>9</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *Ethical Religion*, chapter 5, <http://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/ethical.pdf>

nature. Gandhi reiterated the belief that moral actions discard all oppressions and discriminations. In the section on Social Ideal in *Ethical Religion* Gandhi says:

...we have neither practiced nor known ethical religion so long as we do not feel *sympathy* for every human being. Now we know that higher morality must be comprehensive; it must embrace all men. Considering our relation to mankind, every man has a claim over us, as it is our duty always to serve him. We should act on the assumption that we have no claim on others.<sup>10</sup>

### Women, Non-violence and Care

Gandhi remarkably contends that women have a better proneness to act on the virtue of non-violence in comparison to men. Gandhi was in all likelihood deeply convinced by the inherent moral potency of women to extend love and care for the others in their usual psychic pattern. Gandhi expresses his stance quite categorically in his address "To the Women of India", in *Young India*, 10<sup>th</sup> April, 1930:

In this non-violent warfare, their contribution should be much greater than man's. To call woman the weaker sex is a libel, it is man's injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength, then, indeed, is woman less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior. Has she not greater intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her, man could not be. If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with women.<sup>11</sup>

The statement of Gandhi as expressed above shows that the traits of human which would come to characterize moral power in Gandhi's view are *intuition, self-sacrifice, endurance* and *courage* (to bear with?). The place of reason is not of much importance here. Gandhi does not accord to the view that reason is either the

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, chapter 7.

<sup>11</sup> *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 49, 57. <http://www.gandhiheritageportal.org>

superior or the only faculty leading to human excellence. There is no hesitation, therefore, on our part to argue that the proposed ethics in Gandhi can quite justifiably be termed as *non-rationalist*.

In Bhikhu Parekh's observations we see a confirmation of our contention. As Parekh observes:

Although he took a rather narrow view of reason, he rightly argued that it was not the only valuable or even the highest human faculty. This enabled him to cherish and champion faculties, modes of cognition, forms of knowledge, and styles of reasoning and discourse that are often devalued in a narrowly positivist world-view, and to create a theoretical and moral space for traditions, intuition, collective wisdom, and feeling.<sup>12</sup>

Justifying the matter why Gandhi has taken recourse to a *non-rationalist theory of rationality* Parekh continues:

Gandhi redefined the concept of citizenship, and stressed the ideas of political participation, self-discipline, concern for others, and personal responsibility that are often ignored in liberal writings.<sup>13</sup>

Gandhi's emphasis on 'concern for others' and 'personal responsibility' amidst all the other basic elements of moral life depicts a paradigmatic shift from the right based ethics as outlined in liberal tradition to that of ethics of responsibility. In enormous writings of him Gandhi kept on reiterating the fact that one can follow the course of morality only by ensuring the good and well-being of others. The latter can materialize – provided – one develops a loving or a caring concern for others and is capable of sustaining the belief in inherent goodness of human nature. The faculty of care can take an ethical lift from the psychological state of sustained unwillingness to hurt or harm others. Gandhi clarifies this point in his writings – *I am not Anti-British* – by stating that he would not like to cause harm or hurt people even when they would have enmity or

<sup>12</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi, A Very Short Introduction*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 118-119.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 118.

hatred toward him. He relies on the contrary on the force of love as the force of soul or truth which can conquer the opponents' mind.<sup>14</sup>

Ordinarily viewed love and non-violence can accompany care or follow from care (as a psychic pattern) where as it seems a bit difficult to start with love. It would be difficult for a person to start by loving the entire cosmic community (of which a very small part will be accessed by the moral subject) though it would be comparatively easy for a being to choose a caring pattern for actions in respect of all appropriate moral objects, both visible and invisible. In a given situation care can be very basic to any psyche whereas love and non-violence need culturing. Why or how should I love others or extend my love for the greater community – of which a very meager part is known to me? Even if I do not have any direct answer to the question I may end up by stating that I have no other better option but to choose for it since I see my completion in that. One step ahead would be to choose it voluntarily on moral grounds. Gandhi, however, has taken an exception to this ordinary understanding of care-love dichotomy. Love, according to him, is inherent in human nature and hence, needs no conscious effort for cultivating. That is to say, Gandhi makes love basic to human nature in a manner in which the care ethicists presumes care as basic to woman's psyche. But drawing it beyond the personal limit shall require extra effort.

Gandhi's confidence upon woman's caring nature goes well with the contention that the faculty of care is seen to be prominent in woman's psyche because of her conventional upbringing. This point was well recorded in the moral accounts of the care ethicists like Gilligan<sup>15</sup> (1982) Noddings<sup>16</sup> (1982) and others. Gandhi confirms the same in admitting the fact of woman's proneness to act in a non-violent manner.

<sup>14</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *I am not Anti-British*. <http://www.mkgandhi.org/momgandhi/chap65>.

<sup>15</sup> Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice. Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, (Cambridge,; Harvard University Press, 1982).

<sup>16</sup> Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, (Berkeley: University of CA Press, 1982).

Referring to the matter Parekh says:

“He wondered if and how it was possible to be profoundly at peace with oneself, other human beings, and with one’s natural and social environment, how to live without hurting and harming a single living being and even wishing to do so.”<sup>17</sup>

### **Does Gandhi’s notion of ‘care’ comply with the feminists’ understanding of the same?**

The term ‘care’ has been extensively used by the care ethicists to mean a disposition, a value, a virtue, as a practice and as an overlapping concept of all these nuances taken together. Sara Ruddick has pointed out three distinct but overlapping meanings of care in use of the care ethicists. Care can stand for (i) an ethic defined in opposition to justice; (ii) a kind of labour and (iii) a particular relationship.<sup>18</sup>

Virginia Held’s recommendations in this regard are for taking care as a form of labour which also can be visualized as an ideal. To her, “clusters” of practices and values may go by the name of care.<sup>19</sup> Held specifies the central focus of care on “the compelling moral salience of attending to and meeting the needs of particular others for whom we take responsibility.”<sup>20</sup>

More contemporary attribution to this care discourse with political implication is brought forward by Joan Tronto. Care is understood by her as “species of activity that includes everything we do to maintain, contain and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves and our environment.”<sup>21</sup> Care is taken more in the sense of practice

<sup>17</sup> Parekh, 112.

<sup>18</sup> Sara Ruddick, “Care as Labor and Relationship”, in Haflon and Haber (eds), *Norms and Values: Essays on the work of Virginia Held*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 4.

<sup>19</sup> Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care*, (NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 36-40.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>21</sup> Joan Tronto & Bernice Fischer, “Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring”, in Emily. *Salesian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, X(2019) 2: 95-110

by Tronto. She further identifies four sub-elements of care that can be understood simultaneously as stages, virtuous dispositions, or goals. These sub-elements are: attentiveness, a proclivity to become aware of need; responsibility, a willingness to respond and take care of need; competence, the skill of providing good and successful care and responsiveness, consideration of the position of others as they see it and recognition of the potential for abuse in care. Tronto has addressed cultural variations in her account of care and extends the same beyond family and domestic spheres.<sup>22</sup>

Some scholars attempted to read Gandhi's ideas and activities in the light of the Care Theories. A noteworthy attempt is of Joseph Kupfer's<sup>23</sup> who bases his reading on Richard Attenborough's film *Gandhi* (1982). Kupfer claims that Gandhi is a moral exemplar for whom care was the dominant virtue. Gandhi's pledge for non-violence undoubtedly displays the element of care. A few other characteristic features of care ethics like that of owning responsibility, responsiveness to need, honouring relationship and the factor of mutual dependency are also noticeable in Gandhi's contention. Though Gandhi does not specifically mention care as any distinct virtue or aims at giving it the central place in ethics yet the pattern of morality envisioned by him bears this indication that he pays much value to it. What lies at the core of his philosophy is love, not exactly care. Even then there is good logic to admit care as a postulate in Gandhi's ethics, since the conceptual frame of Gandhian ethics like that of care can corroborate a huge range of human emotions, human sensibility and also ethical injunctions. Gandhi has made room for all these elements in his understanding of morality that premises itself on universal love. Love is an encompassing concept for him from which the values of care, concern, respect, trust and tolerance emanate in a very natural way. Gandhi considers love as a cohesive force that binds not only people but also their families,

K. Abel and Margaret K Nelson (eds) *Circles of Care: work and identity in women's lives*, (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 36-54.

<sup>22</sup> Joan Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethics of Care*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), 126-31.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Kupfer, "Gandhi and the Virtue of Care", *Hypatia* 22, 3(2007): 1-21.

*Salesian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, X(2019) 2: 95-110

communities and nations. Gandhi's ethics prescribes a common decision procedure for both people and the nations – "what is true of families and communities is true of nations."<sup>24</sup> Hence, the way in which implications of care are drawn in the sphere of international politics, in preventing war of violence, and pursuing peace, in a similar fashion Gandhi's strategy to fight back violence at the personal level with love and respect bears implications for national and international politics too.

Kupfer's observation proceeds to situate virtue of care in Gandhi's ethics in the following way: Care as the basis of a coherent public stance shaping Gandhi's political decisions and public policy. Gandhi in person works on the 'motive of benevolence with subsidiary virtues, such as attentiveness and responsiveness'. That the virtue of care is structured by the building blocks of the care perspective: responsibility and need, relationship and mutual dependency, context and narrative, each of which has received due emphasis in Gandhi's life and activity in personal and political spheres.<sup>25</sup>

What we intend to state here is simple enough to admit. Gandhi has understood love as very basic component of human nature which plays a decisive role in fixing human responsibility. Care without love may not be an impossible state of affair in ordinary parlance but Gandhi thinks otherwise. Care for him is a necessary dimension of love. It is grounded in love. Attentiveness, responsiveness to others' needs, owning responsibility and the like are addressed in Gandhi from the perspective of care intertwined with love. What Gandhi in actuality argues for is to base morality on the solid grounding of not simply care but *loving care*.

### **Ethics/Morality as Religion**

True morality according to Gandhi is inclusive of religion. Morality, as initially Gandhi opines, cannot be observed without religion.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, *The Gospel of Love*.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 4-5.

But immediately he goes for altering the utterance by stating that morality should be observed as religion and that there is nothing wrong in calling morality a religion.<sup>26</sup> Drawing the sanctions of morality from religion seems to be nothing exceptional in the tradition of religious ethics. But Gandhi's interpretation of morality as realm of beliefs, knowledge or conduct that can be observed as religion sounds novel. Two things are important to be kept in mind: (i) Gandhi is no believer in any personal God but to him truth is God and (ii) Gandhi follows a faith tradition where confined institutionalized practices carry lesser value. In view of the stated facts it becomes necessary to understand the universal message of humanity that urges upon developing human bonding in a most religious manner. Gandhi's writings in *The Ethical Religion* depict a structured attempt on his part to flourish the idea that religion oblivious of or falling short of morality is no religion at all. What follows is that the ultimate sanction of religion comes from morality and not the other way around.

### Conclusion

All the points we jotted down above are not exhaustive enough but yet indicative of showing that Gandhi's ethics has taken a departure from the conventional ethics. The passage of transition from personal to collective or from private sphere to public sphere of morality follows no utilitarian path here. On the contrary the recommendations come for the adoption of the virtues of ethical approach to moral issues where motive, intention and consequences all equally matter in a globally personalized frame.

<sup>26</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *Ethical Religion*, Chapter 5, [www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/ethical.pdf](http://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/ethical.pdf)  
*Salesian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, X(2019) 2: 95-110



# Decoding *Gandhigiri*: A Genealogy of a 'popular' Gandhi

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Abhijit Ray

This article is about '*Gandhigiri*' - a popular neologism coined by the film '*Lage Raho Munna Bhai*'. It explores the allegorical meaning of the phenomenon. For that purpose, it focuses on Gandhism, Bollywood movies, the content of the film, and certain aspects of contemporary society and culture. As a critic of modernism, many ideas of Gandhi have become more relevant for the post-modernists in the present times. The movie '*Lage Raho Munna Bhai*' 're-engineered' certain ideas of Gandhi without going to the deeper meaning of Gandhian philosophy. These selective aspects of Gandhi got the populist appeal. However, the popularity of '*Gandhigiri*' was short-lived and it was soon distorted in the form of memes on the internet. So the article argues that '*Gandhigiri*' phenomenon is characterised by certain aspects of post-modernism. The article focuses on the different dimensions of '*Gandhigiri*', but ultimately indicates that the ideas of Gandhi and his persona are still relevant in contemporary times.

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**Key words:** Gandhigiri, Post-Modernism, Bollywood, anekantavada, meme.

