

# GANDHI MARG

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VOLUME 39

NUMBER 2&3

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*Combined Issue*  
July-September & October-December 2017

Gandhi Peace Foundation  
New Delhi

# GANDHI MARG

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*Quarterly Journal of the Gandhi Peace Foundation*

VOLUME 39 □ NUMBER 2&3 □ JULY-DECEMBER 2017

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*editorgmarg@yahoo.co.in*

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II ISSN 0016—4437 LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CARD NO. 68-475534

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Published by Ashok Kumar for the Gandhi Peace Foundation, 221 & 223 Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Marg, New Delhi-110 002 (Phones: 23237491, 23237493; Fax: +91-11-23236734), Website: [www.gpfindia.org](http://www.gpfindia.org), e-mail: [gpf18@rediffmail.com](mailto:gpf18@rediffmail.com), [gandhipacefoundation18@yahoo.co.in](mailto:gandhipacefoundation18@yahoo.co.in), and printed by him at Gupta Printing and Stationery Service, 275, Pratap Nagar, Street No. 18, Delhi-110 007

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*Napthalin Prabu*

- *We gratefully acknowledge the financial assistance received from the Indian Council of Social Science Research for the production of this journal*



Gandhi Marg Quarterly

39(2&3): 133–134

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<http://gandhipacefoundation.org/>

ISSN 0016—4437

## Editorial

THE NATIONAL HEALTH POLICY 2017 is aimed at increasing public expenditure on health from the present figure of 1.15 per cent of the GDP to 2.5 per cent by 2025. The year 2017 has been characterized by a number of health disasters including the crisis at the Baba Raghav Das Medical College in Gorakhpur. This has elicited considerable debate on the state of health, particularly rural health in India. The CAG report on reproductive and child health under the National Rural Health Mission (March 2016) suggests that there is considerable lack of capacity to spend the funds allocated, shortage of staff including doctors, essential equipment and medicines. The shortage of doctors is quite acute in states like UP, which is close to the national capital. India intends to reduce infant mortality rates from the estimated 40 per thousand births to 30 per thousand by the year 2020. This would require substantial investments by the centre and the states. Likewise, the National Health Protection Scheme expected to take off in 2018 promises to bring 10 crore families within an insurance scheme entitling each family to a sum of Rs. 5 lakhs. To expect that the market will cater to the health needs of the public is certainly not a feasible option given the inability of the poor to afford the costs and its potential for the impoverisation of the already poor. India has the highest number of stunted children with attendant implications for the quality of the human resource. Thus, slow improvement in indicators of maternal and child health, existence of both communicable and non-communicable diseases, high out-of-pocket expenditure and the highly commercialized character of private health providers are problems confronting the health sector in the country.

If the current expenditure is any indication, the expected goal of 2.5 per cent of the GDP is unlikely by 2025. In the 2018 budget of the present government, a marginal increase to the tune of 5 per cent has been effected. Considering the fact that this represents the last full budget of the government before it faced the voters in 2019 suggests that there has been a lackadaisical attitude to the health issue. Some

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of the schemes like Janani Suraksha Yojana, which provides a cash incentive of Rs. 1400 to a mother who opts for institutional delivery, is estimated to be less than half the amount they would be actually required to spend. According to the national family health survey 4 (2015-16), 55 per cent of the households do not use a government facility for their health needs either because no such facility exists in their vicinity or because the quality of the service provided is far too bad.

Nutrition is one area where more needs to be done. There has been a reduction in the central share in the expenditure on ICDS and mid-day meals and the states have been asked to increase their share. Although the Pradhan Mantri Matritva Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) provides Rs 5000 cash benefit to pregnant and lactating women, it is yet to take off in a big way.

This issue of the journal is a combined one, incorporating volumes two and three of the current year. There are six full-length articles and a shorter one in the notes and comments section. The first article by George Paxton explores Gandhi's changing views on war in the light of his experiences and how he eventually came to adopt a firm commitment to non-violence. The second article by Nishikant Kolge examines whether there can be something called Gandhian feminism in the context of the dominant feminist strands of thought. The next article by G. Palanithurai analyses the track record of rural institutes in India. The fourth article by Saurav Kumar Rai attempts to revisit the ideas of the nation and nationalism of Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore. The fifth article by Persis Latika Dass looks at the Gandhian Sarva Dharma Sambhava idea in the context of the debates over secularism. The final article is by D. M. Diwakar who looks at Gandhian education and the various experiments made to crystallise and practice it in different parts of the country. I hope this collection of articles will provide enough food for thought for the engaged readers.

**JOHN S. MOOLAKKATTU**  
Editor



Gandhi Marg Quarterly

39(2&3): 135–156

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<http://gandhipacefoundation.org/>

ISSN 0016–4437

# Gandhi's Wars

*George Paxton*

## ABSTRACT

*Gandhi participated in or expressed his opinions on six war situations from the Anglo-Boer War to the Second World War. His views were not always consistent and he was criticised for this, particularly by western pacifists, including close colleagues. This arose from his multi-viewpoint position, where he opposed war personally but justified participation in war by others who fought for a just cause. A linked influence was his intense dislike of cowardliness and admiration of courageousness. His ideal, however, was the courageous satyagrahi and his expressed opinions moved during his lifetime to a firmer non-violent antiwar position.*

**Key words:** War, non-violent resistance, inconsistencies, critics, courageousness.

**G**ANDHI WAS NOTED for his inconsistency, or at least apparent inconsistency, on some important issues. This is true of caste, race and class issues which has left him open to attack or misinterpretation by a variety of critics down to the present time. This is true also of his expressed views and actions on the matter of war. This is important because of the prominence he gave to non-violence.

Gandhi was involved, either directly or indirectly, with several war situations – the Anglo-Boer War and the Bambatha revolt in South Africa; the First World War at its beginning and then towards its end; and the Second World War in Europe and in Asia. I intend to examine Gandhi's stance in these diverse war situations, his consistencies and inconsistencies and the evolution of his ideas which I believe are revealed.

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**South African Conflicts**

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi arrived at the port of Durban, Natal on 23 May 1893. The 23-year-old barrister of the Inner Temple, London, having had a slow start to his legal career in India decided to take a year's engagement with a trading firm Dada Abdoolla & Co which operated in South Africa and India. He did not leave South Africa finally till more than 20 years later after taking up the cause of the civil rights of the Indian community there. His religious and political ideas greatly developed during this period and the concept of satyagraha as a means of transforming society is perhaps the most important of these.

South Africa was a very ethnically diverse society – Black Africans; Europeans who were themselves divided into two main groups, those of British origin and those of Dutch origin (Boers); Indians and Chinese who were largely brought in as indentured labourers although there were prosperous traders too; and also the people of mixed race. The British dominated in the colonies of Cape Town and Natal and the Boers in the republics of Orange Free State and Transvaal. After diamonds and gold were discovered in Transvaal, the British contrived to control the province and this conflict broke into an open warfare in 1899 and lasted till 1902. This conflict need not have involved Gandhi but he chose to get involved on behalf of the Indian community.

Gandhi who came to South Africa in the last decade of the 19th century was a different Gandhi from the leader of the Independence movement in India. He was much more accepting of the British Empire than he was later to become. His belief in non-violence also was at a less developed stage. Being raised in Gujarat, he was aware of the Jain belief in ahimsa or non-harm which was carried to extreme lengths by the monks, who attempted to avoid killing the smallest creature. Ahimsa was also part of his own family's Vaishnava form of Hinduism and the family were vegetarian, which Gandhi only adopted with enthusiasm, when he discovered in his student days that vegetarianism was practised in Britain too albeit by a small minority. But the Indian traditions did not necessarily lead believers to reject completely the killing of human beings – neither the execution of criminals nor killing in war – since the traditions often confined ahimsa to the private sphere rather than extending it to the political.

Gandhi read Leo Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You* not long after arriving in South Africa and this had a tremendous influence on his developing religious and ethical outlook. Although coming from the Christian tradition, Tolstoy rejected the complex theologies of

Christianity, as well as the wealth and power of the churches, in favour of the ethical teachings of Jesus with its core message of love or compassion for humans (which Tolstoy extended to animals also) including an explicit acceptance of what Tolstoy called non-resistance.

The Indian ahimsa tradition and the Christian non-resistance tradition combined to lead Gandhi to reject personal violence including war for himself; however, he also accepted the right of those individuals who did not share his belief to resort to violence for a good cause. This double-perspective approach could make him appear inconsistent.

When war broke out between the Boers and the British, although being more sympathetic to the Boers, Gandhi felt that as the Indians were subjects of the British Empire, they should support the British. His stance at this time was recorded many years later (1924) in his *Satyagraha in South Africa*:

Our existence in South Africa is only in our capacity as British subjects. In every memorial we have presented, we have asserted our rights as such. We have been proud of our British citizenship, or have given our rulers and the world to believe that we are so proud. Our rulers profess to safeguard our rights because we are British subjects, and what little rights we still retain, we retain because we are British subjects.<sup>1</sup>

... And if we desire to win our freedom and achieve our welfare as members of the British Empire, here is a golden opportunity for us to do so by helping the British in the war by all means at our disposal.<sup>2</sup>

It is clear that at this stage of his life, Gandhi was thinking primarily of the welfare of the Indian community in South Africa – the war gave an opportunity for Indians to display their loyalty to the regime which hopefully would be rewarded post-war. But how to serve when the Indians had no experience of warfare? Gandhi and his colleagues came up with the idea of an Ambulance Corps and so the leaders undertook some nursing training of the wounded and obtained certificates of competence. A letter was sent to the Government with the proposal which was however initially rejected. But as the war intensified the Indians' offer was taken up and a corps of 1,100 of both free and indentured men from Natal was raised with Dr. Lancelot Booth as Medical Superintendent and Gandhi leading the Indians. Most members were paid £1 per week which was only about half the amount paid to the British troops, and the 30 leaders served without remuneration.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout his life, Gandhi greatly admired bravery and here was an opportunity to practice it in the line of duty; this would show that the Indians were worthy of a status not normally granted to

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them by most of the Europeans. The wounded soldiers were often carried 7-8 miles to base-hospital by the Indian stretcher bearers, but on one occasion it was as much as 25 miles. After the relief of Ladysmith the Corps was disbanded and General Buller praised its efforts and awarded medals to its 37 section leaders. The son of Lord Roberts, the Commander-in-Chief of the British forces, who when mortally wounded was carried off the field by the members of the Indian corps. However, in spite of appreciation of the Corps' work expressed by the British commanders, no improvement in the Indian population's situation materialised post-war.

In the middle of 1906, a conflict arose in Natal between the Government and some Zulus. What became known as the Bambatha Rebellion began as a protest against taxation during which two policemen accompanying a magistrate were killed. Reprisals followed. Again Gandhi offered to form a corps of stretcher-bearers, but this time it was only some twenty strong with Gandhi given the rank of sergeant-major. His sympathies were with the Zulus and it was fortunate that most of those helped by the Corps were Zulus, many of whom had been flogged by the British soldiers and their wounds left untreated, so the Indians' first-aid was clearly greatly appreciated even though it could not be conveyed through speech.

This small 'war' had a profound effect on Gandhi. In his Autobiography he wrote:

The Zulu 'rebellion' was full of new experiences and gave me much food for thought. The Boer War had not brought home to me the horrors of war with anything like the vividness that the 'rebellion' did. This was no war but a man-hunt ... To hear every morning reports of the soldiers' rifles exploding like crackers in innocent hamlets, and to live in the midst of them was a trial.<sup>4</sup>

Rev. Joseph Doke, a supporter of the Indian cause, wrote in 1908-9 the first biography of Gandhi, in which he says: "As a man of peace, hating the very thought of war, it was almost intolerable for him to be so closely in touch with this expedition. At times, he doubted whether his position was right."<sup>5</sup> But he carried on for the sake of the wounded, until after a month the unit was disbanded. And so Gandhi returned to his family, and to the Indian community which he would before long lead in the direction of civil disobedience and satyagraha. 1906 also marked a change in his marriage to Kasturba as he took, at the age of 36, a vow of celibacy which he adhered to for the rest of his life.

### **The First World War**

The resistance of the Indian community in South Africa to discrimination increased in the years following 1906 and expanded to involve more of the indentured Indians and also Indian women. By January 1914 a compromise agreement on a variety of issues had been reached with the former General and leading South African politician, Jan Christian Smuts, and Gandhi turned his mind to preparing to leave South Africa for the last time. Mohandas and Kasturba, along with close colleague Hermann Kallenbach, left Cape Town for London en route to India on 18 July and travelling third class arrived on 6 August – two days after the Great War started. Gandhi's purpose in going by way of London was to see Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the leading liberal and academic who supported Gandhi's work in South Africa, but found that he had been stranded in France although they did meet in London later.

Kasturba and her husband stayed in cheap lodgings while in London but a reception was organised for him at Hotel Cecil, so that Gandhi could meet Indians resident in the city, including Mohammed Ali Jinnah and Sarojini Naidu, as well as some British people known to him including Charlotte Despard, the leading suffragist who did not agree with the methods of the more militant suffragettes. Remarkably, neither at this reception nor during the rest of his stay in London did he speak "of the horrors of war or of the folly of the European nations in their descent into barbarism" as James Hunt expressed it.<sup>6</sup> What Gandhi observed with admiration was the willingness of British people to give up their normal comforts and cooperate for the general good of their own citizens. This was what he wanted to see among Indian people – discipline and willingness to sacrifice. His mind turned to what he could do to help and once more he thought of first aid work.