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## Introduction

Coinage of a popular neologism, a commercial 'Bollywood' movie, and Gandhian ideology are different conceptual entities, apparently disconnected from each other. They are distinct from one another and belong to different spectrums of discourse. However, intersections of these discourses in a triangular form were sought to be conceptualised and materialised with the release of the popular Hindi movie '*Lage Raho Munna Bhai*' (directed by Rajkumar Hirani) in 2006 that coined a neologism '*Gandhigiri*' that broadly signifies 'Gandhism'. The film is a sequel to the earlier movie '*Munna Bhai M.B.B.S.*' (2003, directed by Rajkumar Hirani) and it was a huge commercial success and considered as a cult classic.<sup>1</sup> According

<sup>1</sup> Arunabha Ghosh and Tapan Babu, "Lage Raho Munna Bhai: Unravelling Brand *Gandhigiri*", *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, (2006): 5227.

to the available IMDb (Internet Movie Database) the film earned around 126 crores (\$17,897,527) worldwide. The term '*Gandhigiri*' as represented in the film stands for Gandhism ('*Gandhivad*' in Hindi),<sup>2</sup> received instant popularity along with the movie and became a popular neologism afterwards. The instant popularity of certain ideas of Gandhi through a neologism coined by a 'Bollywood' movie surprised many. People from different sections discussed the phenomenon in different ways. However, most of the discussions available in the academia related to '*Gandhigiri*' are critical about it. Because many people felt that the term '*Gandhigiri*' itself is sarcastic and it is responsible for degrading the significance and the essence of Gandhian ideology. For example, S Ganesh, Shiv Visvanathan, Arunabha Ghosh and Tapan Babu expressed their sceptical views regarding LRMB and the '*Gandhigiri*' portrayed in the movie. However, in his book *Bollywood Nation*, Vamsee Juluri looked at '*Gandhigiri*' in a positive way and discussed the significance of Gandhi and his ideology in the context of the popularity of the movie. In the current study, however, the scepticism regarding '*Gandhigiri*' is not focused. On the contrary, it tries to understand '*Gandhigiri*' on the basis of the idea that a film carries allegorical meaning connected with different political and social aspects. The paper is an effort to figure out the circumstances and the conditions that linked up three seemingly different conceptual entities. For this purpose, the interconnections of film art and the different political and social aspects are discussed along with the ideas of Gandhi. It explains the relevance of Gandhian ideology in the present context. It argues that several ideas of Gandhi are compatible with the postmodernist views and the selective ideas of Gandhi or '*Gandhigiri*' shown in the movie are quite relevant in the contemporary era. The study also focuses on the popular internet 'meme' of Gandhi in the new media. It tries to understand if there is a transitional relationship between the '*Gandhigiri*' and the recent popularity of internet meme on Gandhi's image.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 5226.

## Gandhi in Bollywood

A few movies based on Gandhi were produced by the Bollywood or Hindi film industry before the *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* (LRMB). But none of them got commercial success and mass attention like LRMB. Apart from that, the LRMB is a comedy movie while all other movies before LRMB are based on some serious aspects of Gandhi's life and his ideology. In 1996, a very well known Indian director Shyam Benegal directed the movie 'The Making of the Mahatma'. The movie is about the early years of Gandhi's life. In 2007, Feroz Abbas Khan made 'Gandhi, My Father', based on the troubled relationship between Gandhi and his son Hiralal. 'Maine Gandhi Ko Nahin Mara' is another movie related to Gandhi's memory and his ideas. This movie was released in 2005 and it was directed by Jahnu Barua. All these movies were appreciated by a few critics, but none of these movies received a popular response.

Cinema as a mass cultural product, the commercial appreciation of the masses matters a lot. The socio-political and economic influence of the modern states over the cultural product like cinema is another aspect of film art. Cinema played a crucial role in India from its early days. In this context, K. Moti Gokulsing said:

Cinema not only reflects culture, it shapes culture. When we consider Indian films, we see how they have promoted modernisation, westernisation, urbanisation, new ways of life, a sense of pan-Indianism, secularisation, the emancipation of women and the right of minorities and in particular the relationship between Hindus and Muslims.<sup>3</sup>

Commenting about the role of Cinema in the process of building Indian nation, Ramachandra Guha rightly pointed out that, "India will survive as long as, among other things, its films are watched and songs are sung."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Moti Gokulsing, K. and Dissanayake Wimal, *Indian Popular Cinema: A narrative of cultural change*, Westview House, (London Road: Trentham Books, 2004), 11.

<sup>4</sup> Vamsee Juluri, *Bollywood Nations: India Through Its Cinema*, Gurgaon, (Haryana: Penguin Random House, 2013), 55.

M. Madhava Prasad in his book *Ideology of Hindi film* contented that, “cinema as an institution that is part of the continuing struggle within India over the form of the state.”<sup>5</sup> He further said, “...in a peripheral, modernising state like India, the struggle continues to take the form of contestations over the state form. Cultural production to register this reality through the recurring allegorical dimension of the dominant textual form in the popular cinema.”<sup>6</sup> So the portrayal of Gandhi in Hindi film industry and the appreciation of the portrayal by the masses can be considered as allegories of contemporary times. In the language of M. Madhava Prasad, “The film text that reach us as finished products are made possible, not only by cultural factors, but also by the mode of production that prevails in the industry, and in the society in which that industry operates.”<sup>7</sup>

The way Gandhi was portrayed in Hindi film industry reveals the position of Gandhi in the post-independence India. Gandhi’s ideas were not embraced by the ruling elites of India after independence. Nehruvian ideas dominated the country for a long period. After 1991, the phase of liberalisation started and Gandhi was almost forgotten in the political arena of the country. He became a historical character – sometimes even with some mythical connotation. It was a tragedy for Gandhi and the follower of Gandhism. When the movie LRMB was released, it was a surprise for the adherent of Gandhians of the country. The Gandhian ideology was brought up in the present context by quite an unexpected entity like ‘Bollywood’. Some people were even sceptical about the Gandhi of Bollywood. In an article, S. Ganesh said that for Gandhians, “embedded in the past, any approbation of Gandhi, even from an unlikely source such as Bollywood, gives comfort.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Madhava M. Prasad, *Ideology of Hindi Film: A Historical Construction*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

<sup>8</sup> S. Ganesh, “Lage Raho Munnabhai: History as Farce”, *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, (2006): 4317.

In another article in 'The Times of India', the writer wrote about the transformation of Hindi films over the times in the context of LRMB. He wrote that at the initial phases of Hindi cinema the opposition was shown in between the village and town.<sup>9</sup> Some examples of this genre of movie are *Ram aur Shyam* (1967 film directed by Tapi Chanakya) or *Seeta aur Geeta* (1972 film directed by Ramesh Sippy). These movies basically portrayed the purity and simplicity of the village life verses the poignancy of town. These movies attracted the majority of the masses of the country who lived in the villages. It even attracted the urban population, because the country as a whole did not come out from the hangover of the Gandhi dominated pre-independence era. However "the poignancy of town versus country disappeared in the seventies, especially with the rise of Amitabh Bachchan, the first truly urban hero."<sup>10</sup> The hero became urbanised, but he did not stop fighting against the oppressors. However, in industrialised India, the hero continued his fight by embracing new ideas and methods at odds with Gandhian ideals. Industries of the country were growing; people migrated to urban areas from villages and urban poverty increased. The masses of the country were not satisfied with the newly industrialised mechanism of the country, but they did not consider Gandhian ideology as the alternative either. On the contrary, the masses empathised as well as fantasised the 'angry young man' Amitabh Bachchan as their hero and as a role model who fought violently for justice in the movies. Kishore Valicha has rightly named Bachchan as an 'industrial hero'.<sup>11</sup> Gandhi's idea of village economy and anti-mechanistic stand became more isolated and forgotten. Going further ahead, M. Madhava Prasad said that Bachchan became an 'industrial hero' not only in the sense that he played working-class characters but also because he was the hero

<sup>9</sup>Shiv Visvanathan, "Brand Mahatma", *The Times of India*, New Delhi, 23 September 2006. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/edit-page/Brand-Mahatma/articleshow/2018970.cms>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Kishore Valicha, *The Moving Image*, (Bombay: Orient Longman, 1998).

of the industry.<sup>12</sup> By saying the ‘hero of industry’ he meant the ‘film industry’. During that time the ‘film making’ was gradually turned to be an industry where movies were produced as mass entertainment products.

So the deviance from the Gandhian ideas is quite visible in Hindi films over times. M. Madhava Prasad explained that Amitabh was not only a ‘proletarian hero’, but also a representative of the state; he explained his point- “the act of switching sides, positioning himself on the side of the ‘illegal’ (but morally upright) margin that gives the figure its power.”<sup>13</sup> Gandhi was forgotten by the Hindi film industry. Only a few selective historical events and personalities inspired Bollywood to make movies, but Gandhi was not one of them. In the Hindi films, the past was always portrayed as heritage or legacy or sometimes as a tragedy. Even in the biographical movies, either the heroic or villainous aspects of the characters were emphasised. In certain movies, historical characters were even portrayed like ‘demi-god’ mythical characters. In the post-independence era, a lot of movies based on history were produced following these patterns.<sup>14</sup> But a very few movies broke the monotony of these

<sup>12</sup> Madhava M Prasad, *Ideology of Hindi Film: A Historical Construction*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 138.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 144.

<sup>14</sup> Even the first Indian sound film *Alam Ara* (Released in 1931 and directed by Ardeshir Irani) was based on the story of an imaginary historical kingdom. In the movies like *Jhansi Ki Rani* (1953 film directed by Sohrab Modi), Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: The Forgotten Hero (2004 directed by Shyam Benegal), *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* (2013 film directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra), *The Ghazi Attack* (2017 film directed by Sankalp Reddy), *The Legend of Bhagat Singh* (2002 film directed by Rajkumar Santoshi), *Mangal Pandey: The Rising* (2005 film directed by Ketan Mehta), *Jodhaa Akbar* (2008 film directed by Ashutosh Gowariker), *Kesari* (2019 film directed by Anurag Singh), and *Bajirao Mastani* (2015 film directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali), the heroic and legendary history was shown. While in movies like *Umrao Jaan* (1981 film directed by Muzaffar Ali), *Zubeidaa* (2001 film directed by Shyam Benegal), *Mohenjo Daro* (2016 film and directed by Ashutosh Gowariker), *Amrapali* (1966 film directed by Lekh Tandon), *Anarkali* (1953 film directed by Nandlal Jaswantlal), or *Utsav* (1984 film directed by Girish Karnad) the rich heritage of the country was emphasised. On the other hand, movies like *Garm Hava* (1973 film directed by M. S. Sathyu), *Hey Ram* (2000 film directed Kamal Haasan), *1947: Earth* (1999 film directed by Deepa Mehta), or *Firaaq* (2008 film directed by Nandita Das) focused on some tragic incidents of the history of the country.

patterns. They tried to see history from a different perspective. For example, the movie '*Rang De Basanti*' (2006 film, directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra) tried to contextualise certain historical event with the contemporary time and politics of India. It 'shows that history has to be reinvented to be relevant'.<sup>15</sup> Another example of this genre is LRMB. The movie is not looking back for searching heritage, legacy or tragedy. The movie is not even looking for a utopian future. The movie is just about a certain aspect of a historical figure in the context of specific time and space. But surprisingly this new narrative of the film was highly appreciated by the popular audience. A movie or any popular art form gets wide appreciation from the masses when it can indoctrinate the vibe and experience of contemporary time. But before discussing the movie, we should consider Gandhi and his ideas in the present context.

### **Gandhi as a postmodernist**

Gandhi was criticised by many during his time for being critical about modernism. Post-Modernism is a rejection of what was proposed by Modernism.<sup>16</sup> In that sense, Gandhi himself was a postmodernist. Lloyd I. Rudolph elaborately explained this aspect and described Gandhian ideas as postmodernist in his article 'Post Modern Gandhi'. He challenged the earlier notion of Gandhi as a 'traditionalist' and argued that Gandhi opposed both upper-caste Hindu rituals and high modernism of Nehruvian Congress.<sup>17</sup> So his (Gandhi's) perspective is more relevant in the contemporary era of postmodernism. So the elaborate discussion of 'post modernist Gandhi' can explain why certain ideas of Gandhi have been revived

<sup>15</sup> Shiv Visvanathan. "Brand Mahatma", *The Times of India*, New Delhi, 23 September 2006.

<sup>16</sup> D.F. Nel and J.H. Kroeze, (2008), "Information Technology as an Agent of Post-Modernism", [Online: web] Accessed 13 Nov. 2019 URL: [http://cogprints.org/6207/1/Nel\\_and\\_Kroeze\\_-\\_IT\\_as\\_an\\_agent\\_of\\_post-modernism\\_080909.pdf](http://cogprints.org/6207/1/Nel_and_Kroeze_-_IT_as_an_agent_of_post-modernism_080909.pdf). P 5.

<sup>17</sup> Lloyd I. Rudolph, "Postmodern Gandhi", in Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph (eds.), *Postmodern Gandhi and Other Essay*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press), 3.

in the contemporary time through the popular mass media as well as new media.

Gandhi was a harsh critic of western civilisation (which was a synonym for modern civilisation) of his time. He said that those people who were supporting the modern civilisation are intoxicated by it.<sup>18</sup> He compared the delusional situation by the modern civilisation with a dreaming man. A dreaming man believes what he sees in his dream, but it is not real. He said:

A man whilst he is dreaming, believes in his dream; he is undeceived only when he is awakened from his sleep. A man labouring under the bane of civilization is like a dreaming man. What we usually read are the works of defenders of modern civilization, which undoubtedly claims among its votaries very brilliant and even some very good men. Their writings hypnotize us. And so, one by one, we are drawn into the vortex.<sup>19</sup>

This criticism of modern civilisation can be considered more valid in the contemporary time of postmodernism.

He even pointed out that the colonisation of India is just a result of modern civilisation. He opined that India was under British rule not because of the strength of British but because India is allowing them to rule. He viewed that the adoption of 'English civilization' makes their presence in India at all possible.<sup>20</sup> According to him, the whole situation is an obvious outcome of the process of the modern civilisation. Gandhi said, "... India is being ground down, not under the English heel, but under that of modern civilization."<sup>21</sup> So, when Gandhi said "Civilization is such a disease and we have to be very wary"<sup>22</sup>, he meant the contemporary era of his time, i.e. the modern era or modernism.

<sup>18</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*, (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1938), 31.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 62.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 38.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 41.

So, Gandhi was confident about his principle that, following modernism blindly would be a blunder for the Indians. Gandhi considered the specific context of India while discussing his vision of India. He believed that India would have to choose its unique path. It cannot achieve its goal by imitating or following England or any other nations of the world. Gandhi cautioned, "If India copies England... she will be ruined."<sup>23</sup> However he said that the people of England were not responsible for the destruction, but the modern civilisation was. In the context of the critical condition of the people of England as well as Europe, he said, "...the condition is due to modern civilization. It is a civilization only in name. Under it the nations of Europe are becoming degraded and ruined day by day."<sup>24</sup>

For the technological determinist, the printing press had a great role for the Renaissance and the following era of modernism. However, Gandhi's critical engagement with the press is significant. He brought the context of the press while criticising about the British Parliamentary system. He underlined the negative impact of the Press on it. He thought that the press is not honest, as they are partial and serves the purpose of certain groups only. He said, "To the English voters their newspaper is their Bible. They take their cue from their newspapers which are often dishonest."<sup>25</sup> Interestingly he also expressed his negative opinion regarding the frequent shifting of views in the press. He said, "views swing like the pendulum of a clock and are never steadfast."<sup>26</sup> His idea of 'contextual truth' contradicts here. So, probably, as many intellectuals<sup>27</sup> pointed out that his criticism on modernism did not come from the contemporary idea of 'postmodernism', but it originated from the traditionalism.

<sup>23</sup> M.K.Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*, (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1938), 29.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>27</sup> Many intellectuals did not accept Gandhi as a postmodernist, and they emphasised on Gandhi's traditionalist worldview. For example, Prof. N.A. Nikam described him as 'Discoverer of Religion', Prof. D.D. Ranade called him 'auto-mystic' and Dr R.R. Diwakar explained him as 'the spiritual seeker'.

But still, he was quite confident about the ‘particular Indian context’ while implementing any British based idea. However, it is quite difficult to determine whether this belief on ‘context’ came from his ‘arrogance’ of ‘superior Indian civilisation’ or the scepticism about modernism or the both.

Gandhi criticised the machinery of the industries too. He did not appreciate the over-enthusiasm of the modernist regarding the industrialisation. Industrialisation became a primary goal and ambition of the post-independent Nehruvian era. After Nehru, other leaders followed his footsteps regarding the industrialisation of the country. Gandhi’s anti machinery temperament was not in its entirety based on his traditionalist approach. He criticised the over-enthusiasm of the industrialisation by observing the pathetic condition of the workers in the industrial societies. He said:

Formerly, men worked in the open air only as much as they liked. Now thousands of workmen meet together and for the sake of maintenance work in factories or mines. Their condition is worse than that of beasts.<sup>28</sup>

He threatened, “If the machinery craze grows in our country, it will become an unhappy land.”<sup>29</sup> He mentioned his view about industrialisation in his writing without inclining on the arguments of a particular ideology or any school of thought. But, his criticism was somehow influenced by some of his traditionalist views. He said, “Machinery is the chief symbol of modern civilization; it represents a great sin.” Apart from that, he probably observed the glorified industrialised European society from the perspective of the poorest working classes of the society and tried to articulate their experience and ‘their truth’ regarding the situation.

However, the post-independent India completely sidelined his idea regarding industrialisation and glorification of

<sup>28</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*, (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1938), 32.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 88.

machines. After the 150 years of the birth of Gandhi, the present Government is planning 'smart city' along with the campaign of 'Swaccha Bharat'. In the 'Swaccha Bharat' campaign Gandhi is being portrayed like an ambassador of the campaign. However, the dream of 'smart city' does not reflect Gandhian vision of India. Gandhi thought that the modern city is an outcome of the modern era. He considered it as an outcome of modernism. He said, "...large cities were a snare and a useless encumbrance and that people would not be happy in them, that there would be gangs of thieves and robbers, prostitution and vice flourishing in them and that poor men would be robbed by rich men."<sup>30</sup>

However, the speculation of Gandhi's view regarding a contemporary issue is not possible, as the idea of city and village has changed over times and as Gandhi always admired multiplicity of opinions. For example, Gandhi's view on 'partition of Bengal' was distinctive and was multifaceted. Instead of providing a popular and emotionally appealing narrative about the event, he tried to focus on different aspects of it. He said, "Great events always produce great results."<sup>31</sup> Supporting his idea Gandhi argued that the event would spur the people to come out from their contented position to resist the imperial power. So he said that the unrest which he defined as 'discontent' is, in fact, helpful for India. He said, "This discontent is a very useful thing. As long as a man is contented with his present lot, so long is it difficult to persuade him to come out of it."<sup>32</sup>

Gandhi's perception on many facets of the notion of truth also enabled him to accept the ambiguities regarding the meaning of 'Swaraj'. While describing his idea of 'Swaraj', Gandhi clearly wrote, "It is quite possible that we do not

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>32</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*, (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House,1938), 23.

attach the same meaning to the term."<sup>33</sup> He defined 'Swaraj' or home-rule simply as self-rule or self-control.<sup>34</sup>

So, Gandhi's denial of objective knowledge and master narratives was explained by Lloyd I. Rudolph as 'foreshadowing of postmodernism.'<sup>35</sup> Gandhi proclaimed himself as '*karma yogi*' and believed that human being is only capable of knowing partial and contingent truth.<sup>36</sup> Because of this perception about truth, he believed in the context and pluralism. His idea about pluralism is visible in his writings. Regarding the different views of Dadabhai and Gokhle with him on many issues, he said, "It is bad habit to say that another man's thoughts are bad and ours only are good and that those holding different views from ours are the enemies of the country."<sup>37</sup> However, the genesis of his notion of pluralism of ideas lies mainly in religious texts. He believed in Jain philosophy of '*anekantavada*' which can be referred to as "the doctrine of manifold aspects or manypointedness."<sup>38</sup> So this philosophy accepts the 'ultimate truth' as a complex phenomenon with multiple aspects. But several others have pointed out that Gandhi's view about ultimate truth is quite contradictory. He simultaneously believed in multiple aspects of truth and the existence of an ultimate truth. So it contradicts with the contemporary postmodernist views. Ajit Kumar Jha wrote:

To describe (Gandhi) as a postmodernist is a gross misunderstanding of his philosophy. One of the basic assumptions of postmodernism

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>35</sup> Lloyd I. Rudolph, "Postmodern Gandhi", in Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoerber Rudolph (eds.), *Postmodern Gandhi and Other Essays*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>37</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*, (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1938), 19.

<sup>38</sup> John E. Cort, "Intellectual Ahiṁsā Revisited: Jain Tolerance and Intolerance of Others", *Philosophy East and West*, 50(3): 324.

is the principle of ethical relativism. The Mahatma, whose entire life was dedicated to experimenting with truth, believed, in the absolute truth...<sup>39</sup>

Explaining about Gandhi's idea of truth, Rudolph explained that his idea about truth came from the truism that 'truth is God'; so he (Gandhi) thought that the idea of knowing 'absolute truth in the form of objective truths and universal laws' is a notion of envying God.<sup>40</sup> So, for Gandhi truth is like a diamond with many facets or surfaces that that shows partial truth but it is not possible to see the whole at once.<sup>41</sup> Because of this broader perception about truth, Gandhi believed that, "truth had several meanings and forms".<sup>42</sup> This understanding of truth helped Gandhi to tolerate and respect pluralistic views about everything. He strongly asserted his Hindu belief but he expressed his respect for other religion in every occasion. Many of his critics and even some of his followers were confused about his explanation. Some people even criticised his stand as hypocritical at that time. But the contemporary era is more agreeable along with his ideas. His idea of multiple facets of truth is more relevant in the contemporary era of postmodernism.

### Lage Raho Munna Bhai and Gandhigiri

The film '*Lage Raho Munna Bhai*' is a satirical comedy-drama about a soft-hearted goon of suburban Mumbai. The critic explained the movie as "simple, racy, witty and uproariously funny."<sup>43</sup> In the

<sup>39</sup> Lloyd I. Rudolph, "Postmodern Gandhi", in Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph (eds.), *Postmodern Gandhi and Other Essay*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 6.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Stephen Hay, "Jaina Goals and Disciplines in Gandhi's Pursuit of Swaraj", in Peter Robb and David Taylor (eds.) *Rule, Protest, Identity, Aspects of Modern South Asia*, (London: Curzon Press/Humanities Press, 1978), 120 -131.

<sup>42</sup> Lloyd I. Rudolph (2006), "Postmodern Gandhi", 6.

<sup>43</sup> Arunabha Ghosh and Tapan Babu, "Lage Raho Munna Bhai: Unravelling Brand Gandhigiri", *Economic and Political Weekly*, (2006): 5225.

movie, the goon Munna Bhai (acted by Sanjay Dutt) falls in love with a Radio Jockey Janhavi (acted by Vidya Balan). By kidnapping some Professors and forcing them to answer for a 'phone in Quiz contest' on Mahatma Gandhi on the occasion of *Gandhi Jayanti* (The birthday of Mahatma Gandhi is celebrated as *Gandhi Jayanti* in India on October 2) Munna Bhai somehow manages to meet his love interest. During the meeting with Janhavi, Munna Bhai introduces himself as a Professor and a follower of Gandhism.

Impressed by his deliberations on Gandhi, Janhavi invites him to deliver a lecture on Gandhi to her home where a commune of a few aged people live like an old age home along with her grandfather. They named their house 'Second Innings Home'. To impress Janhavi, Munna Bhai starts reading about Gandhi for preparing the lecture. He continues his study for three days without a sleep and as a consequence starts hallucinating. In the process he starts visualising Gandhi corporeally and he even starts conversation with this imaginative figure of Gandhi. His imaginative Gandhi gets ready to help him to impress Janhavi but says that Munna will have to follow his path in return. Munna promises Gandhi that he will follow him. Gandhi helps Munna and in return asks him to tell her the truth – the real identity of Munna. Munna denies following his advice as he feels the fear of losing her.

In the meantime a builder Lucky Singh, for whom Munna Bhai works, tries to take hold of 'Second Innings Home' illegally for giving it as a gift to Mr Kkhuranna. He promised the house to Mr Kkhuranna as he arranged a marriage of his daughter to the son of Mr Kkhuranna. When Lucky Singh comes to know that Munna loves the girl from 'Second Innings Home', he convinces Munna to go for a trip to Goa along with Janhavi and all the members of 'Second Innings Home'. In the meantime he encroaches the house by using Circuit (acted by Arshad Warsi)- the friend of Munna. After coming back from Goa, Munna asks Lucky Singh to return 'Second Innings Home' to Jahnavi and the elders. But Lucky Singh threatened Munna that if he tries to take it away from him then he will expose Munna's real identity to Janhavi. Munna was trapped

by his lies. Then Munna remembers Gandhi. His imaginative Gandhi shows him the path of the Gandhism. He follows Gandhian method or '*Gandhigiri*' to fight against Lucky Singh. He even tells Janhavi about his real identity. So finally by following Gandhi's path, Munna succeeded to get back the 'Second Innings Home' for Janhavi and the elders. He also gets back his love and eventually, Lucky Singh becomes a changed man.

The '*Gandhigiri*' of the movie got popularity immediately after the release of the movie in 2006. So the paper is an effort to understand this '*Gandhigiri*' in the present context. However, the study is not considering '*Gandhigiri*' entirely based on the contemporary idea of postmodernism explained by Lloyd I. Rudolph in '*Post Modern Gandhi*'.

In the context of the present study, "the postmodern mind may be viewed as an open-ended, indeterminate set of attitudes that has been shaped by a great diversity of intellectual and cultural currents."<sup>44</sup> So, in other words, it is just an effort to examine and understand a current phenomenon on the basis of the characteristics of the contemporary era. Gandhi is studied, appreciated and criticised by many intellectuals of contemporary time. For Ashish Nandy, 'four Gandhis' survived after the death of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. The first one is the statist version of Gandhi, the second one is the 'quite loveable and grandfatherly' but 'boring' Gandhi of Gandhians, the third one is the 'Gandhi of the ragamuffins, eccentrics and the unpredictable' who is 'more hostile to Coca-Cola than to Scotch whisky and considers the local versions of Coca-Cola more dangerous than imported ones' and the fourth one is the mythic Gandhi that no one really serious about.<sup>45</sup> This observation of Ashis Nandy about Gandhi is significant while studying the movie LRMB and its '*Gandhigiri*'. In the movie, the statist version of Gandhi is dominant, the 'boring' version of Gandhi is mentioned and the

<sup>44</sup> R. Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the ideas that have shaped our world view*, (London: Random House, 1991), 395.

<sup>45</sup> Ashis Nandy, "Gandhi after Gandhi", *The Little Magazine*, New Delhi, May 2000, 38-41. <http://www.littlemag.com/nandy.htm>

mythic version of Gandhi is visible in certain parts. However the 'Gandhi of ragamuffins' doesn't enter in the movie. So, basically, the Gandhi of LRMB is a Gandhi with a populist appeal. In an article, titled '*Lage Raho Munna Bhai: Unravelling Brand Gandhigiri*', it was rightly said that "Munna's Gandhi perhaps is not someone distant and historical but someone with whom the contemporary masses can relate"<sup>46</sup>. The movie does not talk about the deeper values of Gandhian thought or the socio-economic ideas of Gandhi. It does not even mention about the basic and unique ideas of Gandhism like idea of the village economy, criticism of modern technology, the idea of '*Ram Rajya*' or any other aspects of Gandhian socio-economic ideas elaborately discussed by Gandhi himself in his different writings and lectures. On the contrary, there are certain statements in the movie that can be considered as 'anti-Gandhian'.