So, Gandhi called a meeting of Indian residents in Britain, which brought a response initially of more than 50 willing to serve. "On 26 August, the first class of volunteers met at the Regent Street Polytechnic Institute for six weeks of instruction in first aid, sanitation and hygiene under Dr. James Cantlie ..."<sup>7</sup> Seventy Indians joined the course and by the end of September, a Field Ambulance Training Corps was formed under the Red Cross Society. But now some of Gandhi's colleagues were disturbed by his association with the military and this included Henry Polak who cabled from South Africa, and another South African colleague and satyagrahi, Pragji Desai. In a letter to Desai, Gandhi wrote: "A satyagrahi cannot support war directly or indirectly," yet because he was not yet a perfect satyagrahi, he felt he

had to help the British. The navy was used to protect supplies of food and other essentials, therefore he was implicated by living in Britain.<sup>8</sup>

In October, Indian troops started to arrive in Marseilles and proceeded to the front line in the north. The Indian Field Ambulance Training Corps under Lt-Col. Richard Baker made camp to the west of London and preparations began well. However, when Baker appointed section leaders, who were mostly Oxford students, Sorabji Adajania, a South African sent by Gandhi to London to train for the bar, complained to Gandhi about Baker's arbitrary actions. There was also dissatisfaction over blankets and rations. Gandhi called a meeting of the Corps but his attempt to act as a mediator between the Corps members and Baker was not well received by the latter, after all this was the army. A first group of 30 trained volunteers from the Corps was sent to a hospital at Netley near Southampton.

Gandhi appealed to the India Office through Charles Roberts MP, Undersecretary of State for India, but Lord Crewe of the Colonial Office supported Baker's position. Gandhi took the position that the Corps had special status and was supervised by an Indian Volunteers Committee, but Baker issued new rules stating that all new applications for service come to him and not to Gandhi. In France, troops of the Indian Expeditionary Force had suffered severe casualties and Col. Baker took a second detachment of volunteers to Netley on 27 October. On the 30th, a resolution of the dispute was reached with the help of Charles Roberts: men going to Netley were to report to the Commanding Officer of the hospital rather than Baker, and Gandhi was to oversee the recruitment and Baker was to consult Gandhi in non-military matters. However, a non-stated condition was that Gandhi was not to be allowed near the hospital. Soon nearly 470 Indian casualties reached the hospital on one day alone after heavy fighting at Ypres. By December the number of volunteers had reached 150, mostly at Netley but smaller numbers were at two other hospitals.

Gokhale was in poor health, as was Gandhi who had been suffering from pleurisy, but they were able to have conversations although very little was recorded, the only significant one being that Gandhi agreed not to involve himself in Indian politics for a year, while he rediscovered the country he had been largely away from for some 20 years.

Gandhi also met with the suffragists Emmeline and Frederick Pethick-Lawrence, the classicist and humanist Professor Gilbert Murray, and Florence Winterbottom of the Ethical Society. Kallenbach stayed with the Gandhis studying Gujarati but did not get permission to proceed to India and in June 1915 he was interned as an alien

ending up on the Isle of Man. Kasturba was also unwell during the winter and so the advice of Charles and Cecilia Roberts to return to India was taken. After a farewell reception at the Westminster Palace Hotel, they embarked at Tilbury on 19th December 1914, finally on their way home after a less than satisfactory stay in Britain.

### **India at Last**

On the voyage, Gandhi wrote a letter to his South African colleague Albert West: "I have been so often prevented from reaching India that it seems hardly real that I am sitting in a ship bound for India. And, having reached that, what shall I do with myself?"<sup>9</sup> The Gandhis arrived in Bombay on 9 January 1915. Gandhi and Kasturba then visited Rabindranath Tagore's Shantiniketan, but while there received the news that Gokhale had died; he was only 48.

Gandhi decided to establish an ashram in his home state of Gujarat and chose initially a small village near Ahmedabad called Kochrab, but before long it was moved a short distance to Sabarmati. Here there were to be strict rules including the absence of caste distinctions. It was named Satyagraha Ashram and was to be his centre of operation until the early 1930s. For the present purposes, the next few years can be ignored until the year 1918.

In February 1918, Gandhi became involved in a dispute at the cotton mills in Ahmedabad. Disagreement over payments led to a lockout but the workers began to weaken in their resolve even though Gandhi considered their demands to be just and at that point Gandhi decided to start a fast with the aim of stiffening their resolve. After 25 days of strike, a settlement was reached. The next month another dispute arose among peasants in Kheda, Bombay Presidency. There had been drought there and the peasants were unable to make payments and so asked for them to be suspended. However, the Government was in no mood to listen, whereupon the peasants supported by Gandhi and others refused to make any payments. Eventually, a settlement was reached though Gandhi was not entirely satisfied with it. But his political technique of satyagraha, forged in South Africa, had demonstrated its usefulness in an industrial setting as well as a rural one.

In Europe, the war was not going well and the British wanted more troops from India to strengthen their side. The Viceroy Lord Chelmsford called a War Conference at Delhi for 27 April. Gandhi allowed himself to be persuaded to attend. According to Gandhi the Viceroy had used a familiar argument:

... if you agree that the Empire has been, on the whole, a power for good,

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if you believe that India has, on the whole, benefitted by the British connection, would you not admit that it is the duty of every Indian citizen to help the Empire in the hour of its need?<sup>10</sup>

Gandhi was still in thrall to the idea that serving in the army would develop courageousness in the ordinary Indian and thus lead to their ability to become courageous satyagrahis.

Gandhi thus undertook to recruit for the army and this time his close friend Charles Freer Andrews was one to object to his decision; another who was sceptical was his Danish friend Esther Faering. Andrews wrote on 23 June 1918:

I do not see the analogy of the dumb man in your letter. It seems dangerously near the argument that the Indian who has forgotten altogether the blood-lust might be encouraged to learn it again first and then repudiate it afterwards of his own account ... At the same time I do agree with you entirely that it is a free India choosing her own path which can give the world the highest example of ahimsa, not the present subjected India. But even then – cannot you conceive of that very freedom being won by moral force only, not by the creation of a standing army to meet the army of occupation?<sup>11</sup>

Gandhi chose Kheda as a suitable area for recruitment and expected that his fellow workers who had assisted with the recent satyagraha there would help. He was to be disappointed, neither his colleagues nor the peasants were inclined to give support. Indeed the peasants could see clearer than Gandhi did, the contradiction in his position. The other strong factor influencing him seems to have been his hope that if Indians show their willingness to support the British rulers when they need support then this loyalty will be repaid by treating their subjects as equals after the crisis and so social and political freedom will be granted. In fact more than a million Indians served in the British army during the Great War without any help from Gandhi. Had Gandhi not noticed that his demonstration of loyalty had not worked in South Africa? And how could raising recruits whom he told to be non-violent towards the British be sent, through his actions, to Europe to kill Germans, Austrians and other enemies of the British who were nevertheless human beings like themselves? Moreover, the war was seen by many ordinary workers in Europe as a war that could not benefit them – it was instigated by the rulers of imperial powers whose ideology could bring neither justice at home nor liberation in the colonies.

The mental conflict of an advocate for non-violence attempting to recruit soldiers may have contributed to a breakdown in his health in

August. The ending of the war in November was a great relief to him. But this was not followed by any concessions as the Government brought in the Rowlatt Acts which were restrictions on civil liberties with the intention of combating political violence. Gandhi considered that this required a strong response and he chose to start satyagraha with a hartal on 6 April 1919, a day when all businesses would stop and people would fast and pray as a protest. (Due to a misunderstanding, the hartal was observed in Delhi a week earlier.) In Bombay banned books, such as *Hind Swaraj* and *Sarvodaya*, were also sold openly, and a news-sheet *Satyagraha* was published in defiance of the Press Act. Unfortunately, violence occurred in several places and Gandhi decided to suspend satyagraha on 18 April, although Nehru and others did not concur. Meanwhile, although Gandhi and most of India did not learn of it for several days, a massacre of unarmed men, women and children was carried out by troops under the command of General Sir Reginald Dyer in Amritsar in the Punjab, resulting in about 400 deaths and more than 1,000 wounded. This was followed by martial law in the city and the notorious crawling orders requiring Indians to crawl on their bellies in the street where a European woman had been assaulted. Gandhi's faith in the benign influence of British rule was finally abandoned.

### **Gandhi's Critics**

About a decade passed between Gandhi's unsuccessful army recruiting campaign and the next time that he was faced with the issue of war. This was in May 1928 when the leading Dutch pacifist, Bart de Ligt, wrote to Gandhi and this then developed into a dialogue which Gandhi published in the pages of *Young India*. De Ligt greatly admired Gandhi but he had been disappointed to learn of Gandhi's support for war on more than one occasion. He went back to 1899 and Gandhi's attitude to the Anglo-Boer War and his offer to the authorities to encourage Indians to enroll in the British Army. When the British forces were under pressure they accepted the formation of a stretcher-bearer corps who would bring wounded men from the front to first aid stations. De Ligt considered that this was not only support for the British side in the conflict but also support for war in general which was incompatible with his firm advocacy of non-violence. Gandhi reacted similarly to the Bambatha conflict in 1906 and the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914.

Gandhi was aware that most people do not believe in the power of non-violence and therefore at a time of the Government's need he believed such people should display their loyalty and their bravery by offering their services to the army. Although in all three cases their

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service was as non-combatants and he did not distinguish ethically between combatants and non-combatants when viewing from the perspective of ahimsa. As such, the third case – recruiting in 1918 – is not so different to the earlier three from Gandhi's viewpoint, and probably from De Ligt's viewpoint either, although others might see an important distinction between saving lives and taking lives. De Ligt saw all four cases as unjustifiable in the light of non-violence.

Here is part of Gandhi's defence in his reply to De Ligt in November 1928:

Being a confirmed war resister I have never given myself training in the use of destructive weapons in spite of opportunities to take such training. It was perhaps thus that I escaped direct destruction of human life. But so long as I lived under a system of Government based on force and voluntarily partook of the many facilities and privileges it created for me, I was bound to help that Government to the extent of my ability when it was engaged in a war unless I non-cooperated with that Government and renounced to the utmost of my capacity the privileges it offered me.<sup>12</sup>

Yet he concludes his letter with this:

But the Light within me is steady and clear. There is no escape for any of us save through truth and non-violence. I know that war is wrong, is an unmitigated evil. I know too that it has got to go. I firmly believe that freedom won through bloodshed or fraud is no freedom. Would that all the acts alleged against me were found to be wholly indefensible rather than that by any act of mine non-violence was held to be compromised or that I was ever thought to be in favour of violence or un-truth in any shape or form.<sup>13</sup>

De Ligt gives an answer to the point in the first paragraph above which was published in *Young India* on 9 May 1929:

... the present governments from time to time, maybe even as a rule, do good more or less. But that can never be for us a sufficient motive for collaborating unreservedly with them in all their enterprises. I am supposing for instance, that someone – or some government – does me a great service. Am I then obliged, from the moral point of view, to come to his assistance even when he acts badly, offends and kills, and forms schemes which are in flagrant opposition to any religious or humanitarian conceptions? No, quite the contrary. The more grateful I feel towards him, the less can I collaborate with him in evil work.<sup>14</sup>

Another individual who wrote to Gandhi in 1928 on the same subject was Vladimir Chertkov, who had been Tolstoy's secretary. He

expresses his disappointment at Gandhi's opinion:

Gandhi: 'If there was a national Government, I can conceive occasions when it would be my duty to vote for the military training of those who wish to take it.' In this way you justify others who also vote for the preparation of war because they sympathise with another Government. And what a snare is placed in people's way by a man who denies war to such an extent that he refuses to serve in the army and who at the same time votes for military training? Further you say that 'all its (the Government's) members do not believe in non-violence,' and that 'it is not possible to make a person or a society non-violent by compulsion.' But by abstaining from voting for military training I compel no one to do anything ...<sup>15</sup>

Chertkov continues:

You say that it would be madness for you to sever your connection with the society to which you belong, and that as long as you lived under a system of government based on force, and voluntarily partook of the many facilities and privileges it created for you, you were bound to help it to the extent of your ability when it was engaged in war.

Firstly, by abstaining from approving those evil deeds which men are engaged in around me I not only do not 'sever my connection with the society to which I belong,' but exactly the opposite. I utilise this connection for the best possible way of serving this society.

Secondly, if living as I live I am obliged to assist the State in waging war, then I ought at all costs to cease to live as I live, even if I had in doing so to sacrifice my life, and in no wise to help people in the slaughter of their brothers. Besides it is quite possible to make use of certain facilities afforded by the State, which could be obtained without violence, and at the same time to abstain from supporting the evil deeds of the State.<sup>16</sup>

At the Second Round Table Conference held in London in 1931 Gandhi declared: "... I am here very respectfully to claim, on behalf of the Congress, complete control over the army, over the defence forces and over external affairs."<sup>17</sup> Here he was speaking on behalf of Congress but nevertheless the words were his.

On his way home he stopped in Paris, in Lausanne and Geneva, and in Rome. In Lausanne De Ligt asked him:

What would you do if an eventually free India were to enter into a war? 'Gandhi replied that he was convinced that, if India freed itself by non-violent means, she would never more go to war. If however, contrary to all his dreams, an eventually free India should go to war, he hoped – with divine assistance – to have the strength to rise up against his government and to stand in the way of violent resistance.'<sup>18</sup>

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It is necessary in order to make sense of Gandhi's positions to see that there are two perspectives used by him. His personal perspective is clear and strongly anti-violence. But he had the habit of seeing from another's perspective too, one that was very different from his own and yet expressing this publicly. This certainly makes it difficult for an outsider to see what he really believes as his perspective shifts. However, the statements and writings of the last decade or so of Gandhi's life show at the very least a change of emphasis with his own belief in the power of non-violence being expressed more strongly.