In a dramatic scene of the movie, the protagonist Munna Bhai says, "He thought he will make the country great - exactly like 'imported one'...but we destroyed everything." This statement is exactly the opposite of Gandhi's vision about India. Gandhi elaborately explained his vision of India in his book '*Hind Swaraj*'. He was critical about 'importing' values, ideas, or western science from the West or any other foreign countries. He criticised the popular vision of his time of material development of the country on the basis of the standard of western developed nations or countries like Japan. He wrote,

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 the *Swaraj* that I want.<sup>47</sup>

In another scene of the movie - when Munna Bhai interacts with the elders of 'Second Innings Home', he says that Gandhi liberated

<sup>46</sup> Arunabha Ghosh and Tapan Babu, "Lage Raho Munna Bhai: Unravelling Brand Gandhigiri", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 41(51): 5225.

<sup>47</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*, 25.

the country from the foreigners, but then the people of the country has turned strangers to him. This is a political statement of the movie and interestingly this statement comes before the hallucination of Munna Bhai or before he read about Gandhi. The statement mildly directs to the socio-economic thoughts of Gandhi, but which is a "complete no-no for today's consumer economy driven India."<sup>48</sup>

Reacting on Munna Bhai's statement, one member of the 'Second Innings Home' comments that the situation of the country is not so bad and India is developing. Munna gets more aggressive by this comment and says,

To hell with the development!...There are pipes- but not water, there are bulbs- but no electricity...there are more potholes than cars on the road...you can't walk by the footpath because there are shops over there...there are trains, but the name is on waiting list...if ticket gets confirmed then the train gets cancelled.

This statement is nothing to do with the Gandhian idea or his vision. This statement is just a popular narrative of the middle-class people about the underdevelopment of the country. These narratives on the daily woes of an ordinary person became popular again during the time of Anna Hazare's anti-corruption movement in 2011.<sup>49</sup> In that movement, the corruption of the country was projected to be the sole cause of the underdevelopment of the country. Another aspect of the movie is the language of the protagonist. The movie does not use some 'refined and mainstream' language to talk about Gandhi. Gandhi himself was a person who tried to understand the vibe of the common masses by living their life. Language is a primary aspect to understand and communicate with a particular group of people. A particular language carries a particular worldview. However, after the death of Gandhi, he

<sup>48</sup> "Lage Raho Munna Bhai: Unravelling Brand *Gandhigiri*", 5227.

<sup>49</sup> The leader of the movement Anna Hazare was called a Gandhian by certain media houses and also by some people. However, this view was criticised by many. Even the great grandson of Gandhi, Mr. Tushar Gandhi expressed his objection over calling him (Anna Hazare) a Gandhian.

became an entity that exists only in refined and sophisticated languages of certain groups. As David Hardiman described, he (Gandhi) had just become 'a template' for modern moral activism.<sup>50</sup> Gandhi's stand on anti-imperialism, anti-racism or non-violence asserted its position as an alternative politics after his departure. The moral superiority of these popular ideas got an overwhelming recognition all over the world irrespective of ideologies, political affiliation or belief. But, a puritan moralistic entity is more exclusive. So, his entity became more exclusive in that sense. But in the movie LRMB, Gandhism was taught by Munna who speaks 'Tapori'- a language often connected to the Mumbai slum dwellers.<sup>51</sup>

In an article, the context and impact of the 'Tapori' language in the movie were explained, "In a remarkable manoeuvre of communication skill, the street-smart Mumbai *tapori* lingo, peppered with slangs, is used to create instant communication with the audience, especially GenNext."<sup>52</sup> Explaining the motive, screenplay writer Abhijat Joshi, clarified their viewpoint regarding the language by saying, "It was important for us to dispel the myth about Gandhi being a sedate, ascetic person. We wanted to show his other side – witty, humorous, light-hearted and creative"<sup>53</sup>. The language helped them to fulfil this purpose. In the movie, Gandhi was comprehended and narrated by a language spoken by the 'goons' and 'dwellers of the slum' areas of the city. Gandhism was defined and explained by the language of a few 'outcasts' and it was accepted and appreciated by the masses.

This phenomenon can be appropriated only by the way of thinking of the contemporary time. The contemporary worldview emphasises on plurality and fragmented views.

<sup>50</sup> David Hardiman, *Gandhi in His Time and Ours*, (New Delhi: Pauls Press, 2003), 297.

<sup>51</sup> "Lage Raho Munna Bhai: Unravelling Brand *Gandhigiri*", 5226.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

This worldview comes from the postmodernist notion that, "No one's view of reality can be taken as the truth, since all views are subjective."<sup>54</sup> In the movie, the understanding of the Gandhism by a 'goon' was not mortified and this view of the movie was appreciated by the mass audience.

The movie LRMB clearly stands for the idea that "Post-Modernism is an opportunity for the world to be re-enchanted."<sup>55</sup> '*Gandhigiri*' is an effort to re-engineer some ideas and ideals that are considered to be outdated for a long period. The movie makes a clear statement that Gandhi is just an archive or a monument if nobody cares about his ideas. The movie asserts, "History remains inaccessible unless he is reworked as a contemporary."<sup>56</sup> It sees history from a different perspective. In the context of Gandhian ideology it does not consider 'history as ideology', but "it is mere information to be tactically used as and when needed."<sup>57</sup> In a comic scene of the LRMB while the security guard of Lucky Singh slaps Munna Bhai he offers another cheek for slapping as Gandhi said that 'If someone slaps you on one side of your face, turn the other one to him'. But when the guard slaps him again Munna punches on his face and says that Gandhi did not say anything what to do after the second slap. In another scene, Munna orders Circuit to point a gun towards the astrologer to make the point that astrology is just a superstition. So, in the movie, the protagonist Munna Bhai uses a selective set of ideas of Gandhism as a tactic to handle or face certain specific situations.

In an article, titled 'Brand Mahatma', the Gandhi of LRMB

<sup>54</sup> D.F. Nel and J.H. Kroeze. (2008), "Information Technology as an Agent of Post-Modernism", , [Online: web] Accessed 13 Nov. 2019 URL: [http://cogprints.org/6207/1/Nel\\_and\\_Kroeze\\_-\\_IT\\_as\\_an\\_agent\\_of\\_post-modernism\\_080909.pdf](http://cogprints.org/6207/1/Nel_and_Kroeze_-_IT_as_an_agent_of_post-modernism_080909.pdf). P 5.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>56</sup> Shiv Visvanathan, "Brand Mahatma", *The Times of India*, New Delhi, 23 September 2006.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

was rightly defined as a 'pragmatic art of life'.<sup>58</sup> It also says, "From distant myth he is now part of modern folklore re-engineered in a new role as agony aunt and management consultant."<sup>59</sup>

Analysing from the perspectives of Frankfurt School mass media as 'cultural industry', LRMB is definitely a product of mass culture.<sup>60</sup> But the cult follower of '*Gandhigiri*' after the movie definitely signifies its appeal as 'pop culture'.<sup>61</sup> 'Pop culture' is not restricted to the dimension of mass production of entertainment product and its consumption. In that sense, popular culture is a more 'intimate' process. Popular culture may circulate not only through mass media but also through other forms of human interactions. The idea of '*Gandhigiri*' was coined by the movie, but the appeal of '*Gandhigiri*' was not restricted to the movie only. A lot of people came to know about '*Gandhigiri*' or participated in the '*Gandhigiri* influenced movements' without even watching the movie. For example, in 2006, around 2,000 farmers of Vidarbha region of India protested with flowers to persuade a bank to disperse loans by the influence of '*Gandhigiri*'.<sup>62</sup> In the same year, influenced by the film, medical students of the King George Medical College performed a '*Shram Daan*' or, voluntary work and planted several tree saplings.<sup>63</sup> In Lucknow, people protested

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> From the perspective of Frankfurt School (Institute of Social Research founded in 1923) 'Mass Culture' refers to the 'contents' of 'cultural industry' like Radio, Cinema, Television or Press.

<sup>61</sup> Pop culture is slightly different from Mass culture. Mass culture considers the 'production aspect' but 'pop culture' or 'popular culture' considers the 'consumption aspect'. The 'Pop culture' is used in a broader sense and it is not always a result of the products of 'cultural industry'.

<sup>62</sup> Zubair Ahmed, "Gandhi-style protest by farmers", BBC News, Mumbai, 12 October 2006. [Online: web] Accessed 12 Nov. 2019 URL: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/6044476.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6044476.stm)

<sup>63</sup> SawFNews (2006), "Bollywood's Lage Raho Munna Bhai inspires Lucknow's medical students", [Online: web] Accessed 11Nov.2019 URL: <https://web.archive>.

against a liquor merchant by offering flowers to him just like Munna Bhai.<sup>64</sup> In 2007, 'Gandhigiri' even influenced some protesters in an American office of Customs and Immigration Services (USCIS).<sup>65</sup> In an article, titled '*Lage Raho Munna Bhai: Unravelling Brand Gandhigiri*', authors pointed out that the movie LRMB branded the Gandhian ideology as 'Gandhigiri' very successfully and so the brand 'Gandhigiri' instantly got popularity in the popular culture. It was rightly said, "Gandhi, the man, was once the message. In the India of the post-liberalisation brand *Gandhigiri* is the message."<sup>66</sup> However, this kind of 'Gandhigiri' continued just for a specific period and after that, it automatically vanished from the memory of the public sphere. So this whole phenomenon signifies the truism that "post-Modernism is pop-culture, characterized by the superficiality of society and the individual being inauthentic and in a constant state of flux, and the image/representation has assumed primacy over the physical."<sup>67</sup>

### Gandhi and Internet Meme

Any content of popular culture remains popular only for a short span of time. It fades over time, but its footprints are not negligible. 'Gandhigiri' is no longer visible in the Indian public sphere, but the neologism 'Gandhigiri' and the picture of Gandhi is still popular on the new media in a different way. In India, the image of Gandhi is one of the most popular faces of social media like 'Yao Ming's laughing

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org/web/20070929100142/http://news.sawf.org/Bollywood/22195.aspx/Lucknow\_residents\_play\_Munnabhais.

<sup>64</sup> Rediff.com (2006), "Lucknow citizens go Gandhian on liquor merchant", [Online: web] Accessed 11Nov.2019 URL: <https://www.rediff.com/news/2006/sep/21sharat.htm>.

<sup>65</sup> NEWS18 (2007), "Gandhigiri works! Green Card seekers make US change heart", [Online: web] Accessed 11Nov.2019 URL: <https://www.news18.com/news/india/gandhigiri-works-green-card-seekers-make-us-change-heart-269337.html>.

<sup>66</sup> "Lage Raho Munna Bhai: Unravelling Brand *Gandhigiri*", 5227.

<sup>67</sup> "Information Technology as an Agent of Post-Modernism", , [Online: web] Accessed 13 Nov. 2019 URL: [http://cogprints.org/6207/1/Nel\\_and\\_Kroeze\\_-\\_IT\\_as\\_an\\_agent\\_of\\_post-modernism\\_080909.pdf](http://cogprints.org/6207/1/Nel_and_Kroeze_-_IT_as_an_agent_of_post-modernism_080909.pdf).P 5

face'. In the popular 'internet meme' of social media, Gandhi's face is often used to talk about morality and utopia sarcastically. The term 'meme' was first used in the cultural context by Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*. In his book he argued, "the gene as the unit of biological selection and the organism as a survival machine for its genes" and he further added that, "culture also evolves" and 'memes' are the units of cultural selection.<sup>68</sup> Accordingly, a meme is "a unit of cultural inheritance, hypothesized as analogous to the particulate gene, and as naturally selected in virtue of its phenotypic consequences on its own survival and replication in the cultural environment."<sup>69</sup> As examples of memes, he suggests ideas, catch-phrases, tunes (or snatches of tunes), fashions and skills.<sup>70</sup> The term meme was elaborately used for some internet contents. The 'internet meme' was defined in the following way:

An internet meme is a unit of information (idea, concept or belief), which replicates by passing on via Internet (e-mail, chat, forum, social networks, etc.) in the shape of a hyper-link, video, image, or phrase. It can be passed on as an exact copy or can change and evolve. The mutation on the replication can be by meaning, keeping the structure of the meme or vice versa. The mutation occurs by chance, addition or parody, and its form is not relevant. An IM depends both on a carrier and a social context where the transporter acts as a filter and decides what can be passed on.<sup>71</sup>

So it is possible to trace back the phenomenon of instant popularity of Gandhi on the internet meme. The satirical and comic presentation of Gandhi in the internet meme is surely not an instant and detached event. The 'mutation' process might have happened in different levels, but there are chances that the instant popularity of 'Gandhigiri' also had a role in that 'mutation process'. The recent proliferation of the internet memes are often connected

<sup>68</sup> Kate Distin, *The Selfish Meme: A Critical Reassessment*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 6.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> C.M. Castaño (2013), "Defining and characterizing the concept of Internet Meme", *Revista CES Psicología* 6, 2(2013): 97.

to Dadaism. As an 'absurd art' movement Dadaism started in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century after the devastating First World War. Dadaist Tristan Tzara commented about Dadaism that "the beginnings of the movement came not out of a desire to make art, but out of a profound disgust with the world."<sup>72</sup> The 'disgust' appeared in the artistic mind of Europe after experiencing the devastating war in the continent. However, the contemporary 'memes' related to Gandhi are not about 'disgust', but mostly about 'scepticism'. They are sceptical about morality, ethics, reality and all the values that once Gandhi considered the virtue of humanity.

## Conclusion

In an article, published in Washington Post (titled 'Postmodernism didn't cause Trump: It explains him', published on August 31, 2018) the writer Aaron Hanlon discussed the popular debate of Post Modernism and the rise of Donald Trump as US President. When Donald Trump won the 2016 American Presidential Election, many intellectuals like Michiko Kakutani or Daniel Dennett blamed postmodernism for facilitating the rise of Donald Trump in the American politics. But Aaron Hanlon, in his article, argued that Post Modernism did not cause Trump, but it can explain why he won the election. In the same way, it will be inappropriate to claim that '*Gandhigiri*' is a deliberate and conscious post modernist effort of the maker of the LRMB; but, there are certain aspects of post-modernism that can explain beautifully the phenomenon of '*Gandhigiri*'. These aspects explain why Gandhism was portrayed as '*Gandhigiri*' in LRMB and why '*Gandhigiri*' got instant popularity all over the country. LRMB broke convention by using a comic treatment for a seemingly serious topic like Gandhism, and the effort was highly appreciated. The contemporaries got this version of Gandhi appealing. As a traditionalist, Gandhi criticised modernism. So, as a critic of modernism, many of his ideas are

<sup>72</sup> Sam Greszes (2018), "Shitposting is an art, if history is any indication: Drawing a line between an internet pastime and the Dadaist movement", [Online: web] Accessed 11Nov.2019 URL: <https://www.polygon.com/2018/12/17/18142124/shitposting-memes-dada-art-history>

attractive for contemporary post-modernists. India, however, is not a postmodernist society. But, the masses of the country are sceptical and suspicious about many aspects and outcomes of modernism. The '*Gandhigiri*' portrayed in the LRMB provided a wishful solution over the frustration caused by the Indian version of modernism. Instead of going deeper into the philosophy of Gandhi, the movie 'reengineered' some Gandhian ideas to use as a tactic to counter some challenges faced by the commoners in the day to day life. Through the movie, the masses perceived Gandhi as an iconic critic and problem solver for their frustrations over modernism. Not Gandhism or Gandhian philosophy, but Gandhi himself became the message through '*Gandhigiri*'. So, '*Gandhigiri*' became short-lived, and very soon it became ridiculously distorted. People expressed their scepticism about the 'message' by making memes – where Gandhi's image was used to ridicule about morality, utopia or any kind of puritan ideas. The whole phenomenon is a display of the pop-culturist dimension of the postmodernist world. However, it shows that the context of Gandhi is still prevalent, and powerful enough to instigate hope and despise at the same time. The whole phenomenon is a statement against the popular belief of Gandhi's political and societal oblivion.

## Labour for Love or Love for Labour?

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Shruti Sharma

### I

A woman at her workplace hallucinates about her son, daughter and husband asking “*Mummy/Darling, aaj kya banega?*” (Mummy/Darling, what will be cooked today?) She gets distressed and reaches home where she finds the children sitting in their school uniform with their father. Placing her office bag and files on a table anxiously she asks “*Roz roz naya kya banau?*” (What new things should I cook every day?) Her husband and son respond with a disinterested ‘I do not know’ shrug whereas her daughter sits with a blank face. The voice over of a man comes to her rescue and asks her family “*Isliye Everest pesh karte hain arhtis masale, jisse bane roz naya...?*” (That is why Everest presents to you thirty-eight types of spices, using which, every day what can be prepared...?) Her children and husband respond happily while eating the meal cooked by their mother and wife using Everest spices, “*Tasty tasty khana*” (Tasty tasty food). She can now prepare new and tasty dishes every day and be content about her children and husband being happy. The voice over ends with “*Taste mein best, mummy aur Everest!*” (The best when it comes to taste, mother and Everest!).<sup>1</sup>

A little girl has participated in ‘Miss Snow White’ competition for which she has to wear a white dress. Her mother is very excited and dances holding the dress her daughter is going to wear. She has a washing machine which washes whites keeping them pretty and the whitest, like it would have been if she would wash them herself. The technology of the machine is based on the ‘magic’ of the mother’s hands which are capable of getting rid of the toughest stains, happily. The mother needn’t be sceptical about the new technology as it has equal use value as her own labour power. “*Uske har white mein hai magic haathon ka*” (Every white has been washed with the magic of hands). While her husband and children sit and

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dqdV-mqj7g>, last accessed on 3 March 2020.

watch her dancing her way to the washing machine, a yellow spiral surfaces over the woman's head. Later we find out that the spiral is actually signifying a whirlpool, while the voice over adds – *You and Whirlpool, the best homemakers*".<sup>2</sup>The background song and voice over are of men, again.<sup>3</sup>

The two descriptions that have been outlined above are of television commercials (hereafter, TVC) that are common to regular television viewers. In them, the wife/mother is the sole person doing housework – cooking new and tasty dishes every day, keeping clothes stainless and shining, keeping the house clean and germ-free corner to corner, to name a few. Doing housework is an activity that most women identify with at some point in their life. However, there is some uncertainty about whether women have been able to identify with the contentment and *love* that the onscreen actors portray while undertaking housework. Love is what *she* performs, tirelessly, happily and daily.

This paper seeks to 'burst asunder'<sup>4</sup> this very notion of love into pieces that resemble the likes of Marxian concepts of labour power, use value, production, and alienation. With a brief contextualization of the isolationist accumulation of women within the household/private, the boundaries of the Marxian concepts have been pushed back to the period of their emergence as material processes, to the origin of family and the period of transition from feudalism to capitalism in Europe. Borrowing from Kalyan Sanyal, the central argument of the paper is that capital is not universal in its realization and it has to inherently depend on its supposed outside – the hetero patriarchal family – which is its invisibilized inside, where it accumulates surplus off the unwaged housework of

<sup>2</sup> Whirlpool did a series of television commercials with the same actors advertising its home appliances and the woman of the house as the 'best homemakers'.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=baI5XR6qVwI>, last accessed on 3 March 2020.

<sup>4</sup> The phrase 'burst asunder' has been borrowed from Marx and Engels (1848)'s Manifesto of the Communist Party in which it has been used to denote the intensity with which developed productive forces became incompatible with the feudal relations of property and hence burst it asunder.

women.<sup>5</sup> Taking this as the node around which this paper revolves, it becomes essential to cater to two usual criticisms at the very outset – first, capital does not require labour in huge numbers as technological innovations have turned things around today and second, that women are not caged within their household anymore, they make the labour force in most non-advanced capitalist countries as well. These criticisms emerge from the very view this essay aims to critique – the partial view that only looks at what happens in the public realm, in the realm of the ‘productive’ (mental and material) labour. With that aim in mind, we have to turn our lens towards what takes place within the four walls of a household.

The household has to be viewed not just as a site of reproduction of future generations through procreation or of labour power through everyday activities that are put under the rubric of ‘love’, but also as a site of production – the creative labour that turns raw materials into use value. Gender and sexuality cannot be treated solely as a cultural phenomenon but as work-function of capitalist class relations.<sup>6</sup> This paper is a contribution to the everyday struggles of women which need to be brought out of their kitchens and bedrooms – from their isolation – to the streets of solidarity and togetherness. This will enable us to view “women’s history as class history.”<sup>7</sup>

## II

To begin the analysis of the concrete socio-economic conditions that wear the garb of ‘love’, we must go back to Friedrich Engels’ (2004) *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (hereafter, *Origin*) in which he re-outlines the materialist conception of history as production and reproduction of immediate life being the determining factor, in the last resort. Production refers to the means of subsistence – of food, clothing, shelter and the tools required

<sup>5</sup> Sanyal, K., *Rethinking Capitalist Development: Primitive Accumulation, Governmentality and Post-Colonial Capitalism*, (New Delhi: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Federici, S., *Wages Against Housework*, (London: Falling Wall Press, 1975), 14.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

for it, and the propagation of species. The former is defined as the stage of development of *productive* labour and the latter as that of the family. The social order seems to be determined by an inverse relationship between the two till the time society reaches a stage when the family system is dominated by the property system and the latter begins to predominate social existence. Engels' depicts the linearity from sexual promiscuity, group marriage, pairing family to the monogamous family as natural and evolutionary. This linearity is one from the mother right of inheritance to father right and from communal property to private property. Social and conscious history only begins at the institution of the monogamous family which is based on economic conditions before which Engels argues all forms of family under the institution of mother right had *naturally* evolved from one to another.

Critiquing Engels' selective application of historical materialism to the period he classifies as civilization and to the development of productive labour alone, Maria Mies (2014) argues for the extension of Marx's notion of 'appropriation of nature' to all of human history including savagery and barbarism, and to the development of family. She argues that in the *German Ideology* Marx and Engels leave out the 'third moment' that constitutes human life from the sphere of history.<sup>8</sup> This third moment is that of the production of life – both of one's own labour and of fresh life in procreation. Dismissing the natural/evolutionary and social/historical binary which continues till today in the analysis of the development of family and of productive labour respectively, she asserts that if we have to follow Engels, we would have to conclude that "women have not yet entered history and still basically belong to the animal world."<sup>9</sup>

In the *Origin*, Engels' does state the production features of the 'prehistoric' period, which he terms as incontestable –the appropriation of ready to use natural products by instruments produced by mankind (savagery) followed by one in which the

<sup>8</sup> Mies, M., *Patriarchy and Capital Accumulation*, (London: Zed Books,2014), 51.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 52.

knowledge of cattle breeding and land cultivation was acquired which led to the increase in productivity of nature (barbarism). However, he does not view the ties of sex prevalent in those periods through the same lens. Mies undertakes this task in *Patriarchy and Capital Accumulation*. She locates women in the abstract narrative of 'man the hunter' of the primitive stages by recognizing the appropriation of body as a productive force and the appropriation of nature by men and women distinctly. "The warrior-hunters lived in an economic system based on women's productive agricultural work; they were the husbands of female agriculturists"<sup>10</sup> who would provide for daily subsistence irrespective of the men's success at hunting. Mies further distinguishes the former as the predatory/parasitic means of acquisition and the latter as the reciprocal/productive means of subsistence.

Apart from their hands or heads, women can experience their whole body as being productive.<sup>11</sup> Out of their body they produce new children and food for them and also provide food for themselves daily as gatherers or agriculturists. The first sexual division of labour occurred between the daily activity of gathering means of subsistence by women and the sporadic hunting of men. The former was always a collective activity of the women folk. The everyday experience with plant life eventually led to the invention of regular cultivation of tubers and grains with the help of the digging stick and the hoe, tools invented by women.<sup>12</sup> With the increase in productivity, the technological innovation for collection of surplus (storage containers) came to the fore. Along with these activities, it can be concluded that women were also the inventors of the first social relations – that between mothers and children.<sup>13</sup>

This point can be stressed further by placing it in tandem with Engels' (2004) incontestable features of prehistoric production – the mother right and communal ownership of property by the gens.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 53

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 56.

Activities like gathering, cultivation and storing were the primary means of subsistence, the basic source of survival for mankind, in the period of savagery. The products that were gathered, cultivated and stored were done so by women folk in, from and for common. However, with the domestication/breeding of animals and the invention of the plough (which Mies calls the symbol of the phallus, a tool to sow seeds into the field) social relations changed drastically as surplus beyond subsistence became available.<sup>14</sup> Until the lower stage of barbarism, fixed wealth consisted mainly of the house, clothing, crude ornaments and instruments of procuring and preparing food which belonged to the gens. With herds of cattle, pastoralists acquired possessions demanding only supervision and elementary care in order to increase their number.<sup>15</sup> The relationship of dominance between men and women was established when the former acquired knowledge about their generative capacities by observing the sexual behaviour of the domesticated cattle.<sup>16</sup> With the requirement of more labour power for land cultivation (increase in territory) and to tend the cattle, slavery was invented and slaves were converted into family possessions.<sup>17</sup> The patriarchal line of descent and inheritance were a consequence of this new mode of production.

Who would own this surplus which was way beyond the subsistence need? Those who had the monopoly of arms (man the hunter) to acquire labour power and surplus produce through predatory means. The natural father in the pairing family thus overthrew the mother right in favour of private ownership of property to be inherited by his children. The expropriation of women from their communal possessions and their bodies, thus the *“world historic defeat of the female sex”* led to the institution of

<sup>14</sup> Ibid,57.

<sup>15</sup> Engels, F., *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, (Australia: Resistance Books, 2004), 64.

<sup>16</sup> Mies, 63.

<sup>17</sup> Engels, 65.

the monogamous patriarchal family.<sup>18</sup> The woman was reduced to being a slave of man's lust, a mere instrument for breeding children as the man seized the reins of the house. The fidelity of the wife was instituted to ensure undisputed paternity completing the "first class oppression in history" – of the female sex by the male sex.<sup>19</sup>

In the brief history of sexual division of labour derived from reading Mies' critical engagement with Engels' *Origin*, we can conclude that women's activity of bearing and rearing children has been a conscious and social one. When it is interpreted as purely physiological, it reflects the ideological foundations of patriarchal and capitalist division of labour and not its precondition. However, we must be cautious of not reducing women solely to their capability to produce new life as irresponsible emphasis on it could make us fall into the trap, we are critiquing, of biological determinism. At the same time, we need to equip ourselves with the ability to use the master's tools against them.

Bringing in Silvia Federici (2004)'s retelling of the history of transition from feudalism to capitalism in the *Caliban and the Witch* (hereafter, *Caliban*) is relevant here. Reworking Marx's conception of primitive accumulation, and Foucault's analysis of the power techniques to which the body was subjected, she situates women's reproductive labour in the continuous primitive accumulation of capital by highlighting the repressive character of power and the disciplinary techniques (witch-hunts) used by the ruling class, to gain control over women's sexuality. This led to the gendered accumulation of their bodies in the household for the purpose of reproduction of labour. From the standpoint of women, the transition and movement of history through material dialectics doesn't seem progressive or liberative as Marx claimed it to be.