### **Gandhi Confronts Fascism**

In late 1935 Italy, with Mussolini as head of the Fascist Government, invaded Abyssinia. Villages were bombed with poison gas and after seven months an Italian Empire was declared. The Italian Empire was however short lived as British Empire troops ejected the Italian forces in 1941. Early in 1937 Gandhi had stated:

If the Abyssinians had retired from the field and allowed themselves to be slaughtered, their seeming inactivity would have been much more effective though not for the moment visible.<sup>19</sup>

He further reflected on the invasion in *Harijan* in 1938:

...if the Abyssinians had adopted the attitude of non-violence of the strong, i.e., the non-violence which breaks to pieces but never bends, Mussolini would have had no interest in Abyssinia. Thus if they had simply said: 'You are welcome to reduce us to dust and ashes, but you will not find one Abyssinian ready to co-operate with you,' what would Mussolini have done? He did not want a desert.<sup>20</sup>

The Czech crisis of 1938 brought a similar response from Gandhi:

It was necessary to give this introduction to what I want to say to the Czechs and through them to all those nationalities which are called 'small' or 'weak.' I want to speak to the Czechs because their plight moved me to the point of physical and mental distress, and I felt that it would be cowardice on my part not to share with them the thoughts that were welling up within me. It is clear that the small nations must either come or be ready to come under the protection of the dictators or be a constant menace to the peace of Europe. In spite of all the good will in the world England and France cannot save them. Their intervention can only mean bloodshed and destruction such as has never been seen before. If I were a Czech, therefore, I would free these two nations from the obligation to defend my country. And yet I must live. I would not be a vassal to any nation or body. I must have absolute independence or

perish. To seek to win in a clash of arms would be pure bravado. Not so, if in defying the might of one who would deprive me of my independence I refuse to obey his will and perish unarmed in the attempt. In so doing, though I lose the body, I save my soul, i.e. my honour.

... Hitherto he [Hitler] and his like have built upon their invariable experience that men yield to force. Unarmed men, women and children offering non-violent resistance without any bitterness in them will be a novel experience for them. Who can dare say it is not in their nature to respond to the higher and finer forces? They have the same soul that I have.<sup>21</sup>

In October 1938 he wrote an article in *Harijan* called 'If I were a Czech' in which included:

I present Dr Benes [President of Czechoslovakia] with a weapon not of the weak but of the brave. There is no bravery greater than a resolute refusal to bend the knee to an earthly power, no matter how great, and that without bitterness of spirit and in the fullness of faith that the spirit alone lives, nothing else does.<sup>22</sup>

The Second World War began in September 1939 with the German invasion of Poland. That month Gandhi wrote on board a train to Simla:

Though I have failed with the Working Committee in persuading them, at this supreme moment, to declare their undying faith in non-violence as the only sovereign remedy for saving mankind from destruction, I have not lost the hope that the masses will refuse to bow to the Moloch of war but will rely upon their capacity for suffering to save the country's honour. How has the undoubted military valour of Poland served her against the superior forces of Germany and Russia? Would Poland unarmed have fared worse if it had met the challenge of these combined forces with the resolution to face death without retaliation? Would the invading forces have taken a heavier toll from an infinitely more valorous Poland? It is highly probable that their essential nature would have made them desist from a wholesale slaughter of innocents.<sup>23</sup>

In early July 1940 when the Battle of Britain between the German and British air forces was about to begin, Gandhi published a message 'To Every Britton':

I appeal for cessation of hostilities, not because you are too exhausted to fight, but because war is bad in essence. You want to kill Nazism. You will never kill it by its indifferent adoption. Your soldiers are doing the same work of destruction as the Germans. The only difference in that perhaps yours are not as thorough as the Germans. If that be so, yours

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will soon acquire the same thoroughness as theirs, if not much greater. On no other condition can you win the war. In other words, you will have to be more ruthless than the Nazis. No cause, however just, can warrant the indiscriminate slaughter that is going on minute by minute. I suggest that a cause that demands the inhumanities that are being perpetrated today cannot be called just.

... I want you to fight Nazism without arms, or, if I am to retain the military terminology, with non-violent arms. I would like you to lay down the arms you have as being useless for saving you or humanity. You will invite Herr Hitler and Signor Mussolini to take what they want of the countries you call your possessions. Let them take possession of your beautiful island, with your many beautiful buildings. You will give all these but neither your souls, nor your minds. If these gentlemen choose to occupy your homes, you will vacate them. If they do not give you free passage out, you will allow yourselves man, woman and child to be slaughtered, but you will refuse to owe allegiance to them.<sup>24</sup>

It is clear from the advice to the Czechs, to the Poles and to the British – unwelcome as it no doubt was to most – that Gandhi's belief in the power of nonviolence had solidified. Although none of the governments that were to be invaded by the German forces considered non-violent methods of resistance nevertheless certain sections of the occupied populations took up non-violent resistance as pragmatic responses to occupation.

The plight of the German Jews also prompted Gandhi to give similar advice in 1938, which in general was not welcomed by the world Jewish community who considered him naive:

But the German persecution of the Jews seems to have no parallel in history. The tyrants of old never went so mad as Hitler seems to have gone. ... If ever there could be a justifiable war in the name of and for humanity, a war against Germany, to prevent the wanton persecution of a whole race, would be completely justified. But I do not believe in any war.<sup>25</sup>

To see what the Jews did in the way of non-violent resistance and what more they might have done – also what other groups did to resist the Nazis consult my book *Nonviolent Resistance to the Nazis* and Jaques Sémelin's *Unarmed Against Hitler*.

### **India at War**

On 3 September 1939 the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow announced that India was at war with Germany. Although most of the leaders of Congress were supporters of Britain rather than Germany they were offended by the absence of consultation. At the Congress Working

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Committee, Gandhi advocated unconditional non-violent support for Britain but he was isolated because most of the CWC members did not hold to non-violence as a fundamental belief but only an expedience and thus were prepared to offer military support in return for concessions. The Committee stated that they could only give support to Britain on the basis of equality between India and Britain. The Raj however would only offer constitutional talks after the end of the war. In 1940 with Western Europe overrun by German forces the Congress Working Committee made another offer that if the British Government made an unequivocal declaration of Indian independence after the war Congress would join with the Raj to defend the country. Jawaharlal Nehru however dissented as he felt it went too far. At this point Gandhi and the Congress Working Committee parted company. This separation did not last long and he was asked by some to launch a mass satyagraha but instead he decided to confine it to individuals chosen by himself. The satyagrahis were to use the slogan: "It is wrong to help the British war-effort with men or money. The only worthy effort is to resist all war with non-violent resistance."<sup>26</sup> Individual satyagraha was begun by Vinoba Bhave on 17 October 1940 and he was arrested four days later. By 25 May 1941 25,000 convictions had been made by the courts.

In March 1942 a mission headed by Stafford Cripps was sent to India to discuss with Congress leaders the latest proposals of the British Government. Once more there was no agreement. Meanwhile the threat to India from the Japanese advance grew and Gandhi wrote in April 1942:

... non-violent resistance could commence the moment they effected a landing. Thus non-violent resisters would refuse them any help, even water. For it is no part of their duty to help anyone to steal their country. But if a Japanese had missed his way and was dying of thirst and sought help as a human being, a non-violent resister, who may not regard anyone as his enemy, would give water to the thirsty one. Suppose the Japanese compel resisters to give them water, the resisters must die in the act of resisting. It is conceivable that they will exterminate all resisters. The underlying belief in such non-violent resistance is that the aggressor will, in time, be mentally and even physically tired of killing non-violent resisters. He will begin to search what this new (for him) force is which refuses cooperation without seeking to hurt, and will probably desist from further slaughter. But the resisters may find that the Japanese are utterly heartless and that they do not care how many they kill. The non-violent resisters will have won the day inasmuch as they will have preferred extermination to submission.<sup>27</sup>

Mirabehn had at this time been asked by Gandhi to go to Orissa to prepare the population for non-violent resistance in the event of Japanese troops landing on the east coast. But probably realising how unprepared the Indian population was for non-violent defence he changed his position and accepted that Congress could support military defence of India in alliance with Britain if India was given its freedom. The All-India Congress Committee decided that if Britain did not accept this then Congress would advocate civil disobedience led by Gandhi which they did on 8 August 1942, although Rajagopalachari strongly dissented as he believed it would lead to anarchy.

'Quit India' as it became to be known was met by preventative action by the Government including the arrest during the early hours of 9 August of Gandhi, Nehru, Azad and other Congress leaders. But the Government action provoked violent reaction in several parts of the country including police stations and courts being set on fire and telephone and telegraph lines cut. Government security forces responded by force including firing to disperse crowds. Gandhi's plans for non-violent resistance did not have the opportunity even to be discussed by Congress leaders let alone acted upon but the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, accused Gandhi and Congress of being responsible for the outbreak of violence by Indians. Gandhi in turn accused the Government of provoking violence by the imprisonment of the Congress leaders. Gandhi was not released from prison until May 1944 and on grounds of ill health. His principal secretary Mahadev Desai and Kasturba had both died during their imprisonment.

The last few years of Gandhi's life were much occupied not with threats of violence from invading armies but with violence internal to India itself. As he had done all his life he urged the use of non-violence or satyagraha to deal with the conflicts. During this period of communal fueled violence, it is often considered that Gandhi was seen at his greatest as he travelled to areas of conflict and walked through areas where terrible crimes had been committed. One final event needs to be examined as India split and Pakistan came into existence.

As the partition lines were drawn and the different states had to choose to opt for Pakistan or India a particular problem arose with regard to Kashmir. Kashmir had a Hindu Maharajah, Hari Singh, but the majority population was Muslim and Singh hesitated. Influential figures in Pakistan were determined that the state should not accede to India and so they sponsored a raid by thousands of Afridi tribesmen on 22 October 1947. As the raiders neared Srinagar, Hari Singh and Sheikh Abdullah, who was previously imprisoned by Singh but now released, asked for India's help and after discussions with Nehru and others Singh acceded the state to India and consequently Indian troops

were flown to Srinagar. Abdullah was declared premier of Kashmir with the intention of a plebiscite being held to decide the state's future. In the meantime the Pakistani-backed invaders had been pushed back but retained part of the state.<sup>28</sup> Gandhi had given his 'tacit consent' to the use of Indian troops and in response to a letter he received he explained his position in *Harijan* on 16 November 1947:

A correspondent rebuked Gandhiji for having dared to advise Mr Winston Churchill, Hitler, Mussolini and the Japanese when they were about to lose their all, that they should adopt his technique of non-violence. The writer of the letter then went on to say that if he could give that advice when it was safe for him to do so, why did he abandon his non-violence when his own friends in the Congress Government had forsaken it and even sent armed assistance to Kashmir? The letter concluded by inviting Gandhiji to point out definitely how the raiders were to be opposed non-violently by the Kashmiris.

Replying Gandhiji said that he was sorry for the ignorance betrayed by the writer. The audience would remember that he had repeatedly said that he had no influence in the matter over his friends in the Union Cabinet. He held on to his views on non-violence as firmly as ever, but he could not impose his views on his best friends, as they were, in the Cabinet. He could not expect them to act against their convictions and everybody should be satisfied with his confession that he had lost his original hold upon his friends. The question put by the writer was quite apposite. Gandhiji's answer was simple. His ahimsa forbade him from denying credit, where it was due, even though the creditor was a believer in violence. Thus, though he did not accept Subhas Bose's belief in violence and his consequent action, he had not refrained from giving unstinted praise to him for his patriotism, resourcefulness and bravery. Similarly, though he did not approve of the use of arms by the Union Government for aiding the Kashmiris and though he could not approve of Sheikh Abdulla's resort to arms, he could not possibly withhold admiration for either for their resourceful and praiseworthy conduct, especially, if both the relieving troops and the Kashmiri defenders died heroically to a man. He knew that if they could do so, they would perhaps change the face of India. But if the defence was purely non-violent in intention and action, he would not use the word 'perhaps' for, he would be sure of change in the face of India even to the extent of converting to the defender's view the Union Cabinet, if not even the Pakistan Cabinet. The non-violent technique, he would suggest, would be no armed assistance to the defenders. Non-violent assistance could be sent from the Union without stint. But the defenders, whether they got such assistance or not, would defy the might of the raiders or even a disciplined army in overwhelming numbers. And defenders dying at their post of duty without malice and without anger in their hearts against their assailants, and without the use of any arms including even their fists

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would mean an exhibition of heroism as yet unknown to history. Kashmir would then become a holy land shedding its fragrance not only throughout India, but the world.<sup>29</sup>

### Gandhi, Violence and War

It is frequently stated that Gandhi was not a pacifist but his fluctuating statements make it difficult to be sure one way or the other. A pacifist today is normally defined as someone who directed by ethical or religious beliefs will not participate in war or support war directly or indirectly. Since Gandhi participated in the South African wars albeit as a non-combatant he admits himself to have supported war. Even more directly by attempting to raise troops in 1918 to fight in the British army in the Great War he did help the war effort.

Up till 1914 Gandhi seems to have been concerned mainly with the civil liberties of the Indian community in South Africa and later in freeing Indians from the Raj. Part of this process he believed required Indians to become courageous and he saw the discipline of serving in the armed forces as a help in this. Therefore for those, unlike himself, who believed in the rightness of the use of violence in a good cause they should volunteer.

However, the recruiting episode which caused him mental anguish may have been responsible for a change which occurred in the following years. In 1927 he printed extracts from two journals in *Young India* which enumerated many of the negative aspects of war and added "And yet there are intelligent men who talk, and gullible men who subscribe to the talk, of the 'humanising influence' of war!" In *Young India* the following year he responded to a correspondent in regards to the Great War:

The war certainly did not do good to the so-called victors.

The pacifist resisters who suffered imprisonment certainly served the cause of peace.

If another war were declared tomorrow, I could not, with my present views about the existing government, assist in any shape or form; on the contrary I should exert myself to the utmost to induce others to withhold their assistance and to do everything possible and consistent with Ahimsa to bring about its defeat.<sup>30</sup>

By the later 1930s a further shift had occurred in Gandhi's thinking as he was now advocating non-violent resistance to the Abyssinians, the Czechs, the Poles, the French, the British, as well as the Jews in

spite of the obvious totalitarian nature of the German regime which most people thought necessitated a military response. He also recommended non-violence to the Indian people and the Chinese in the face of Japanese aggression.

Moving to a consideration of Gandhi's attitude to violence in a wider sense he did not believe that all violence could be avoided by human beings. The very matter of acquiring food inevitably results in destruction of some animal life (e.g. insects, worms) even when one is a vegan – not even ultra-strict Jains can avoid that and if they avoid all agricultural occupations they are simply depending on others committing the acts on their behalf. But he also considered that killing an incurably ill or injured animal to put it out of its misery was justified on compassionate grounds, although ultra-orthodox Hindus did not agree. Although unhappy with the idea he considered killing animals who were destroying vital human crops to be justified if no other way was effective in saving the crops. But the use of animals in medical teaching and research was in his eyes unjustified.

The killing of humans could be justified in certain circumstances: the acts of voluntary euthanasia or assisted suicide to end suffering; another is a murderer out of control who cannot be stopped in any other way. This would be undesirable but the lesser evil. Other even more difficult choices may have to be made, for example, the situation where the victim cannot be saved and killing the defenceless victim is the lesser evil to avoid rape or torture to death; cases such as these occurred during the Indian partition, madness by male relatives to prevent rape of daughters and wives (however the belief that protection of chastity was the supreme virtue might be questioned).

What then of war? Gandhi would not himself consider participation in killing in war. What makes his position confusing to admirers and sympathisers is his defence of others' participation in war if they believe in the just aim of the war. Perhaps this derives from the influence of Jainism's multi-viewpoint, or *anekantavada*. This multifaceted understanding of truth could lead to an admirable attitude of tolerance of differences in religion and democratic politics – but is there not a limit to tolerance when it comes to behaviour? Mass killing, including of civilians, is absolutely normal in war and is, I suggest, beyond that acceptable limit. It is true that Gandhi had to accept that most people including the majority of his colleagues did not have a principled belief in non-violence and therefore the state established at independence would be conventional in most respects and would include armed forces. But by explicitly accepting this, most publicly in the case of military defence of Kashmir, did he not weaken the case for *satyagraha* which he had been advocating?

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Scott Daniel Dunbar has examined a related issue, that of Gandhi's abhorrence of cowardice. He traces this to traditional Indian cultural values of the warrior found, for example in ancient literature such as the *Mahabharata* where cowardice is a dereliction of duty and a sin. Fighting and killing is to be preferred. Dunbar regards Gandhi's attitude here as an expression of intolerance.<sup>31</sup>

Another weakness of Gandhi's position is that he seemed to assume that the most likely outcome of resistance to invaders was slaughter and it was only the willingness to die and the undeserved suffering of the victims that would, or at least might, affect the invader and weaken their determination to achieve their goal. Gandhi placed too much emphasis on the suffering of the resisters as a mechanism of change. He in fact underestimated the extent of non-violent resistance to bring about change through exercise of power. One can see that in some of his own campaigns which involved an element of non-violent coercion. There are now many case studies of large-scale political change being brought about through non-violent direct action and Chenoweth and Stephan have demonstrated that it is generally a more effective method than using violence and leads to a more desirable outcome.<sup>32</sup>

Gandhi's critics of his contradictory stances on war had the better arguments yet he demonstrated better than any the power of non-violence through his various campaigns covering the last 40 years of his life.

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**GEORGE PAXTON** is the editor of *The Gandhi Way*, the quarterly journal of the Gandhi Foundation which is based in the UK. He is the author of *Sonja Schlesin: Gandhi's South African Secretary* (Pax Books 2006) and *Nonviolent Resistance to the Nazis* (YouCaxton Publications 2016). Address: 2/1, 87 Barrington Drive, Glasgow G4 9ES, Scotland, UK. [gpaxton@phonecoop.coop](mailto:gpaxton@phonecoop.coop)



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# GANDHI MARG

Quarterly Journal of the  
GANDHI PEACE FOUNDATION

VOLUME THIRTYFIVE □ NUMBER THREE □ OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2013

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*Published by:*

**GANDHI PEACE FOUNDATION**

221 & 223 Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Marg, New Delhi-110 002

Phones: +91-11-23237491/93, Fax: +91 +11-23236734

E-mail: gpf18@rediffmail.com, gandhipeacefoundation18@yahoo.co.in



Gandhi Marg Quarterly

39(2&3): 157–180

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<http://gandhipacefoundation.org/>

ISSN 0016—4437

# Is Gandhian Feminism Possible? Interpreting Gandhism and Feminism

*Nishikant Kolge*

## ABSTRACT

*The pluralist approach to understand the meaning of feminism inspires us to think of the possibility of articulating a Gandhian feminism in spite of Gandhi's patriarchal outlook and patronizing attitude towards women. This paper makes an effort to articulate different aspects of Gandhian feminism by comparing it with various other feminist perspectives. But before that, this paper attempts to critically examine the existing literature on Gandhi and women. These writings are marked by both enthusiastic approbation and harsh criticism. The paper takes an empathetic approach to understand Gandhi's views on women and their role in society on the understanding that some lessons could be derived from them.*

**Key words:** *Gandhism, feminism, essentialism, heterosexuality, patriarchy*

## Introduction

FEMINISM IS ALWAYS in the process of theorizing, reassessing, and restructuring itself; therefore, it is difficult to determine the precise status of feminist thought. So it would be futile to offer a precise and clear definition. After all, feminism is a blanket term to cover varieties of perspectives i.e. liberal feminism, Marxist or socialist feminism, radical feminism, lesbian feminism, multi-ethnic feminism and postmodernist feminism. It is rather appropriate to think in terms of feminisms than feminism. However, one must be curious to think that there should be a baseline definition covering all feminisms. Alison

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Jaggar says that a commitment to eliminating the subordination of women unifies the diverse strands of feminist theory. But she herself states that such agreement soon dissolves into radically different accounts of the subordination, and the measures required to eliminate it.<sup>1</sup> Such pluralist approach to feminism inspires us to think of the possibility of articulating Gandhian feminism, in spite of long-standing and fresh attacks on Gandhi, about his patriarchal outlook and patronizing attitude towards women. Such attacks often undermine his saintly character, but fail to completely reject the proposition that Gandhi in his own way was also committed to eliminate the subordination of women. The present paper is a modest attempt to present a comparative study of Gandhian and other feminist perspectives.

Before doing that it seeks to critically engage with existing literature on Gandhi and women. Such writings often confront a dilemma; they are simultaneously marked by enthusiastic approbation and harsh criticism. Some scholars berate Gandhi for a strong class and caste bias but they also recognize his important role in laying foundation for subsequent participation of women in the national movement. The paper makes no attempt to resolve these long-standing dilemmas in the existing writings. Rather it argues that such dilemmas actually convey that there are divergent understandings of Gandhi. However, it does suggest that one should scrupulously avoid exaggeration in praising or in criticizing personalities like Gandhi. It creates sensational effects that often overshadow our holistic understanding of life and thought of such personalities. This paper takes an empathetic approach on Gandhi's views on women and their role in society. And it further argues that some lessons can be derived from his life and thought in respect of a feminist perspective.

## I

### **Engaging with Existing Scholarship on Gandhi and Women**

As mentioned above, two radically different conceptions of Gandhi's views on women have informed discussion among both academics and popular writers in the past few decades, and it is the tension between these two conceptions that this section wish to present here. This section studies this tension into six sub-sections and proposes an empathetic reading of such aspects of Gandhi's life.

**Gandhi and Women's Participation in National Movement:** Scholars vary in their conclusions regarding Gandhi's contribution in breaking the shackles of women and bringing them in Indian's national

movement. Sujata Patel writes: “given that the phase [1917-22] is characterized by the spontaneous and later organized expression of protest against the British and participation of both men and women in this struggle, it is difficult to separate analytically which proceeded first: women’s participation or Gandhi’s advocacy of this.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, Sujata Patel is hesitant to give any credit to Gandhi for women’s participation in large numbers in India’s national movement. But other scholars like Tanika Sarkar, Bhikhu Parekh and Lyn Norvell assert that it was Gandhi who brought women from various diverse backgrounds into national movement. Tanika Sarkar very categorically writes:

Gandhian movements changed this. Peasant women, upper-caste, middle-class women, upper class Muslim women, tribal women came together in nationalist demonstrations, picketed foreign-goods shops, organized social boycotts of loyalists and public burning of foreign cloth, filled up prisons, become local level ‘dictators’ during civil disobedience when their men were arrested. No aspect of Gandhian politics was sexually segregated.<sup>3</sup>

She did not forget to add even that “this owed much to the self-representation of Gandhian movements. Led by a man who was seen more as a saint than as a politician...”<sup>4</sup> However, such scholars take one of the two views about Gandhi’s role in bringing women in the national movement. They either appreciate Gandhi for transforming Indian women or they condemn him for manipulating them for political ends.<sup>5</sup>

It is true that much before Gandhi, many spontaneous and organized expressions of protest against the British had taken place with participation of both men and women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But in all historical fairness, it must be admitted that it was Gandhi who developed the strategies that made possible women’s participation in large number in the national movement. Moreover, it would also be an exaggeration to say that women from all the sections of the society equally participated in Gandhi’s movement. It must also be accepted that maximum participation of women in Gandhi’s movement came from urban middle class and upper caste Hindu families. He often pleaded that the participation of women in his non-violent movement is an essential ingredient for its success. As Gandhi writes: “Women’s marvelous power is lying dormant... my experiment in non-violence would be instantly successful if I could secure women’s help.”<sup>6</sup> However, it would be erroneous to think that he manipulated women for his political ends. Rather there is growing realization among the scholars that Gandhi was more committed to social justice (removal of untouchability, Hindu-Muslim



Unity, Women's empowerment and Khadi) than mere freedom from the alien rule.

**Gandhi and Essentialized Understating of Women:** Many feminists have criticized Gandhi for his essentialized understanding of Indian women and gender differences which reinforce the existing social order. As Sanjam Ahluwalia writes: "Unraveling patriarchal assumptions, Gandhi essentialized gendered divisions"<sup>7</sup> or as Mary N. Woods writes: "Gandhi essentialized the Indian women as pure, moral, resolute and self-sacrificing."<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, there are Gandhian scholars who argue that "... one should be aware of the fact that he [Gandhi] did not consistently essentialize gender roles. Although he wanted women to assume more domestic or home-centered jobs like spinning, reinforcing the gendered public-private division, his recognition of the role that women could play in satyagraha suggested that there was no rigidity about the private-public roles ...."<sup>9</sup> It would not be factually correct to say that Gandhi did not hold an essentialized understanding of women. But we must remember that essentializing women does not itself reflect patriarchal assumptions or reinforce the gendered public-private division. Essentializing means attributing certain qualities as natural, essential characteristics of specific culturally defined groups. It also means that individual differences can be explained by inherent biological, 'natural' characteristics shared by members of a group. Essentialist thinking becomes problem when it results in thinking, speaking and acting in ways that promote hierarchy and dichotomy. It is true that essentialist thinking is often anchored in dualistic (two-category, either/or) and hierarchical modes of thought. In the case of Gandhi, it is not correct; as in his essentialized understanding of an ideal woman, he never thinks in dualistic and hierarchical modes. He encourages both men and women equally to acquire qualities of each other. He proved by his own example that it is quite possible for a human being to acquire qualities of both gender and be master of both types of works, which are traditionally marked as 'men's work' or women's work.' In his ashrams too, works were not divided on the basis of gender: men were required to do cooking and women were also assigned work of watchwomen in the night. He also never thought in hierarchical modes while talking about men and women. Even in the rarest occasions, when he talks in hierarchical modes, he gives highest rank to natural, essential characteristics which he attributes to women. In his scheme of things, women are far superior to men due to their natural essential characteristics like ability to love and care, ability to suffer and sacrifice for others. Throughout his life, Gandhi encouraged men to acquire these feminine qualities.