<sup>18</sup> "The word familia did not originally signify the ideal of our modern Philistine, which is a compound of sentimentality and domestic discord...Familia signifies the totality of slaves belonging to one individual" (Engels, 67).

<sup>19</sup> Engels, 73.

In *Caliban*, Federici traces the changes in the social position of women from the feudal order through the everyday peasant revolts and the heretic movement to the first phase of capitalism. She argues that the shortage of labour following the Black Death gave unprecedented power and unity to the working class. Threatened, the ruling class in Europe devised a multipronged policy for the accumulation of labour. The Conquest of Americas and successive Enclosures were complemented by controlling reproductive power of women through legislation and mass propaganda against deviants (demonization of witches) which led to the “*accumulation of differences*”<sup>20</sup> and divisions within the working class. The new social order was meant to relegate women to the sphere of the household by naturalizing their reproductive function leading to accumulation of unwaged work to provide for the social reproduction of the workforce free of cost.<sup>21</sup>In the household, the accumulation of surplus value (unwaged housework which reproduces labour power) and the primitive accumulation (isolated accumulation of women) began taking place simultaneously yet invisibly.

The pertinent question remains – who were the witches?

The witches were the first practitioners of birth control and abortion; the midwives and wise women who possessed traditional knowledge; old widowed women or those who lived alone, negatively affected by land privatization as their families moved to the cities, leaving them to beg in the villages or rely on public assistance; the proletarian women who did not listen to their husbands; any women who did not identify herself with the normalized reproductive function that would benefit the capitalist work discipline. A witch is, therefore, any women who questions the passive norms of femininity slapped upon her, who is seen

<sup>20</sup> Federici, S., *Caliban and the Witch*, (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2004), 115.

<sup>21</sup> In the “Wages Against Housework” pamphlet, Federici (1975) contests the very nature of the naturalness of reproductive labour- “...it takes at least twenty years of socialisation - day-to-day training, performed by an unwaged mother – to prepare a woman for this role, to convince her that children and husband are the best she can expect from life. Even so, it hardly succeeds” (p.3).

outside of her household, who doesn't want to or cannot bear a child, who doesn't do housework happily. A witch is the woman who questions the internalized voluntariness of housework as *love*, the necessary ideological mystification of their own self repression. And in writing this, I might as well be classified as a witch and so I call for a unity of the witches of the world...

### III

They say it is love. We say it is un waged work.

They call it frigidity. We call it absenteeism.

Every miscarriage is a work accident.

Homosexuality and heterosexuality are both working conditions ...

but homosexuality is workers' control of production, not the end  
of work.

More smiles? More money. Nothing will be so powerful in destroying  
the healing virtues of a smile.

Neuroses, suicides, desexualisation: occupational diseases of the  
housewife.

(Federici, 1975, 1)

This section situates the household as a production unit and will unpack the notion of love. The wage that a worker receives in return of their expended labour time is exchanged for commodities in the market. These commodities are raw materials that need to be converted back into use value for the purpose of subsistence. The labour required to transform them into "*articles of consumption*"<sup>22</sup> and the affective labour that goes into reproducing labour power (the commodity that the worker is) as well as the bearing/rearing of children is the daily activity of (re)production undertaken by the women of the household. It does not matter who the wage earner is, women are *naturally* predisposed to doing this activity.

Unlike the 'public' workplace where the commodified worker is alienated from the activity of producing the object of alienation,

<sup>22</sup> Sanyal, 62.

from themselves and hence from their species character, the 'private' workplace is the site where women are not free to even feel this alienation. They are alienated from the experience of feeling alienated as the system mystifies housework as their species character. Reduced to producing and reproducing the 'animal functions' for the capitalist system, it is evident that women could have only accepted this role after a prolonged struggle with the parasitic and predatory non-producers.<sup>23</sup> The norms of ideal femininity - being chaste (innocent, virtuous, faithful), passive (submissive, docile), obedient (dutiful and compliant), thrifty (economical), of few words, always busy at work (reproduction of the labour-force); covered by the necessary ideological mystification called love ensures that women smile and dance their way through this daily alienation.

It is essential to go back to the description of the two TVC's at the outset of the essay. In both the TVCs the protagonist is a woman who has a double work day - first in the private and second in the public. Even though women's employment in the public sphere is on the rise, their natural predisposition towards housework remains unshaken. The husband and children have barely any dialogues and respond to the woman (wife and mother) through shrugs, giggles or laughter. The audience that these two TVCs have in mind is the modern urban middle-class heterosexual nuclear family. This is clearly evident from the locational setup of the TVCs which means that only a certain section of the population can seek validation of their realities in it. It seems as if the TVC is telling its viewers that irrespective of your social location, your women have to do housework. Second, both the TVCs seem to be advertising two distinct elements - the wife/mother and the object she has to work with to convert its rawness into use value. And third, the background sound track is a happy and playful one. While watching the advertisement one can almost sway to the music. This makes the viewer feel that housework is not work but play adding to the

<sup>23</sup> Mies, 57.

evidence that capital invisibilizes women's labour in the household as a fun and love filled activity.

The two things that strike out instantly are, first, the happiness that the woman expresses while working (cooking new dishes every day and washing clothes) and second, the male expert voice over which explains the technicalities of the commodities in the TVCs. Ironically, it is not the man who is to use the spices or work with the washing machine. In the first TVC he is seen sitting idle with his children when the woman gets back to housework. She is distressed about providing tasty food daily to her family to such an extent that she cannot focus on work in office. The husband's disinterested shrug is a usual response to housework related questions in most households. However, another man comes to her rescue – the man who suggests Everest's range of thirty-eight spices using which she can prepare new and tasty dishes daily.

In the second TVC one does not realise what the commodity on advertisement is. We see the protagonist dancing happily around the house with a white satin dress (later we realise its her daughter's attire for 'Miss Snow White' competition). Her husband and children giggle and watch her. The voice over keeps repeating "*Uske Har White Mein Hai Magic Haathon Ka*". We know that the magic that is being sung about is that of the labour power of the woman. Her hands have the magic to get rid of stains from whites. This mystification of labour power, invisibilization of housework, is the basis of the accumulation of surplus value which is not catered for in the subsistence wage of the worker. The TVC equates the machine's efficiency (advanced hand wash agitator) with that the labour power of the woman also recognizing that machines would never be able to outdo the value of human labour.

The TVCs reinforce the oppressive social relations by representing the social conditions which are the basis of capital – the heteropatriarchal nuclear family and the naturalized, open yet disguised enslavement of women within the household. Capital needs to convince us through all possible means that housework

comes naturally to women, is unavoidable and an activity full of love. This unwaged condition of housework has been the most powerful weapon in reinforcing the common assumption that housework is not work but love, preventing women from struggling against it.<sup>24</sup>

#### IV

Mies and Federici's critique of the orthodox Marxian discourse for overlooking the household also breaks the universality of capital. Labour power is not reproduced at the site of capitalist production but in the non-capitalist site of production – the household. The relationship between capital and the household is one of extraction/appropriation, in which capital extracts the labour performed in the household in the form of reproduced labour power.<sup>25</sup> The household is the intrinsic inside of capital which creates the economic conditions of capital's expanded reproduction and is also the site that challenges capital's political and ideological universality, unsettling the state of its being.<sup>26</sup>

Having traced the changes in the social valuation of the daily subsistence work done by women- from being the first institutors of social relations, the intrinsic providers of means of subsistence, the first gatherers of nature's produce and inventors of cultivation tools to the ones who have been enslaved within the household – reproducing labour power, bearing and rearing prospective labour power and transforming commodities purchased from wages into articles of consumption/use value –it can be concluded that the institution of the patriarchal monogamous family pushed women out of production to ensure undisputed paternity for the owners of property and to reproduce labour power for those who had only their labour power as property. The naturalness of this activity, as opposed to its conscious and social nature before the institution of the monogamous family, is reinforced through the notion of *love*,

<sup>24</sup> Federici 1975, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Sanyal, 62-3.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 64.

the ideological blanket over the appropriation of surplus (unwaged) labour.

In contemporary times, every act of primitive accumulation is accompanied by newer forms of patriarchy where women expropriated from the commons, are isolated in their households and made to reproduce labour power which has to follow the capitalist work discipline. One may argue that technological innovations have altered social relations. These affect a miniscule percentage of the population who can afford them. However, even for this section, housework, irrespective of the level of technology and freedom is to be undertaken by women. It may be just switching the machine on, or the transfer of child rearing activity to the mother in-law or a nanny, it is nonetheless women whose natural predisposition remains reinforced. Women are the sole repositories of love and the most elementary form of its expression is housework. Can women be loved if they do not labour at home? Can women define love without any reference to labouring at home?



## Production of a 'degenerate' form

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Vasudeva K. Naidu

The National Socialists seized power in Germany in 1933 and immediately started their virulent attacks on modernist art but their most ambitious attack was on July 19, 1937, in Munich, where they organised the opening for an exhibition titled *Entartete Kunst* (degenerate art), in which were brought together more than 650 important paintings, sculptures, prints, and books. These works were confiscated from over thirty two state museums and were brought for display to vilify and denigrate the avant-garde art of that time. Never before and never since has there been an exhibition of this kind and scale, in the history of modern art. This exhibition attracted more than two million people with an average of twenty thousand people visiting each day and went on to tour for four years across Germany and Austria to be seen by a million more.

Interestingly, a day before the opening of *Entartete Kunst*, on July 18<sup>th</sup>, Hitler presided over the opening of the inaugural exhibition titled *The Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung* (The Great German Art Exhibition), under great pomp and ceremony just across the park from the dilapidated building which the next day would host *Entartete Kunst*. This exhibition brought together around 600 paintings and sculptures, a lot of which were personally approved by Hitler and Goebbels, to showcase the triumph of German art under the Third Reich.

Another interesting fact is that in spite of all the pomp and ceremony that The Great German Art Exhibition enjoyed, it barely got one-fifth of the crowd that went to see *Entartete Kunst*.

Why did *Entartete Kunst* enjoy such popularity? What could be the significance of the title *Entartete Kunst* for attracting such crowds?

The answers probably lie in understanding the etymological, epistemological and historical moorings of the word '*Entartet*' which traditionally has been translated as "degenerate" or "decadent". It

is essentially a biological term used to denote to a plant or an animal that has changed so much that it no longer belongs to its species.<sup>1</sup> This brief reflection will attempt to introduce the reader to this word in a particular context and hope to bring forth certain aspects of the historical implications 'Entartet' evokes in the discourse on race, psychiatry, eugenics, nationalism and (in the context of degenerate art) culture.

The term 'degenerate' has been in the public sphere of the German culture long before the National Socialist Party. The publication of Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man* in the year 1871 also marked the emergence of the German Empire, marking the intersection of the misconstrued application of Darwin's ideas with the blue-eyed and blonde haired Nordic-Aryan identity. This amalgamation would in coming decades be used to justify German racism.<sup>2</sup> But the conceptualisation of the degenerate first happened in the medical sciences, where the term was used in a specific context with regard to 'pathological alterations'.<sup>3</sup>

Benedict Augustus Morel (1809-1873) is generally considered to have originated the concept of degeneration in this more psychiatric sense...His major works published in 1857 and 1860 advanced the idea of there having been an original perfect type of the human race. Degeneracy according to Morel arose "from the influence of diet, toxins, climate, disease, and moral depravities of one generation" inducing "a high proportion of neurotics, criminals, and paupers in the next generation. The degenerative influence was then transmitted to the third generation, which had a high number of insane, mental defectives, and monstrosities. This in turn gave way in succeeding generations to defects of severe degree producing sterility and the eventual dying out of the tainted family."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Barron, S., & Guenther, P., *Degenerate art: the fate of the avant-garde in nazi Germany*, (Los Angeles: CA 1991), 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>3</sup> Walter, R. D., "What Became of the Degenerate?" *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* XI, 4(1956): 422-429.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 423.

The notions on degeneracy would spill over into the public psyche with the publication of Max Nordau's *Entartung* (Degeneration) in 1892. This book became notoriously popular, being widely read and discussed in Europe and America at that time, making Max Nordau a household name among educated late nineteenth century Europeans. *Degeneration* was so popular that it evoked a brilliant and scathing review of the book by George Bernard Shaw in 1895 from England.<sup>5</sup> Nordau, a doctor and a prominent Zionist, borrows ideas from Morel and Cesare Lombroso (who popularised the theory of degeneration in the field of criminology in the 1870s) and applied them to the disciplines of art and literature. He vehemently denounces the modernist movement with vilified attacks on the Pre-Raphaelites, and figures like Henrik Ibsen, Emile Zola, Nietzsche, among others. According to Nordau, these 'so called' avant-garde artists and writers were not heralding the society towards a new era but rather towards a regressive past of deterioration. He tries to persuade his readers by reiterating:

The 'freedom' and 'modernity', the 'progress' and 'truth', of these fellows are not ours. We have nothing in common with them. They wish for self-indulgence; we wish for work. They wish to drown consciousness in the unconscious; we wish to strengthen and enrich consciousness. They wish for evasive ideation and babble; we wish for attention, observation and knowledge. The criterion by which true moderns may be recognized and distinguished from impostors calling themselves moderns may be this: whoever preaches absence of discipline is an enemy of progress; and whoever worships his 'I' is an enemy to society.<sup>6</sup>

For Nordau, whoever didn't fit in this category was a degenerate. He particularly takes up the case of Nietzsche, giving point by point analysis of how madness entered Nietzsche's thought, logic and writing. "The normal man with his clear mind, logical thought, sound judgement, and strong will, sees, where the degenerate

<sup>5</sup> George Bernard Shaw, *The Sanity of Art. An Exposure of the Current Nonsense about Artists being Degenerate*, (London, 1908).