**Gandhi and his *Brahmacharya* Experiment:** Many feminist and Gandhian scholars peep into the innermost aspect of Gandhi's relationship with women. They discuss his controversial 'experiment' of sleeping naked with naked women and reached to different conclusions. Referring to Gandhi's experiment, Arundhati Roy writes: "He [Gandhi] viewed woman not as an individual, but a category. That, for him, a very small sample of a few physical specimens, including his own grand-niece, could stand in for the whole species."<sup>10</sup> Or as Rita Banerji writes: "I saw Gandhi as a classic example of a sexual predator — a man who uses his position of power to manipulate and sexually exploit the people he directly controls."<sup>11</sup> However, there are some other Gandhian scholars like Bhikhu Parekh, Veena R. Howard and Vinay Lal who make more detailed and in-depth investigation of this aspect of Gandhi's life and reach altogether different conclusions. Parekh tells us five reasons that Gandhi mentioned to justify for undergoing his 'experiment'. One of the reasons, Parekh writes: "he [Gandhi] decided to plunge into the 'sacred fire... and be burnt or saved.' His sexual *yajna* was a way of mobilizing the capital of his spiritual *Shakti* and making it yield vitally necessary political dividends. For him, personal purity and political success 'hanged together.'"<sup>12</sup> Veena R. Howard goes one step forward and writes: "By including Manu in *brahmacharya yajna*, Gandhi sought to offer her an equal partnership." She adds, Gandhi was seeking to make Manu 'an ideal *brahmachari* as well' and to grant women the privilege of equal choice by defining celibacy not solely in terms of semen control, but also as comprehensive control of the sense.<sup>13</sup>

Veena R. Howard's conclusion seems to be too admirable to be accepted as the best explanation for Gandhi's experiment. Conclusions of Arundhati Roy and Rita Banerji seem to be ruthless to be accepted. It is difficult to accept Rita Banerji's claim that Gandhi was a 'sexual predator' or he sought to 'sexually exploit' the women for two reasons. First, these so-called experiments were conducted with great deal of openness, and there was nothing that was conducted behind closed doors. Places where Gandhi used to sleep with girls were open for everyone's verification. Second, girls and women who were partners in Gandhi's so-called experiment never gave any testimony that they felt cheated or sexually harassed by Gandhi. But if sleeping naked with young women were part of Gandhi's experiment with his *brahmacharya* to test his control over his senses for whatever reasons, Then what is the alternative way to see Gandhi's sleeping naked with young women? Alternatively, it can be seen as part of Gandhi's life-long effort to completely become a woman in his thoughts and actions. Such a close contact of Gandhi with women was not a sudden

development; Gandhi used to have bath in the nude posture in the presence of his wife or Sushila Nayar or Prabhavati or Lilavati Asar or some other close women co-workers. Some of these women also used to give him oil massage in the nude state. But there were no privacy, during his bath and massage, he used to carry out a lot of business with his co-workers. There was no private sleeping arrangement in the Ashram. Many women used to sleep next to Gandhi's bed. Gandhi's sharing his bed with some of the women of the ashram in a state of nakedness was an extreme step towards becoming a woman. As J. Jordens writes: "he [Gandhi] wanted to feel about women, not as a male, but as a women, and wanted to be accepted by them not as a male, but as a sister or a mother."<sup>14</sup> Gandhi also writes: "I deliberately want to become a eunuch mentally. If I succeed in this then I become one physically also. That alone is true *brahmacharya*."<sup>15</sup> From this standpoint, Gandhi's sharing his bed with some of the women of the ashram is to be seen, then it may not look as 'sexual arrogance' as suggested by Arundhati Roy. And definitely we need more details and in-depth investigation of this aspect of Gandhi's life to reach any reasonable conclusion.

**Women's Place Outside the Home:** According to Sujata Patel, though Gandhi constructed a significantly new place for women in household, he could not construct similar place for women outside the family and household. In his scheme of things, only a de-sexed woman, who has 'scarified' her sexuality, her family life, and has dedicated herself to the service of the nation is allowed to work outside the family and household.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand Madhu Kishwar's analysis seems to be more sympathetic to this issue. Contrary to Sujata Patel, she argues that "He [Gandhi] creates a tradition and a social-political atmosphere in which even today, hardly anyone will publicly stand up and explicitly oppose women's fundamental rights or will deny them participation in politics."<sup>17</sup> If it would be exaggeration to accept Kishwar's argument, it will also be a mistake to accept Sujata Patel's above mentioned view for the following reason: it is true that Gandhi asked women on several occasions to scarify their sexuality and family life if they desire to serve the nation. But what Sujata Patel seems to miss is that Gandhi demands similar sacrifice from men as well, if they desire to serve nation. Even he asks a married couple to sacrifice their sexuality and family life, if they desire to serve nation or mankind. Consequently, sacrificing sexuality and family life is not a condition, in Gandhi's scheme of things, for woman to break the 'Lakshman Rekha' of the 'home.' According to Gandhi, it is a desirable qualification for both man and woman who wish to serve the mankind. Moreover, we have

many examples to argue that Gandhi encourages and appreciates women for taking up the new challenges outside 'home.'

**Gandhi and Women's Economic Independence:** Some of the feminist scholars have also accused Gandhi for not paying much attention for uplifting economic condition of women. Madhu Kishwar writes: "one of the limitations of Gandhi's thinking, then, was that he sought to change not so much the material condition of women as their 'moral' condition. She adds:

Gandhi failed to realize that, among other things, oppression is not an abstract moral condition, but a social and historical experience related to production relations. He tried changing women's position with either transforming their relation to the outer world of production or the inner world of family, sexuality, and reproduction.<sup>18</sup>

But there are scholars like Simmi Jain, who believe that helping women to be economically independent was one of Gandhi's great contributions towards their emancipation....<sup>19</sup> And Neera Desai points out that unlike many other Congress leaders of their time, Gandhi and Nehru were in favour of giving social and economic equality to women.<sup>20</sup> (Quoted in Lyn Norvell 1997:19).

The claim of Simmi Jain and Neera Desai regarding Gandhi's contribution towards helping women to be economically independent seems to be little exaggeration because Gandhi never encourages man or women to pursue higher education, economic stability or political power. But it does not mean that Madhu Kishwar is correct when she writes that Gandhi did not seek to change the material condition of women.

It appears that Kishwar fails to understand that Gandhi was quite aware of the fact that oppression is not just an abstract condition, but a social and historical experience related to production relations. She seems to forget the fact that Gandhi rejected both capitalism as well as socialism not just because he believed that in both the systems goods are produced at the loss of the moral autonomy of individuals but also he believed that both systems fail to create economic equality between man and man, and man and women. He was highly suspicious of capitalism with its emphasis on individual ownership, competition, and consumerism. He was equally suspicious of socialism. He writes: "Pandit Nehru wants industrialization because he thinks that if it is socialized, it would be free from the evils of capitalism. My own view is that the evils are inherent in industrialism and no amount of socialization can eradicate them."<sup>21</sup> Indeed Gandhi tried to transform women's relation to the outer world of production but not exactly in

the way Kishwar wishes to change. For Kishwar, like many other feminists, transforming women's relation to the outer world of production may mean creating gender neutral society in the sense that women are not arbitrarily excluded from pursuing the things society defines as valuable-education, financial independence/stability, social respect, political power and so on.

If change means above mentioned changes, definitely Gandhi neither stood for such changes nor believed that such changes can create equal opportunity or economic independence for women in society. On the other hand, he was aiming more radical changes in the social, economic and political institutions that create inequality and exploitation in the society. As Ronald J. Terchek, writes about Gandhi's economy:

... He [Gandhi] finds that the character of the new economy introduces standards that reduce the realm of freedom available to ordinary men and women. Accordingly, his alternative is a place where people are said to regain control of their lives and livelihoods because employment is widespread, power dispersed and social relationship nonhierarchical.<sup>22</sup>

And Gandhi's Khadi programme along with other constructive programmes were directed towards building such structures, system, processes or resources that were positive alternatives to oppression and hierarchy that present economic system creates. It means that Gandhi wanted to create a de-cartelized, de-industrialized, village centered and non-hierarchical economy where every man and woman can contribute according to his or her ability.

**Gandhi's Upper Caste and Urban Middle Class Biases:** Many feminist scholars opine that Gandhi could not overcome his urbanized middle class upper-caste Hindu male's perception of what a woman should be. Different scholars reached this conclusion through different ways. For instance, Madhu Kishwar believes that Gandhi's obsession with idea of bodily purity of women reflect the age-old patriarchal bias in his thinking. She writes: according to Gandhi in any case women should prefer to give up her life rather than her virtue. She adds: "The equation of rape with loss of virtue reflects the age-old patriarchal bias."<sup>23</sup> Another scholar Debali Mookerjee-Leonard has done extensive work on this aspect of Gandhi's thought. She seems to be more objective because she presents a divided Gandhi who expresses two contradictory opinions on the issue. First, Gandhi a Hindu patriarch, believes raped women lost her virtue and second, a modern liberal ethical Gandhi who believes 'that the victim remains unsullied by the acts of violence performed on her.' To substantiate her second point

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she presents two quotes of Gandhi. In the first quote Gandhi says: "If a women's mind is pure, her virtue is not violated and she is not stained by sin, even though she may have been raped." And in second quote, Gandhi says: "that girls forcibly abducted have committed no crime, nor incurred any odium."<sup>24</sup> However, she writes that 'Gandhi is never fully consistent as a liberal thinker.' She resolves this contradiction between Hindu patriarchal Gandhi and liberal ethical Gandhi by arguing that Gandhi appears to be liberal only in a particular context — partition of India. She is of the opinion that Gandhi made such liberal statements only when he wanted to urge the social rehabilitation of abducted and/or violated Hindu and Sikh women recently repatriated from Pakistan. And she argues that Gandhi did it because "Gandhi acknowledges a certain nationalist logic for the Indian State's efforts to restore women to their families, so that they would not become wards of the State, as many women eventually did."<sup>25</sup>

Debali Mookerjea-Leonard may not be completely correct because there are other occasions as well when Gandhi writes as a modern liberal ethical person. Gandhi writes: "and why is there all this morbid anxiety about female purity? Have women any say in the matter of male purity? ... Why should men arrogate to themselves the right to regulate female purity?"<sup>26</sup> Moreover, we must remember what Vinay Lal writes about Gandhi's thought about purity. He writes: "Gandhi did not at least endorse varying standards of sexual conduct for men and women. Nothing in Gandhi's writings or actions even remotely lends itself to the view that he insisted on sexual probity among women but turned his face the other way when it comes to the sexual conduct of men."<sup>27</sup>

For Sujata Patel, Gandhi exhibits upper caste and middle class biases because "though Gandhi did introduce a dynamic concept, that politics, in his model of social role for woman, he did not revolutionize the assumptions on which these middle class reformers perceived women."<sup>28</sup> Sujata Patel comes to this conclusion through analyzing Gandhi's writings and speeches in which he defines women's role in national movement. However, she forgets that Gandhi's construction of women's role in national movement was not exclusively based on his own perception of women, but it was also determined according to the exigencies of their social, political and economic situation in Indian society. According to S. Shridevi: 'Gandhi had to go slowly in the beginning,' realizing that it was not going to be easy for women to escape from seclusion, because of their own self-doubt about taking part in the national struggle. She adds that "they were further hindered by their men folk, who in general were too conservative to permit

them to participate in public activities. Perhaps some men were also frightened that women's emancipation would erode their power-base and shake the traditional patriarchal power they had over them."<sup>29</sup> Therefore, to have better understanding whether Gandhi could overcome his urbanized middle class upper-caste Hindu male's perception of what a women should be, one needs to go beyond Gandhi's political activities and writings relating to women and look at his personal conduct, and also investigate his relationship with different women. And as Madhu Kishwar writes: "despite insisting on the stereotype of women as running the household while men dominate the affairs of the outside world, in practice Gandhi encouraged a breaking away from these stereotypes." She adds:

Gandhi's action, in bringing women dignity in social life, in breaking down some of the prejudices against their participation in social and political life, in promoting an atmosphere of sympathetic awareness of their issues, goes far beyond his own views and pronouncements of women's role and place in society.<sup>30</sup>

## II

### **Gandhian Feminism and Various Other Feminist Perspectives:**

There are many scholars who try to develop different aspects of Gandhian feminism. Shane Ryland's 'The theory and impact of Gandhi's feminism,'<sup>31</sup> Barbara Southard's 'The feminism of Mahatma Gandhi,'<sup>32</sup> Devaki Jain's 'Gandhian contributions towards a theory of feminist ethic'<sup>33</sup> and Sushila Gidwani's 'Gandhian feminism'<sup>34</sup> can be included in this group. Different scholars of this group focus on different themes but the focus of this study is to articulate different aspects of Gandhian feminism by presenting a comparative study between Gandhism and various other contemporary feminist perspectives.

### **Challenging Inequality: Liberal Feminism and Gandhi**

Since it is believed that liberal feminism has its roots in the writings of, among others, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), Harriet Taylor Mill (1807-1858) and Betty Friedan (1921-2006), this section will present a comparative study of these liberal feminist scholars and Gandhi. These liberal feminists believe that women are equal to men in all respects. But according to them, in most of the human societies women's status is inferior to men because they do not enjoy the same political rights, economic opportunities

and the same education that men enjoy. In brief, the chief concern of these liberal feminists is equality for women. Gandhi also believes that fundamentally man and woman are equal, because the soul in both is the same. However, it needs to be examined whether Gandhi and liberal feminists also agree on the methods or the ways that need to be adopted for achieving equality for women.

One of the most important liberal feminists is Mary Wollstonecraft, an English writer, philosopher, and advocate of women's right in eighteenth century. Mary Wollstonecraft, like Gandhi, believes that unless a person acts autonomously, he or she acts as less than a fully human person. She, like Gandhi, also believes that sexual inequality is immoral, because it deprives women of autonomy or self-governance. However, whereas Gandhi was highly suspicious of the efficacy of western/modern education for building autonomy of an individual, Wollstonecraft insists that the part of autonomy goes through the education. Give women men's education, said Wollstonecraft, and they would be no less than men. They would become morally-mature human beings.<sup>35</sup> However, difference disappears when we investigate what Wollstonecraft means by education.

The purpose of education, according to Wollstonecraft is not to make women successful or independent in the fields of economics and politics. According to Tong: "in the end she [Wollstonecraft] decided *well-educated* women did not need to be economically self-sufficient or politically active in order to be autonomous."<sup>36</sup> She could arrive at such conclusion because like Gandhi she believes "although virtue must be regarded as the same in both sexes, men and women have different 'duties.'"<sup>37</sup> According to Mackenzie, for Wollstonecraft women's 'duties' are associated with the care of children and the running of the household, which naturally follow from women's role in reproduction.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, according to Wollstonecraft, purpose of education is not to make women economically and politically independent but cultivating ones relational and moral capacities. According to Tong, Wollstonecraft believes: "society owes girls the same education that it owes to boys, simply because all human beings deserve an equal chance to develop their rational and moral capacities by virtue of which one can achieve full personhood."<sup>39</sup> Gandhi would not have any problem to endorse such views on women's education because like Wollstonecraft, his concern was not to make woman, man competitor in the field of economics or politics but to create the possibility for genuinely reciprocal friendships and love relationship between men and women. Tong and Williams argue that "at times, Wollstonecraft implied that the purpose of educating women is simply



to supply men with rational fellowship; that is, with more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers."<sup>40</sup> Definitely, Gandhi would also agree with Wollstonecraft on this issue. Therefore, for both, equality of women does not mean that women should blindly copy men in every aspect of life. Rather, equality of women for both suggests that women should be free and competent enough to perform their traditional duties autonomously. It appears that both Wollstonecraft's and Gandhi's commitment for women's equality was genuine; their vision of female autonomy was limited from the perspectives of other liberal feminists.

The discussions about what makes equality for women possible did not end with Wollstonecraft in liberal feminist tradition but continued into the next centuries. John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor (Mill) were two liberal feminists of nineteenth century who went further than Wollstonecraft in defining what constitute equality for women. According to Tang: "Mill and Taylor also departed from Wollstonecraft in insisting that if society is to achieve sexual equality, or gender justice, then society must provide women with the same political rights and economic opportunities as well as the same education that men enjoy."<sup>41</sup> In short, according to both, in order to be partners rather than servants of their husbands, wives must earn an income outside the home. In this way they challenge the traditional division of labour within the family, where the man earns the money and the woman manages its use. Like them, Gandhi would also say that society should not put any restriction on those women who want to become economically independent. He would argue that such women should be let free to choose whatever profession they wish to excel. However, he would also argue that if women are given choices, most of the women prefer to perform their traditional duties at home rather than pursuing their economic or political career outside home. It appears that vision of women autonomy or concept of women equality was extended within liberal feminist tradition by Mill and Taylor. For them equality for women means women to become like men in every possible ways. But in Gandhi's view it cannot be taken as a progressive step towards defining women's equality. On the other hand, he would argue that this idea of women's equality is anti-feminine because in his view these liberal feminists are attempting to 'ride the horse that men ride.'<sup>42</sup>

It was Betty Friedan, a liberal writer of twentieth century, who continued the discussion about what makes equality for women possible. She wrote *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, in which she argues "for women to have full identity and freedom, they must have economic independence. Equality and human dignity are not possible

for women if they are not able to earn.”<sup>43</sup> About twenty years after *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan wrote *The Second Stage* and changed her position completely. As Tong inform us, “to the degree that *The Feminine Mystique* advised women to become like men, *The Second Stage* urged women to be like women. But *The Second Stage* did more than this. It also encouraged men and women alike to work towards an androgynous future in which all human beings manifest both traditionally masculine and traditionally feminine traits.”<sup>44</sup> What Friedan proposed theoretically in *The Second Stage*, Gandhi exhibited it in his practice as well as in his writings. Gandhi not only diligently cultivated his feminine traits and aspired toward androgyny but also legitimated androgynous elements in the selfhood of Indian men through his national movement. As David Cortright writes: “he [Gandhi] tried to break down gender roles both politically and in the home. He wanted to liberate men as well as women, to transcend gender roles and stereotypes.”<sup>45</sup> It appears that Gandhi and contemporary liberal feminist like Betty Friedan agree on the question of what makes equality for women possible. Both of them propagated the idea of androgyny to combat gender discrimination and society’s traditional tendency to value masculine traits more than feminine traits.

#### **Challenging Patriarchy: Radical Feminism and Gandhi**

Liberal feminists believe that they could achieve equality for women by reforming the existing system – by working to eradicate discriminatory educational, legal and economic policies. On the other hand, radical feminism is highly skeptical of educational, legal, economic and political reform within existing system, and instead focuses on culture change that undermines patriarchy and associated hierarchical structures. In other words, radical feminists directly attacks on existing political and social organization because they believe that it is inherently tied to patriarchy. As Gilbert Abcarian informs us that for radical feminism “discrimination against women basically originates in patriarchal cultures that allocate one set of human experiences and roles to men, another to women.”<sup>46</sup> But just because radical feminists agree in principle that patriarchy— the systematic subordination of women is root cause for women’s exploitation, did not mean they also agree about the best way to eliminate it. As Alice Echols tells, “radical feminism was anything but monolithic” and “they were divided on critical questions.” For matter of convenience, Tong categorizes these diverse feminist scholars into two basic camps— radical-libertarian feminists and radical-cultural feminists. She explains that depending on their camp, these feminists voiced very different views about how to fight patriarchy.<sup>47</sup> We also accept this categorization

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for our discussion on Gandhi and radical feminists.

In order to understand radical-libertarian and radical-cultural feminist views on patriarchy in greater detail, it is useful first to understand their difference on so-called sex/gender system, sexuality and reproduction. Tong identifies Kate Millett and Shulamith Firestone as important radical – libertarian feminists, among many others. According to Tong, for both the root cause for women’s oppression is patriarchy’s sex/gender system. However, both of them differ in their understanding regarding what is the foundation of this sex/gender system and what is the best way to eliminate it. Whereas Millett argues that this patriarchy’s sex/gender system is the product of culture rather than biology, Firestone believes that it is natural — ‘rooted in the reproductive roles of men and women.’ As they differ in their understanding regarding what is the foundation of the sex/gender system, they also differ in their approaches to eliminate it. Millett believes that in order to liberate women from man’s oppression and domination, men and women have to abolish gender-specific, sexual traits, role, and behaviours —as it been constructed under patriarchy. And in order to do so or to destroy the sex/gender system, she suggests men and women alike work toward an androgynous future in which all human beings manifest a combination of the best masculine and feminine characteristics. On the other hand, in order to destroy the sex/gender system for liberating women, Firestone suggests, ‘artificial (ex utero) reproduction would need to replace natural (in utero) reproduction.’ According to her: “freed from their gender roles at the level of biology (i.e. reproduction)” ... men and women would be encouraged to mix and match feminine and masculine traits and behaviours in whatever combination they wished.” She insists: “as a result, not only would human beings evolve into androgynous persons, but all of society would also become androgynous.”<sup>48</sup>

Tong identifies Marilyn French and Mary Daly as radical-cultural feminists, among many others. Like Millett and Firestone, they also differ in their analysis of what is the foundation of patriarchy’s sex/gender system and what is the best way to eliminate it. Whereas like Firestone, French attributes sex/gender differences more to nature than culture, Daly like Millett believes these differences are socially constructed. If analysis of French and Daly relating to the foundation of patriarchy’s sex/gender system were very similar to Firestone and Millett respectively, it does not mean French agrees to Firestone and Daly agrees to Millett on the best way to eliminate this patriarchy’s sex/gender system. Like Firestone, French does not propose that in order to liberate women, she needs to make herself free from her role of natural reproduction. On the other hand, French proposes

that society needs to encourage everyone to develop positive feminine traits in order to end discrimination on the basis of sex/gender. Tong informs us that “French claimed that feminine values must be reintegrated into the masculine society created by a patriarchal ideology.” Tong adds: “... a closer reading of French suggests she actually esteemed feminine values *more* than masculine values...”<sup>49</sup> It means that French rejects masculine values by associating masculinity with a patriarchal ideology and encourages both men and women to embrace the historically feminine values of love, compassion, sharing, and nurturance in order to liberate women. Daly goes one step ahead and rejects both masculine values and feminine values as a product of patriarchy and proposes transvaluation of values as remedy for systematic and violent exploitation of women. Tong writes: “Daly had completely replaced the ideal of the androgynous person with the ideal of the “wild female” who dwells beyond masculinity and femininity. To become whole, a women needs to strip away the false identity —femininity- patriarchy has constructed for her.”<sup>50</sup> Daly rejects French’s idea of celebrating feminine values. She argues that feminine values are as much constructions of patriarchy as masculine values. She argues “... women should reject the seemingly ‘good’ aspects of femininity as well as the obviously ‘bad’ ones. They are all ‘man-made constructs’ shaped for the purpose of trapping women deep in the prison of patriarchy.”<sup>51</sup>

Gandhi would, like Marilyn French and Shulamith Firestone, attribute sex/gender differences more to nature than culture, however he would never agree with Firestone that ‘artificial reproduction would need to replace natural reproduction.’ It seems that he was radical like French to reject masculine values by associating masculinity with a patriarchal ideology and encourages both men and women to embrace the historically feminine values of love, compassion, sharing, and nurturance in order to liberate both men and women. However, Gandhi was not radical enough like Daly to reject feminine values along with masculine values as a product of patriarchy and propose a transvaluation of values as remedy for systematic and violent exploitation of women. For him values especially feminine values are necessary for peaceful co-existence in the human society.

Radical-libertarian and radical-cultural feminists have divergent perspectives not only about gender but also about sexuality and reproduction. Though both equally challenge heterosexuality – the chief institution of patriarchy, they have different ideas on what could be an emancipative alternative for women. Gayle Rubin — spokesperson for radical-libertarian feminist celebrates all forms of sexuality; “for Rubin, all sex was good; no judgments should be made

about the rightness or wrongness of any form of sex."<sup>52</sup> However, in radical-cultural feminists' estimation 'the only kind of sex that is *unambiguously good* for women is monogamous lesbianism.'<sup>53</sup> It means that radical-cultural feminists more than radical-libertarian feminists have been central in attacking heterosexuality associated with traditional nuclear family. They completely reject heterosexuality as patriarchal institution, which keeps women perpetually dissatisfied with themselves. On the other hand, radical-libertarian feminists, though wish to legitimize other forms of sexuality – bisexuals, homosexuals, lesbians, transsexuals and other types of sex, do not completely reject heterosexuality. Radical-libertarian feminists and radical-cultural feminists also have different ideas about natural reproduction; for the former natural reproduction is a site of women's oppression and for the latter reproduction is a site for women's liberation. Therefore, "whereas radical-libertarian feminists believe women should substitute artificial for natural modes of reproduction, radical-cultural feminists believe it is in women's best interests to procreate naturally."<sup>54</sup>

Like both of them, Gandhi could diagnose that heterosexuality is one of the chief institutions of patriarchy by which systematic and violent exploitation of women become possible. However, he would highly object to calibration of all types of sexuality by radical-libertarian and promotion of monogamous lesbianism by radical-cultural feminists to liberate women from patriarchal hierarchy and exploitation created by heterosexuality. He was too traditional to accept their propositions. However, his response to heterosexuality was equality radical; he would reduce heterosexuality to its bare minimum and that is to its natural function — only for reproduction. He was quite aware of the fact that heterosexuality is violently exercised across the society for the systematic subjugation of women. Therefore, he was also in favour of empowering women to say no to her husband to touch her body against her will. He writes: "Man has no right to touch his wife so long as she does not wish to have a child, and the women should have the will-power to resist even her own husband."<sup>55</sup> And as stated above he will restrict the sexual relationship between man and woman only for reproduction and would advice all men and women to practice *brahmacharya*. In this way, *brahmacharya* and sexual relationship between men and women only for reproduction was Gandhi's response to violence and exploration based on heterosexuality.

### **Challenging Capitalism and/or Patriarchy: Classical Marxist and Socialist Feminism and Gandhi**

Though like the above two groups of feminists, classical Marxist and

socialist feminists have divergent perspectives not only about what is the root cause for women's oppression, but also what is the best way to eliminate it. But "the differences between these two schools of thought," according to Tong, "are more a matter of emphasis than of substance."<sup>56</sup> Tong identifies Evelyn Reed and Margaret Benston as classical Marxist among many others because both believe that root cause for women's oppression is not patriarchy, but first and foremost, capitalism. They use a class analysis rather than a gender analysis to explain women's oppression. But they differ in their ideas about what is the best way to eliminate women's oppression. If Reed "encourages oppressed women to join oppressed men in a 'class war' against their common capitalist oppressors, female and male,"<sup>57</sup> Benston suggests "it might be necessary to socialize domestic work to achieve full liberation for women."<sup>58</sup> For Benston, socializing domestic work means acknowledging domestic labour as productive work. Hence, according to her, wages should be paid to women for their housework.

Most of the socialist feminists like Juliet Mitchell, Alison Jaggar, Iris Marion Young and Heidi Hartmann believe that paying women wages for housework was neither feasible nor desirable. Unlike the classical Marxist feminists, contemporary socialist feminists combine class analysis with gender analysis in different ways to explain women's oppression. Juliet Mitchell and Alison Jaggar present two —systemic explanations of women's oppression. According to them both capitalism and patriarchy are almost equally responsible for women's oppression. As Mitchell claims that:

Even if a Marxist revolution destroyed the family as an economic unit, it would not hereby make women men's equals automatically. Because of the ways in which patriarchal ideology has constructed men's and women's psyches, women would probably continue to remain subordinate to men until their minds and men's minds had been liberated from the idea that women are somehow less valuable than men.<sup>59</sup>

Iris Marion Young and Heidi Hartmann present interactive-system explanations of women's oppression. These feminists stress the interdependency of capitalism and patriarchy for explaining women's oppression in the society and they use terms like 'capitalist patriarchy' or 'patriarchal capitalism' in their work. These contemporary socialist feminists believe that capitalism and patriarchy are necessarily linked. As Hartmann writes: "a feminist analysis of patriarchy must be integrated with a Marxist analysis of capitalism. [...] the partnership between patriarchy and capitalism is complex because patriarchy's interests in women are not always the same as capitalism's interests in

women.”<sup>60</sup> She adds: “The only possible hope for women is to fight capitalism and patriarchy simultaneously. These two systems are simply two heads of the same beast: capitalist patriarchy.”<sup>61</sup>

Gandhi would not agree with classical Marxist feminist scholars like Evelyn Reed and Margaret that root cause for women’s oppression is not patriarchy, but first and foremost, capitalism. He would neither encourage women, like Reed to join oppressed men in a ‘class war’ against their common capitalist oppressors, female and male, nor would like to socialize domestic work as suggested by Benston. He would reject the former because he did not believe in class struggle and he would reject the latter because he would find it immature and impractical. But he would, as suggested by Richard L. Johnson, encourages ‘women’s unpaid labour in home needed to be shared equally by men.’<sup>62</sup> However, he would definitely agree with socialist feminists like Iris Marion Young and Heidi Hartmann. He, like them, believes that capitalism and patriarchy are necessarily linked with each other as a system of exploitation and domination. He, like them, would suggest women to fight capitalism and patriarchy simultaneously and he indeed attacked all kinds of violence and domination, irrespective of whether he discovered it is patriarchal way of life or capitalist way of organizing human society.