<sup>6</sup> Nordau, M. S., *Degeneration*, (New York: D. Appleton and Company. 1895), 560.

only gropes..."<sup>7</sup> Nordau's work was different from others writing on degeneracy because he managed to integrate his criticism of these figures into an overarching positivist framework,<sup>8</sup> but what would stick in the following decades would be the popularisation of the term 'degenerate', where Nordau certainly had a significant contribution.

Not surprisingly, by the time the National Socialists came to power, there was a comfortable assimilation between the 'degenerate' from medical sciences and the cultural 'degenerate' of Nordau. A good example to illustrate this is the work of Paul Schultze-Naumburg, an architect and racial theorist, who in 1925 published *Das ABC des Bauens* (The ABCs of Building) which was an attack on the Bauhaus School in Germany (famous for its modern approach to architecture). In 1928, Schultze wrote *Kunst and Rasse* (Art and Race), which would have a far-reaching influence in the Nazi scheme against modernism. Schultze-Naumburg exploited the popularity of Nordau's treatise to attack modern art as "entartet" by juxtaposing examples of modern art and photographs of deformed or diseased people, "to suggest that they were the models for the elongated faces of Amedeo Modigliani, the angular physiognomies of Schmidt-Rottluff, and the florid faces of Otto Dix. He railed particularly against the Expressionists, who he felt represented the inferior aspect of modern German culture."<sup>9</sup> It has been argued that Schultze-Naumburg must have adopted this methodology from the study *Bildneri der Geisteskranken* (Image-making by the mentally ill) published in 1922 by the psychiatrist Hans Prinzhorn, in which he examined more than 5,000 works by 450 patients to demonstrate that the art of the insane exhibited certain specific qualities.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, in 1933 in Erlangen, there was an exhibition, one of the many precursors to *Entartete Kunst*

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 541.

<sup>8</sup> Aschheim, S. E., "Max Nordau, Friedrich Nietzsche and Degeneration", *Journal of Contemporary History* 28. 4(1993): 646.

<sup>9</sup> Barron S., & Guenther P., *Degenerate art: the fate of the avant-garde in Nazi Germany*, (Los Angeles, CA, 1991), 12.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 13.

where thirty-two paintings by contemporary artists were displayed along with works by children and the 'mentally ill'.

This kind of juxtaposition gave legitimacy to a convenient establishment of synonymy between the avant-garde artist, the insane and the Jew, all interchangeable with the degenerate in Nazi Germany.

The ideas on degeneration continued to take hold throughout the late Nineteenth century way into the first half of Twentieth century in both Europe and America. In the case of Britain, as a result of Industrial revolution and mass migration to cities, there was a permanent underclass of poor people- who came to be categorized as beggars, thieves and prostitutes, always in poor health but reproducing rapidly. "The early defeats of the British army in the Boer War (1899-1902 confirmed for many, that degeneration had become a national problem."<sup>11</sup> Many argued that natural selection in the population of Britain has ceased to exist because public and private philanthropy has helped the weak to survive. Prominent intellectuals like Herbert Spencer gave a call for social Darwinism to take hold of the British society. Herbert writes:

[T]he well-being of existing humanity and the unfolding of it into . . . ultimate perfection, are both secured by that same beneficial though severe discipline, to which the animate creation at large is subject. It seems hard that an unskilfulness . . . should entail hunger upon the artisan. It seemshard that a laborer incapacitated by sickness . . . should have to bear theresulting privations. It seems hard that widows and orphans should be left to struggle for life or death. Nevertheless, when regarded not separately but in connexion with the interests of universal humanity, these harsh fatalities are seen to be full of beneficence. . .<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, Francis Galton, cousin of Charles Darwin, credited with the coinage of the term 'Eugenics', called for a "science of

<sup>11</sup> Childs D. J., *Modernism and eugenics: Woolf, Eliot, Yeats, and the culture of degeneration*, (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 9.

<sup>12</sup> Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics, Abridged and Revised* (1884), in *The Works of Herbert Spencer*, 21 vols. (Osnabruck: Otto Zeller, 1966), vol. i, 147.

improving stock" that would study "all influences that tend in however remote a degree to give to the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable than they otherwise would have had."<sup>13</sup>

The Mental Deficiency Act of 1913 which allowed provisions to treat and institutionalize people who were deemed as "feeble minded" and "moral defectives" was an improvement on the Idiots Act of 1886 which made a legal distinction between "idiots" and "imbeciles".

Eugenics had its own hold on many writers including Bernard Shaw, D.H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, W.B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, among many others. By the time the Nazis brought their Eugenical Sterilization Law, a soft distinction had already come about in England between negative and positive eugenics.<sup>14</sup>

The use of medical sciences, namely medico-psychological examination, where 'examination' became a transition from 'inquiry', according to Foucault, was aimed not at learning about the mechanism of knowledge, of what had taken place but rather took the role of a surveiller leading to the constitution of the domain of the abnormal. This medico-psychological examination acts as a new technique of individualization which mediates in the fabrication of a singularity, an identity, a "case".<sup>15</sup>

A clear expert psychiatric categorization of what constitutes as insane also spills on what constitutes as degenerate leading to a clear reconstitution of the identity of the Jew or an 'inbecile'. For Nordau, the avant-garde artists were 'dangerous' (particularly Nietzsche) because they seemed to threaten and endanger the order of things in an established society. Nietzsche is antithetical to Nordau's positivist approach towards the world, where the

<sup>13</sup> Galton.Francis . *Inquiries into Human Faculty*, (London: Macmillan, 1883), 24-25.

<sup>14</sup> For more see, Childs, D. J. *Modernism and eugenics: Woolf, Eliot, Yeats, and the culture of degeneration*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the birth of the Prison*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 225-27.

former is at the forefront in problematizing everything Nordau held sacred- rationality, discipline, order and science, ('All ordered society', Nietzsche scoffed, 'puts the passions to sleep')<sup>16</sup>. And passions are dangerous for a society based on rationality and order. Passions symbolise chaos and a passionate individual can be termed as a "dangerous individual", whose examination as Foucault notes, "must be considered at the level of his potentialities and not at the level of his acts" ... "Similarly, the "delinquent" must be distinguished from the law breaker, since what is relevant to his characterization is "less his act than his life... legal punishment bears on an act; punitive technique on a life."<sup>17</sup>In this line of analysis Foucault concludes, in *Abnormal*, that "expert psychiatric opinion makes it possible to transfer the point of application of punishment from the offense defined by the law to criminality evaluated from a psychological-moral point of view."<sup>18</sup>

Hence, it becomes easier to categorize an entire race (the case of Jews for instance) or a class (as was the case in Britain) of people as a singular entity, a "case", to be pigeonholed as 'dangerous', 'alien' and discardable, to be 'institutionalized' and separated from the ordered civilized society. *Entartete Kunst* was an exercise precisely of this kind of categorization of ideas manifesting as art.

These two very brief glimpses of discourses on degeneration and eugenics in Germany and Britain are only intended to introduce the reader to these terms. There is an entire plethora of work that has been done and is still coming on these concepts.

Even though degeneration is rarely used as a serious explanation for any human phenomenon now, it still persists in different forms as a weapon of prejudice in different societies across the world.

<sup>16</sup> Nietzsche, F. W., Common, T., Cohn, P. V., & Petre, M. D., *The Gay Science*, (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2020), 79.

<sup>17</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the birth of the Prison*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 292.

<sup>18</sup> Foucault, *Abnormal*, (New York: Verso Books, 2016), 16.



## Book Review

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Irfan Ahmad, *Religion as Critique: Islamic Critical Thinking from Mecca to Marketplace*, (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2018), Rs. 1195, xxv +270, Hbk, (ISBN 0 19 948759 6)

*Shofiul Alom Pathan*

The larger project that Ahmad has undertaken in this book is to question the dominant Eurocentric discourse that – Islam is a religion with an absence for the space of critique. He argues that in the twentieth century there has been a cold war between Islam and the West, underlined by the discourse of Enlightenment. The idea of Enlightenment, as contented by Ahmad is a manifested “self-appreciation” and did not necessarily mean a break from the earlier Christian tradition; but rather it was the project of putting ‘progressive’ Protestantism forward to immune the Christian world from any sort of critique. Thus, enlightenment becomes for the author an ethnic project of the German and the French.

On this backdrop Ahmad argues that it is the larger politics of enlightenment that projects Islam as a religion without the scope of any critique. In this process, he gives a substantial account of western literature which talks about Islam and it’s orthodoxy including Immanuel Kant. But for Ahmad, the greatest inability of this prevailing dominant theoretical framework is connected to Enlightenment legacy which talk about critique of religion other than Christianity. Rather than putting Islam and critique as mutually exclusive domain, he talks about Islam as a permanent critique in itself. He builds on Talal Asad’s conceptualization of Islam as a discursive tradition, and shows that “immanent critique” has always been present in Islamic history and culture.

This Eurocentric project alleges non-Christian religion of lacking a critique within their own domain. They perceive Protestantism as already something with in-built critique and hence rational. Ahmad deals with the ideas of prominent thinker of political

Islam; Abdul Ala Maududi and his lesser known, diverse critiques. Based on critique on and by Maududi, Ahmad argues that critique in different form and extent has always been an essential part of Islamic tradition.

Emphasizing on in-depth historical analysis, Ahmad argues that the issue of ‘continuity and break’ has a prominent role in our understanding of what we call Islam today or Islamic civilization or culture. Here he brings the methodological distinction of sociologist / anthropologist and that of orientalist/historian. For Ahmad, the latter uses the historical continuity in their analysis whereas the former often write in terms of a break with the past (pp.91-92). He is of the opinion that a proper understanding of what we call Islam today is not possible without a thorough engagement with the ancient Islamic political thought and history. In the above context Ahmad emphasizes the need for an “epistemic continuity between the pre-colonial and contemporary periods in the Islamic world” (pp.92-93).

Ahmad further elaborates on Islam through a critical engagement with the writings of Maulana Maududi (the founder of *Jamaat-e-Islami*, usually referred as Jamaat). Ahmad explores those areas of Maududi’s writings – on the critic on Islam. Simultaneously dealing with the writings of different scholars – both trained in modern western education and Islamic theology – their critical responses to Maududi and his counter response to them. The critiques of Maududi are either sympathizers of Jamaat with significant difference or ex-Jamaat supporters. The main criticism that critique brought against Maududi was that Maududi’s idea of Islam deviates from universal humanistic view, by ethicizing Islam only to Muslims. Also significant critiques of Maududi argue that for them Islam with a sense of devotion to Allah might be a matter of private faith; by not subscribing to Maudud’s political Islam or kingdom of Allah. By referring to various literatures and ethnographic accounts connected to *Darul Uloom* in Deoband and other Islamic institutions in North India, the larger project that Ahmad pursues is – to underline that critique within and from Islam has always

been part of Islamic tradition. For this purpose he reflects critically on his ethnographic engagements in Aligarh by meeting different people who had diverse opinion on Maududi; some of them are connected to Jamaat and some are not. Ahmad brings the debate as what is it that constitutes the basis of something to be categorized as a specific work of critique? Also in alternative way, what are the basic criteria or parameters that pre-suppose something to be called as critique? To engage with this query he brings Maududi in and argues that - the answer has to begin from engaging with Quran and Sunna. He writes that "The Legitimacy, desirability, motive, function, mode and goal of critique ought to speak to the yardstick of truth, which is ultimately sharia. And in Sharia no human is above critique" (pp.84). Ahmad refers to one of the instances of Quran where Prophet Musa goes on to critique Khizr related to some issue of religious discursive practices. Forms of critique within Islam not only continued but also flourished. Ahmad says that Maududi wondered if there was a time when critique had been considered illegitimate (pp.85-86).

He also debates an interesting and often controversial phenomenon - that is - Islam and the position on women. Ahmad refers to a set of literature as a critique of Maududi who viewed women's participation outside the house and in politics undesirable. But at the same time, Ahmad refers to vast range of literature by Islamic scholars who responded to Maududi and argued for alternative interpretation of Quran and Hadith. Basically before beginning to engage with the ideas of Maududi and his critique, Ahmad puts forward an alternative genealogy of critique which is not informed by Eurocentric notion about Islam and non-Christian world. He criticizes the traditional approach on Anthropology where it doesn't reflect much on the historical ruptures. For Ahmad, to understand the present day Islam, one needs to focus on the historical continuity that conventional Anthropologist ignores. In this context, Ahmad particularly reflects on the critique of Maududi by his followers on his "neopatriarchate" ideas especially related to women. Their critic actually exposes the missing part of what

modernist critic couldn't talk about Islam and Women. Ahmad argues that it is not essentially Islam but the interpretation of the person and the historical-political context that legitimizes patriarchy (pp.156).

From a methodological point of view this book makes a significant intervention in the understanding of sociology or social anthropology. Ahmad moves beyond the notion of traditional Anthropology by referring to substantial number of literary and poetry pieces. By critiquing this conventional approach, Ahmad argues that many actually fails to recognize that it is actually a repetition of the Enlightenment position. By referring to Kant, Ahmed writes "In Anthropology, Kant (2006)[1798] wrote that plays, novels and other literary works are not actually based on truth but only on invention" (pp.180). He also interestingly gives emphasis to the critique in mundane form or notion of critique by ordinary people.

From a theoretical point of view, the study can be located within the larger domain of post-colonial scholarship and Asadian framework of Anthropology of Islam. He extends the arguments put forward by Said about Eurocentric notion of the world. Taking that framework, bringing religion into the subject matter of inquiry, Ahmad forwards a critic of Western enlightenment project. While engaging with the works of Maududi, he refers to Talal Asad - for a discursive framework to establish an anthropology of Islam. Extending the idea of Asad, Ahmad considers this discursive tradition within Islam and engages with the idea of critique within it.