#### **Challenging Essentialism: Postmodern Feminism and Gandhi:**

It has been demonstrated that different feminists have offered a different set of explanations and solutions for women’s exploitation. However, in place of offering yet another explanation and a solution for women exploitation, postmodern feminist rejects the very possibility of an overarching explanation and solution for women’s oppression or exploitation. Hence, postmodern feminist believe that there can be multiple and overlapping explanations and solutions for women exploitation. In this way, postmodern feminists are more than willing to accommodate diversity and plurality. As Tong writes: “postmodern feminists reject any mode of feminist thought that aims to provide a single explanation for why women are oppressed or *the ten or so steps all women must take to achieve liberation.*”<sup>63</sup> This diverse and pluralist approach about women’s exploitation of postmodern feminists is based on their unique understanding about patriarchy. For them specific articulation of patriarchy— the systematic subordination of women, is diverse and varied according to diverse mode of production. As Teresa L. Ebert writes: “... patriarchy reproduces itself differently in relation to diverse modes of production, for example, in the variations between feudal and capitalist patriarchy.”<sup>64</sup> She adds: “...patriarchy, then, is continuous on

the level of structure or organization of oppression the asymmetrical division of all differences according to gender and discontinuous (that is, different from itself) on the level of the particular practices of oppression. In short, patriarchy is a differentiated, contradictory structure that produces *identical effects* differently."<sup>65</sup> For postmodern feminists there are different patterns of women's exploitation, oppression and exclusion based on different forms of patriarchy. Therefore, there must be different sets of explanations and solutions for women's exploitation.

Tong identifies Helene Cixous and Judith Butler as important postmodern feminists among many others. Writings of both Cixous and Butler are perceptibly influenced by the postmodern tendency to see our very conception of reality as determined by imposing linguistic norms. As for Cixous, one of the important causes of women's oppression is 'masculine writing and thinking.' She believes that "man has unnecessarily segmented reality by coupling concepts and terms in pairs of polar opposites, one of which is always privileged over the other."<sup>66</sup> She proposed that in order to emancipate women, women should write themselves to break this dichotomous conceptual reality created by men's writings and thinking. "Cixous insisted women writers have the ability to lead the Western world out of the dichotomous conceptual order that causes it to think, speak, and act in terms of someone who is dominant and someone else who is submissive."<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, Butler focuses 'to criticize a pervasive heterosexual assumption in feminist literary theory.' She warns "feminism ought to be careful not to idealize certain expressions of gender that, in turn produce new forms of hierarchy and exclusion."<sup>68</sup> She believes that women's oppression is based on traditional feminist's assumption that sex is a biological category. Therefore, she questions the traditional feminist assumption that sex is a natural category and gender is a cultural category by arguing that our perception of bodily sexual differences are also affected by social conventions. For Butler, sex is not "a bodily given on which the construct of gender is artificially imposed, but... a cultural norm which governs the materialization of bodies."<sup>69</sup> Though Butler argues that the 'reality' of sex is historically constituted, it can also be challenged and changed, she thinks that "it is highly unlikely that we will be liberated from the gender games that preoccupy us and the hierarchical systems that entrap us."<sup>70</sup>

Gandhi would agree with postmodern feminists that there are different patterns of women's exploitation, oppression and exclusion based on different forms of patriarchy. Therefore, there must be different set of explanations and solutions for women's exploitation. However, though Gandhi believes that difference between man and



woman are natural, he would agree with Judith Butler that the ‘reality’ of sex is historically constructed. Hence, it can be challenged and changed. But he was not pessimistic like Butler who believes that it is highly unlikely that we will be liberated from the gender games. On the other hand, he was an optimist like Helene Cixous. Gandhi indeed in his life very sincerely tried to change this dichotomous conceptual reality. As Ahish Nandy explains that the colonial culture assumes manliness is superior to womanliness and womanliness in turn to femininity in man. And he argues that Gandhi tried hard to change this order; for Gandhi manliness and womanliness were equal, but the ability to transcend the man-woman dichotomy was superior to both (Nandy 1987: 141-151).<sup>71</sup>

### Concluding Remarks

It appears that Gandhi corresponds strongly with almost all the above-mentioned feminist perspectives. However, the feminism with which Gandhi can most closely be identified is radical – cultural feminism of Marilyn French who believes that in order to make world free from patriarchy, feminine values must be reintegrated into the masculine society created by a patriarchal ideology. But there are also some unique features in his thinking like *Brahmacharya* as a response to heterosexuality – the chief institution of patriarchy. Therefore, it can be safely concluded that it is possible to think about Gandhian feminism— a combination of Gandhism and feminism. Because both are compatible to each other and can learn from each other and both can struggle together as genuine equals, to achieve a more just and loving society. Hence, theoretical accommodation between the two groups is certainly possible and even necessary.

**Acknowledgment:** I am grateful to Ramchandra Pradhan, Siby K. Joseph, Ashes Gupta and Anagha Ingole for going through earlier versions of the paper and giving valuable comments and suggestions.

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**NISHIKANT KOLGE is Assistant Professor, Department of History, Tripura University. Suryamaninagar, Tripura(W) PIN: 799 022 His recent book *Gandhi Against Caste: An Evolving Strategy to Abolish Caste System in India* was published by Oxford University Press in 2017. Email: nishikantkolge@tripurauniv.in**



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Gandhi Marg Quarterly

39(2&3): 181–204

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<http://gandhipacefoundation.org/>

ISSN 0016—4437

# A Critical Analysis of the Functioning of the Rural Institutes in India

*G. Palanithurai*

## ABSTRACT

*Rural Institutes were created at the dawn of independence based on the educational ideas of M.K.Gandhi to prepare a cadre of transformational leaders in the rural areas . But they could not move beyond a point. It is not because of the educational ideas of Gandhi, but due to paucity of neo-Gandhian leaders and adventuristic teachers to contextualize the institute and the pressure exerted on them by the funding and regulatory authorities. Even the remaining institutes have also changed their character to adjust with the mainstream higher learning institutions. But the conditions in the rural areas in India need more rural institutes. Rural areas at present need neo-rural institutes and not the old one as globalization has changed completely the rural areas. They should be contextualized to help and support the rural populace to face the challenges of globalization and the pro-market state.*

**Key words:** Rural Institute, Rural University, Nai Talim, Basic Education, Rural Transformation

“I claim to be a simple individual liable to err like any other fellow mortal. I own, however, that I have humility enough in me to confess my errors and to retrace my steps”  
— M.K. Gandhi

## Introduction

THE CHALLENGES BEFORE the governing of institutions in India both at the centre and states come from the rural areas as 68 per cent

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of the people are still living in the villages. Their life and livelihood conditions are being disturbed by the reckless exploitation of the natural resources by the state and the market to achieve economic growth and development. Fast urbanization takes place in India at the cost of the villages. People in the villages particularly the poor are in vulnerable conditions. The intellectual community is not able to address the problems of the people in the rural areas. Our higher learning institutions are untouched by the sufferings of the rural masses. Hence, the higher learning institutions' priorities are based on the needs of the market and the industries. People in the rural areas have been reduced to the status of beneficiaries or petitioners or voters and beyond it, they are not considered as responsible citizens of this country, despite the fact that they have constitutional rights and duties. Farming communities, tribal communities, craft communities, nomads, and part of fishing communities in the rural areas constitute the majority in India. They are the real faces of India. India's identity comes only from them. Yet they are marginalised and a few segments in the rural areas are in deplorable conditions. More than the thirty-seven odd departments of the government that function do not have any role in improving their lives. The existing conditions in the villages are largely the outcome of the development activities initiated by the governments to achieve economic growth through industrial, service and knowledge economy over a period of time.

The exploitation of the natural resources is further intensified in the era of globalization.<sup>1</sup> Inequality among the human collectivities has deeply widened. This has been done through an educational process, which helped only the urban sector. In the seventy years of rural development activities in India, governments have implemented more than 2000 schemes and programmes<sup>2</sup> and yet they have not enabled the rural populace to lead a decent and dignified human life. Against this background, sensible academics and policy makers lamented that the present educational system helps only a few segments and leave the majority unattended and susceptible to exploitation. They made a plea for revival of rural higher education, which was introduced at the dawn of independence, based on the Gandhian framework of education and development.<sup>3</sup> It is in this context, an attempt is made to analyse the functioning of the Rural Institutes, which had been initiated at the dawn of independence. It is a major question, whether the rural institutions created as per the vision of Gandhi on education have made any significant impact in the rural areas or provide policy advice as expected. Before embarking on an analysis of the functioning of the Rural Institutes, one has to have a conceptual clarity on the very concept of "Rural Institute or

Rural University.”

### **Framework on Rural Institutes**

The concept of ‘Rural Institute’ and ‘Rural University’<sup>4</sup> had been in vogue and operation along with the mainstream higher education system for the past seventy years in India although it had not been widely recognized and strengthened as a system of higher education. It is to be noted that all the institutions though followed the framework of education of M.K. Gandhi, are not uniform in their functioning. Each was conceptualized differently by the Gandhian architects of these institutions.<sup>5</sup>

Now the term ‘Rural Institute’ is also seen as synonymous with Non-Governmental Organisations from the perspective of the National Council of Rural Institutes (NCRI).<sup>6</sup> Being an academic working in a Rural Institute for about 20 years, I could make out the nature of the confusion from the level of the head of the institution to the last person working in the institute. Only a few academics understood the real spirit of the idea and they too were not able to operationalise the concept in their domain of activities. Some argue that Rural Institute is meant for achieving rural development and many perceive that it is meant for educating the rural poor. A few argue that it is nothing but preparing human power for rural development activities of the government agencies and civil society organisations. Gandhians argue that it is the development of the post basic education idea as conceptualized by Gandhi.<sup>7</sup> It is a new kind of exercise to evolve alternative model of education to achieve alternative development.<sup>8</sup> Rural Institutes have to prepare human power for achieving Gandhian type rural transformation.

No doubt Rural University System is not based on any other system outside India. It is indigenous in origin with its own rich knowledge tradition. Wide references are available about the existence of the Gurukula system. In the same way, world-renowned universities like those of Nalanda and Taxila functioned in India. These institutions drew scholars from all over the world. It was only during the British period that the rural areas came to be neglected and attention was paid only to a few hundred towns and cities. Since development activities were initiated in the urban areas, people in the rural areas started migrating to them. When higher education institutions were created in towns and cities, people who know the implications of higher education moved out of the rural areas with the purpose of educating their children. As a result, rural masses were totally neglected and kept far away from the reach of higher education.

Though millions of people desire for higher education, they were

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compelled to remain in the rural areas, as their livelihood depended on agriculture. In order to cater to the needs of the rural masses, an education system was needed, located in the rural area itself. There were bold initiatives like the Gurukula University at Haridwar created by Arya Samajists, the Visva-bharati University at Santiniketan established by the great poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore, and the National University at Adayar established by Dr. Annie Beasant. There was yet another path breaking event, namely establishing Vidya Peeths of Gujarat and Bihar and subsequently Jamia Millia of Dr. Zakir Hussain. Attempts were there in history to provide an alternative system of education to the British system of education in India.<sup>9</sup>

The idea of 'Rural University' or 'Rural Institute' gained currency among the policy makers and Gandhian academics in India particularly after the submission of the report of the University Education Commission under the chairmanship of Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan.<sup>10</sup> The section in the report dealing with rural university was written by one of the commission members, Dr. Arthur E. Morgan, the President of the Tennessee River Valley Authority in the USA. He visualized an ideal university suited to Indian ethos. It is yet another paradox that a foreigner was able to show us the way. Morgan urged that India needed a different, distinct, independent institution to prepare cadre of leaders to bring about transformation in the Indian rural society, rather than produce a class of people with knowledge and skills to take up employment in the government and private sectors.<sup>11</sup> For three years, from the advent of independence, it was only a concept in the making till Nanabhai Bhatt translated the idea of the Rural Institute into action in 1951, in Gujarat. In his preface to the booklet entitled "Gram Vidhyapith" he dwelt upon the foundation of the Rural University. According to him, the edifice of the Rural University should be built on 'Nai Talim,' the basic education principle enunciated by Gandhiji. Bhatt unequivocally stated that the existing university culture had not shaped the younger generation with character, humility, commitment, responsibility and spirituality, which were necessary to reconstruct the Indian society. It was to be recognized that the dreams of the founding fathers would be realized not through a few government servants and a few development schemes of the government, but only by invoking and involving the masses, for which a cadre of leaders and volunteers with a sense of commitment and values was needed.