Punam Tripathi, *The Vulnerable Andaman and Nicobar Islands: A study of Disasters and Response* (New Delhi: Routledge India, South Asian Edition, 2018), Rs. 1495, Pages 354, Hbk, (ISBN 1138323551).

*Bipul Chhetri*

Andaman and Nicobar Island is one of the Indian territories that is known for its natural scenic beauty in terms of its diverse forests cover, the azure sea, white beaches and rich biodiversity. It is one of the most important tourist destinations today. The presence of colonial architecture further adds advantage to the island which makes it more attractive destination for both domestic and international tourist in the region. It is the island inhabited by six aboriginal tribes who were later brought into contact with the population from the mainland India after Independence.

The Island though today presents a glorious picture of its abundant natural resources and rich diversity of flora and fauna however have a bitter history when it is seen in terms of disaster. The tribal population of the region have witnessed multiple forms of disaster which were more of anthropogenic in nature rather than the natural disaster. The author has well documented the human induced disaster in relation to its history in different episodes or phases. Keeping the tribal inhabitants at the centre of the study, the work presents the nature of vulnerability that the tribal population were exposed in three different stages.

The book follows unique orientations of its chapters with first two chapters dedicated on general introduction of Andaman and Nicobar Island and its geographical aspects and introduces different episodes of disasters in different time periods. It slowly touches the other crucial aspects of vulnerability and various stages of responses and threats to the tribal population. It then critically analyzes the causes of failure of different responses from the concerned authorities. Hence, the chapters interestingly justify the whole idea of the book along with its contents.

Three different phases that brought about the vulnerability among the aboriginals were the Syphilis epidemic of late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, World War II of 1942 to 1945 and the Tsunami of 2004. All three disasters that have been taken into account were of different magnitude, time period, distribution and intensity of damages. For instance the Syphilis epidemic that existed for around 30 years wiped around 90 percent of tribal population from the region. Roughly 7000 tribal inhabitants lost their lives due to the epidemics. The Britishers invaded their homelands and started keeping them in confinements which made them more vulnerable due to exploitation. There were several stages of confrontation between the tribal and the Britishers in different phases. However, they could succeed in taming them in their own homeland and in no time these groups of the population were exploited for domestic and non domestic activities. It was evident that the Tribal population were not treated well by their colonial masters due to which they could not thrive in their own environment.

World War II was another event that made the tribal of Andaman more vulnerable. The A&N Island was captured by the Japanese forces in 1942 with various other island regions including Burma, Malaysia, Singapore and Rangoon. The British forces fled to the mainland India leaving the tribal population in their Island. Even the Car Nicobar Island was captured in 1943 by the Japanese troops. There were continuous war, air raids, submarine attacks, injuries and killings. All the means of transportation, communication and industrial resources which were used by the enemy was destroyed. The Island was not self sufficient in terms of food grains and other essential means of living including clothes, medicines, equipments, tools and other household items. All the supply of all these essential items were cut off during the War due to which, A&N faced famine. This phase was indeed a phase of massive disaster. The Britishers further defeated the Japanese forces in 1945 and took charge over the Island. They distributed civil supplies and medicines in the Island. Port Blair and Car Nicobar were the two most affected areas and

much of the investment was made in rebuilding these two places that later turned to be the hub of growth and development.

Earthquake measuring Mw 9.3 on Richter scale that hit the Island on 26<sup>th</sup> December, 2004 and within no time the Island was engulfed by Tsunami. Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia, Thailand, Maldives and other countries were severely affected by it. Altogether 100000 people were killed by Tsunami that affected 14 countries. In India total number of person killed was 12,405 and nearly 2.8 million people were affected. Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Union Territories of Pondicherry and A & N Island were mostly affected. In A&N itself the official figure of total killed by Tsunami was 3513 person. However, the actual deaths were much higher than the official figures. There were several forms of damages that were seen other than the ones that were killed. Forest Destruction, Impact on Coral reefs, effect on agriculture, fishing, livestock, tourism, small and micro industrial units, Infrastructure, communication networks, transport services, damages on houses were severe by the Tsunami. People lost their livelihoods along with the loss of resources.

The book presents not only the disaster and its impact on the population but also reflects the nature of responses to it. Different disasters that had unfolded in different times with different intensity were seen from the nature of responses and the failure of the system keeping in mind the vulnerability aspects of it has been clearly shown. The way the authority had taken disaster for granted without adequate concern for vulnerability in their poor responses further added greater degree of threats to the lives of the tribal population.

The author has well presented her work with great articulation. Extensive data have been used in all the aspects to show the real damages, figures and maps have been extensively used keeping in mind the intensity of disaster in different time period. The most interesting part of the book is the way it has been organized

in different episodes and the assessment of vulnerability of the population in different forms of disaster. The book itself is very informative as it provides the overall picture on history and nature of disaster that had unfolded in A&N Island keeping the vulnerability aspects of its population into account. The book has covered multiple dimensions of disaster that the A&N Island has witnessed and the intensity of its effects on the tribal as well as non tribal inhabitants of the region. This book is a great treatise for the academicians of different disciplines ranging from Geography, History, and Disaster Management to Tourism. It's indeed a great contribution from the author for the future researchers in the region due to its in depth information and excellent articulation of thoughts.

Sreetanwi Chakraborty, *The Sleeping Beauty Wakes Up* (Kolkata: Penprints Publications, 2019), Rs. 350, 144, Hbk, (ISBN 978-93-5361-186-6)

*Monika Rana*

Sreetanwi Chakraborty's thesis on a feminist interpretation of fairy tales came as a surprise and treat to my literary interest. One of my fondest childhood memories is intricately connected with the stories I used to hear as a child. These stories would range from tribal folk tales comprising mermaid to the stories by Grimm Brothers. Back then, I didn't realize in that small hamlet of Dooars, stories and fables written in Germany would seep into our local households in the form of oral narratives, cartoons and comics. It took me another decade of exposure to various schools of thought to understand the politics of representation in the tales that made our childhood.

The changes in the academia and politics which can be located more prominently in the fin de siècle of the twentieth century led to challenging and reproduction of the previously accepted concepts and ideas associated with representation of women. In this context, works like Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*, Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* would be indispensable. The understanding of women and her gender roles assigned by these male authors came under strict scrutiny of the Feminist Literary critics. It is in this premise, we can locate Sreetanwi's *The Sleeping Beauty Wakes Up – A Feminist interpretation of Fairy Tales*. As the subtitle suggests, her work argues and challenges various stereotypes associated with the representation of women characters. The stereotyping of women as victims, damsel in distress, agents of darkness has been a common practice in literature across ages and civilization. If the Greeks had Medea and Medusa, the Elizabethans gave birth to Lady Macbeth. The seemingly long title of the book, however, succeeds in laying out the agendas forthright to the readers. The metaphorical 'Sleeping Beauty' is no longer ignorant, innocent and in darkness. Short and precise, the book has been

divided into four sections. It is inclusive and encompassing in the sense that it takes into account the Russian, German, Czech, Danish, and stories from other regions of the world.

The text talks about the recurrent images of garden, forest, mirror in the fairy tales. What appears intriguing is the observation of the idea of woman as a fruit. It is also interesting to note that feminine *self* has been recurrently identified as the producer. The image of a fruit bearer can be found pronounced in the idea of Mother Earth or Mother India. This not only suggests that women as the producer but as the passive receiver of actions as well. It also successfully argues the various images of garden and forest as a site of pleasure and entrapment in the corpus of fairy tales. The idea can be identified in the following lines from the text:

The garden and the wood is a highly important site of conflict; therefore, in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Alice's quest is a gendered quest during which she investigates types of feminine representation.

I personally was quite fascinated by the working of some stereotypical images to generate certain mass consciousness. These pointers not only entrapped women to a certain space but also framed an ideology or base on the basis of which a superstructure of women's identity would be generated:

All images, ice, mirror, coffin, garden, everything, are used later on as bridges to cross, weapons to blind men, and to reverse the position of women and not reflect it. Beauty itself is a kind of entrapment that dominates most of the prominent fairy tales.

However, one can see the narrativizing of such images have changed in the course of time. In contemporary literature, forest as a space finds its way in Haruki Murakami's magical realism. The forest that Kafka resorts to find an escape from the situation around him is quite different from the forest that Naoko finds her peace in *Norwegian Wood*. In Murakami's magical world, forest is no longer an entrapment, it is rather

an escape. In case of Sigmund Freud, it would signify a bottomless pit or an abyss – the space of subconscious mind where all desires remain repressed.

One of the chapters discusses about the process involved in sub-conscious social conditioning done by the fairy tales thereby validating gender roles on the basis of fairy tale narratives. The narratives in active and passive ways are responsible for social constructs that subjectify and objectify women. It can also be noted in the manners how girls passively subject themselves with the constructs created in the fairy tales. Sreetanwi aptly points out the role of these fairy tales in promotion of compulsory heterosexuality and patriarchal values inherent in the tales. The idea of gender as performativity was taken by Butler from Derrida's reading of Kafka's "*Before the Law*". Gender as performativity is based on the premise that repetitive and ritualistic practice give rise to a sense of naturalization in the context of a body. It produces a series of effect to keep one in a gendered space. The reworkings of fairy tales as informal and subconscious way of practicing this act also leads to the creation of constructs. An important instance of gynocentrism can also be seen in Sreetanwi's referral to J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter and how the latter presents the narratives of men from her vantage point. However, Sreetanwi points that Rowling fails to deviate from the normative ways of representation and hence, has been highly criticized for "undermining women" in her works.

Even though the text covers the major corpus of fairy tales, it has certainly missed out certain aspects which would otherwise be possible only by telescoping down into certain texts. Compartmentalizing the texts on the basis of subjects and then dealing with the issues would have been more coherent and structured. The book is meant to be read to gain a clearer insight into the ideas and arguments associated to the question, ideas and politics of representation in fairy tales. It is

indeed inclusive but at the same time, offers only the Western idea of representation even though certain references to tales from the Middle East can be definitely seen. It has been thoroughly researched and is a delight to read. To conclude, I would like to point at the changing narratives of fairy tales in the contemporary discourse. These days one might see a commercial flashing on television where a famous actor acting as dad talks to his daughter about the change in the gender roles thereby asserting that it is the heroine who saves the prince. It only makes me wonder how socially validated constructs are slowly being deconstructed and reconstructed to create general consciousness and at the same time commodified.

## Our Contributors

**Abhijit Ray** is doctoral candidate at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. His research interests include politics, representations, and popular culture.

**Bikash Sarma** is a Faculty with the Department of Political Science, Salesian College, Siliguri.

**Bipul Chhetri** is presently working as an Assistant Professor and Head in the Department of Geography at Salesian College, Siliguri Campus. He has a teaching experience of more than 5 years. He defended his PhD Thesis entitled "Livelihood Adaptability and its Sustainability in the Mountain Ecosystem: Lachung Valley, Sikkim Himalaya" from Sikkim Central University in the year 2019. His area of interest lies in Environmental Geography, Geography of Resources and Population Geography. He has published some of his research work in Journal entitled Deccan Geographers, Indian Journal of Regional Sciences, Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences.

**Geroge Thadathil** is the Principal of Salesian College, Sonada and Siliguri. He is the author of Vision from the Margin and has edited and co-edited number of books besides contributing to a number of journals and edited volumes. He is the founder Director of Salesian Publications, Salesian Research Centre and Salesian Translation Centre.

**Jaydeep Chakrabarty**, is Faculty of English, at the Department of English, Assam University, Silchar, India. His areas of interest include postcolonial literatures, critical theory, fiction studies and British literature. He has to credit several papers published in noted journals.

**Monika Rana** has earned her Masters degree from Visva Bharati, Santiniketan. Currently, she is working as an Assistant Professor in the Department of English. She is also engaged in a translation project under Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi. Three anthologies of poetry has been published to her credit during her high school days. She continues to write poetry in English, Hindi and Nepali.

**Pius V Thomas** is Faculty at the Department of Philosophy, Assam University, Silchar. Areas of specialization are Contemporary Western Philosophy, Critical Hermeneutics, Ethics-Applied Ethics, Theories of Democracy, Religion and Human Rights, Philosophies of Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore. His current research interests are focused on the question of the possibility of contextualizing Human Rights, along with cultural critique, which stimulates themes like Philosophical concepts of Interculturality and Critique, Ethics and Reason, Democracy and Religion, Environmental Ethics and the Philosophy of Education. He has a good number of papers and articles to his credit.

**Shofiul Alom Pathan** is doctoral candidate with Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur. His research interests include questions of identity and violence in contemporary Assam.

**Shruti Sharma** is a doctoral candidate with CSSSC, Kolkata. Her research interests include Critical geography and gendering of sports.

**Siby K. George** is Professor of Philosophy at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay. He is author of *Heidegger and Development in the Global South* (Springer, 2015), co-editor of *Cultural Ontology of the Self in Pain* (Springer, 2016) and *Teaching in Unequal Societies* (Bloomsbury, 2020), and of a number of journal papers and book chapters.

**Subhra Nag** is Professor at the Department of Philosophy, Assam University, Silchar. Her areas of special interest and research are Moral Philosophy, Gender Studies and Philosophical Psychology. She has published several papers in journals and edited volumes.

**Vasudeva K Naidu** is a Faculty with the Department of English, Salesian College, Sonada.

**Violina Patowary** is M Phil candidate at the Department of Philosophy, Assam University, Silchar. She has published a good number of papers in reputed.

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