Morgan's chapter on Rural Institutes has eight sections. In the first section he explains the context in which 'Rural Institutes' are visualised. The conditions of the villages and the basic education

programme are explained. Undoubtedly, they are all based on the Gandhian framework of rural reconstruction. The whole vision was against the on-going development process of modernization, industrialization, and westernization.

In the second section, post-basic education is explained. The third section deals with rural industrialization. The fourth division explains the reconstruction of Indian villages. The fifth section is the core area, which deals with the establishment of Rural Colleges and Universities. In this section, the characteristics, the curriculum and the methodology of such colleges and universities are explained. The sixth section deals with the basic concerns of Rural Universities such as the kind of management and administrative systems to be put in place. The final section sums up the whole argument.

In 1954, the Government of India appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Dr. K.L. Shrimali to look into higher rural education and offer recommendations. The Committee submitted its report and suggested an umbrella institutional set up to coordinate the Rural Institutes' academic activities. Based on the recommendation of the Shrimali Committee the National Council for Rural Higher Education (NCRHE) was established in 1955. In the first phase the National Council for Rural Higher Education identified ten "Rural Institutes" which would be later developed into rural universities. The ten institutions were:

1. Shri Niketan (West Bengal)
2. Jamia Millia Islamia (New Delhi)
3. Mouni Vidyapeeth (Gargoti, Kolhapur)
4. Shivaji Lok Vidyapeeth (Amravati)
5. Gandhigram (Madurai)
6. Vidyabhawan (Udaipur)
7. Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya (Coimbatore)
8. Lok Bharti (Sanosara, Saurashtra)
9. Toorki (Bihar)
10. Balwani Vidyapeeth (Bichpuri, Agra)

The Gandhian Rural Institute was created in the year 1956 by the Gandhigram Trust. The Trust was founded by Dr. Soundaram and Dr. G. Ramachandran as Gandhigram society on 7th August, 1947. It has several units and institutions to work for rural transformation. From 1947 to 1956 many institutions have been developed. It started with outreach programmes and later moved to organizing academic programmes. Only at a later stage, after it became a deemed university, it started research activities. Its aim was to transform the rural

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communities to lead a decent scientific human life with dignity. It tried to provide needed knowledge, service, human power and technology to the rural areas. The academic programmes were basically organised through work with the communities. It devoted its attention on livelihood, sanitation, rural industries, poverty reduction, and social transformation through its continuous committed work. Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Martin Luther King Jr. from the USA visited the institute and registered their observations about its functioning. The status of the institute was changed from Rural Institute to a deemed university in the year 1976, fully funded by the Government of India through the University Grants Commission. While changing the status into a Deemed University, it could not evolve a unique governance system by following the Gandhian principles, but tried to follow the traditional university system to suit the requirements of the funding agency, the UGC. It was a tightrope walk for the Deemed University to keep the balance between the academic programmes in line with conventional university and outreach programmes in line with the mandate of the Rural Institutes. Teaching — learning methods and academic programmes have been designed in such a way that the students coming out from the institute would go for higher education, and seek jobs like other students coming out from traditional universities. Despite all trials and tribulations, it tried its best to retain the characteristics of the Rural Institute.

The courses offered in the beginning were changed by citing the reasons stated by earlier Rural Institutes and, gradually, barring a few, all the degrees up to the masters came to be modelled on those of the traditional universities. The appointment of the Vice-Chancellor has played a crucial role in deciding the fate of the Rural Institutes. On many occasions, Vice-Chancellors were appointed without any Rural Institute background. They managed the institute to suit their own philosophy. Teachers recruited to this institute have not been oriented rigourously to change their attitude and behaviour. As a result, the institutions were caught in the dilemma of either to go back to a 'Rural Institute' character or transform into a conventional university, which they really could not do. The institute has faculty with capacity and commitment to deliver services in academic, outreach and research programmes, both in terms of quantity and quality when compared to the traditional universities. It is evident from the ranking of the institute by the NAAC.<sup>12</sup> One has to understand the challenges faced by the leaders of the Institute. They needed the support of the Government. In this context, it is necessary to recognize and assess the honest attempts made by different institutions.

**Box – I**

**Rural Institute**

**Characteristics**

1. A rural university should be founded ideologically on the conviction that there are certain material, mental and spiritual values in the ancient rural civilization and culture of India which require to be rediscovered and renourished and that such values need not conflict with the values of the scientific and technological developments in the modern world.
2. Among the values of a rural culture would be peacefulness of daily life in place of restlessness and the fret and the fury coming from such restlessness; cooperativeness and adjustments in place of competition and strife in the economic order; decentralization of political and economic power and resources in order to reach out to hundreds of thousands of villages; the proper balancing of material and moral claims of life; and above all, a deeper and functioning artistry permeating the common life of the people. There will be no question of setting aside modern science or technology, but their application will be more broad-based, human and humane.
3. A Rural University should take higher education to the doors of the people where they live close to the soil and with agriculture as their main occupation. Therefore, inevitably, much of higher education in rural areas will be in and through agriculture.
4. Closely allied to agriculture would be the place of village industries and handicrafts. Rural Higher Education will thus be, in a measure at least, woven around village industries and handicrafts.
5. A Rural University should neither be too big nor centralized. It should be smaller than the urban university, but at the same time, it should spread out its programme through extension methods.
6. A Rural University should depend more and more on local resources, both human and material, and aim at a large measure of self-sufficiency through the productive

- work of its own teachers and students.
7. Two languages at least will be compulsory, namely the mother tongue or regional language and Hindi, the national language. Any other language like English may be added to these two, but there should be no subtraction from these two.
  8. There should be no steam-rolling to produce identical patterns everywhere, but local colour, tones and traditions must be allowed to come in freely without losing certain general standards and attainments.
  9. While providing for a measure of specialization in techniques, a Rural University will aim at the development of integrated personality in men and women so that the future citizen will know how to lead a balanced life. The economic, social and spiritual claims must be reconciled in the character and outlook of the growing generation.
  10. The Rural University must revitalize a whole rural area in which it is situated. Life inside the campus should illuminate and reflect itself fully in the increased education, prosperity and happiness of the people in the rural areas. That certainly would be a real test.

*Source: G. Ramachandran "Rural Universities" in Gandhigram Rural Institute, Gandhigram Rural Institute of Higher Education. Gandhigram: Gandhigram Rural Institute, 1960, pp. 2-4.*

Within a short span of time the Rural Institutes faced a plethora of problems because they were not in the broader framework of the Indian education system. In 1958, the problems of the Rural Institutes were discussed at an international seminar at Bichpuri. Having experienced turbulent weather, the Rural Institutes had decided to be merged with the traditional university system within fifteen years of their existence without creating much impact and they turned towards the western mode of educational system by changing into constituent colleges of affiliated universities.<sup>13</sup>

If an analysis is made as to why the Rural Institutes could not survive, one would meet with surprises. It is necessary to keep the basic objectives as referral points for evaluation. The objective was to create a cadre of rural development leaders and managers to tackle the problems of the rural communities. Programmes were to be offered

not to seek employment opportunity in government departments. They would be real change makers to bring about rural transformation. But the main reason attributed for the failure was that the graduates who passed out of the Rural Institutes were not able to get admission to the traditional university system and appointments in government services. From these arguments one can infer easily that the students admitted to the Rural Institutes were not moulded, motivated, oriented and trained towards the objectives of the Rural Institutes. The students who got admitted to the Rural Institutes were also having the same objective of seeking jobs in the government system as the students in the traditional educational institutions.

The Gandhigram Rural Institute was the only institute that continued as a Rural Institute and delivered what it ought to deliver to the rural masses at a limited level with the dedicated staff under the leadership of Dr. G. Ramachandran. The staff who worked in the Rural Institute could not get remuneration as their counterparts elsewhere and yet they served the institute with a sense of commitment.

#### **Assessment of the First Phase**

Fourteen Rural Institutes (ten plus four) had been started in India at the dawn of Independence. They were supposed to offer alternative system of education in India based on the Gandhian Framework of Education. Of the fourteen, one institute remained as rural higher education institute and all other institutions had transformed themselves to join the mainstream system of education in India. The remaining one is also functioning neither as a Rural Institute nor as a full-fledged university. It tries to ape the traditional universities but it tries to keep certain values of the Rural Institute developed over a period of time. Now Rural Institute as a distinct category of educational institution based on the framework evolved for Rural Institutes in India is more or less an extinct entity.

Rural Higher Education gained momentum in Gujarat by the setting up of Gram Vidyapeeths. Lok Bharti, though it remained an inspiring concept, could not leap forward despite the attempts made continuously. Three Gram Vidyapeeths were established in Gujarat. They were at Bahadurpur (Baroda District), Samoda (Mehsana District) and Vedchi (Surat District). A Gram Vidyapeeth Society was formed to strengthen the initiatives of these Vidyapeeths. To further their activities, the Gujarat State Basic Education Board was sought to be established. The Board was expected to coordinate the activities of 'Nai Talim' right from primary to Rural Higher Education. The proposal for establishing the Board statutorily did not come through.

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The Rural Institutes created with enthusiasm, commitment and sincerity could not make an impression on the policy making community.

The students who passed out of these institutions faced many problems as they were from a totally different stream of Higher Education in India. Many students from the Rural Institutes who wanted to pursue higher studies found it difficult to get admission to the conventional universities. Many who tried to get government jobs by showing the degree obtained from Rural Institutes could not get them. This has been projected as a reason for the drifting away from the concept of the 'Rural Institute.' The real issue, however, is that the Rural Institutes had not performed as they ought to. In the name of Rural Institutes they performed the job of a college affiliated to a conventional university. They could not improve sanitation or livelihood, protect rural industries, innovate appropriate technology, provide health facilities, literacy, and, work for social change. When the Rural Institute was created it worked on all those critical issues of development as there were no institutional mechanisms in the government to engage in such tasks. But now there are many government departments to carry out the same tasks. Hence, the Rural Institute now concentrates on production of graduates. The old institutions like the Gandhigram Rural Institute and the new ones like the Chitrakoot Institute struggled to survive as they did not have appropriate leadership excepting the Vice-Chancellors. They too were mere managers for a brief period of three years. All the functional values and skills evolved at the time of the creation of the Rural Institute have been imparted through the teaching mode mechanically and internalization of such values among the teaching staff is also weak. As a result, those values are present in the system as mere symbols.<sup>14</sup> They could not make a mark although continuous steps have been taken to reposition the institute as a Rural Institute.<sup>15</sup> Sometimes, to justify their distinctiveness, the Rural Institutes introduced courses and programmes with a rural bias, but the students could not get gainful employment. It is a hard fact that the students joining the Rural Institutes are having a record of low level of performance in schools with very little motivation.

Rural Institutes are being viewed as non-profitable white elephants. Despite all constraints, the Rural Institute serves the poor in the rural areas through its academic, outreach and research programmes. Here one has to recognize and underline that Rural Institutes were created not to train students to get clerical positions in government offices. They were to become change agents in the rural areas. But, unfortunately, a perception was developed that the students who got degrees and diplomas have to go for higher studies

or get employment opportunity in the government sector. When Rural Institutes were seen from that perspective, many felt that the students faced problems. Moreover, many wanted to move with the mainstream education rather than carve out a different path distinctively different from the mainstream educational system. Even the degrees and diplomas in Rural Institutes were designed to suit the requirements of the traditional colleges and universities. In the meanwhile, the schools preparing students through basic and post-basic education started disappearing. The Gandhian institutions which had supported the Rural Institutes also declined in terms of their activities. The Gandhigram Trust however continued many of its activities despite the challenges.<sup>16</sup> But, it is unfortunate that Gandhigram Rural Institute has severed its ties with the parent body which originally created this Rural Institute. It is a loss for the Institute. Thus, the Rural Institutes gradually lost their original character, mandate, approach and activities. They were all merged or affiliated with the traditional university system.

#### **New Initiatives**

The concept of 'Rural University' gained much prominence after the release of the New Education Policy in the year 1986. It states that the new pattern of the rural university will be consolidated on the lines of Mahatma Gandhi's revolutionary ideas on education, so as to take up the challenges of micro planning at the grassroots for the transformation of the rural areas for which institutions and programmes of Gandhian basic education will be supported. The policy envisages that educational institutions and voluntary agencies which take up educational programmes based on the concept of correlation between socially useful productive work, social service and academic study will be encouraged. Why did the New Education Policy reemphasize the need for the Rural Institute? It has to be viewed in perspective. Rural problems are mounting enormously and poverty reduction has become a real challenge to the rural development departments. Against this background the central government needed professional institutions to tackle the issues in the rural areas. Whether it was water supply, or sanitation, or livelihood, or primary education or primary health, or waste management, or rural energy, or rural employment, the government required nodal institutions to help it to take appropriate policy decisions and implement them to achieve the targeted outcome. Against this background, the New Education Policy emphasized the need for rural higher education institutions. It advocated :



- a. Consolidation of the existing rural universities;
- b. Reorganization of the Rural Institutes established as a part of schemes of rural higher education launched in the second Five Year Plan;
- c. Encouraging other institutions to take up Rural Reconstruction.
- d. Strengthening Rural Development Educational Programmes in select institutions;
- e. Supporting the elementary, secondary and post-basic institute based on 'Nai Talim;'
- f. Strengthening the content of all these institutions with emphasis on science and technology; and,
- g. Setting up of National Rural Institutes Council to manage the affairs of Rural Institutes and Rural Universities.

Nothing moved beyond preparation of documents for about six years. This New Education Policy was modified in 1992 and, subsequently, based on the new recommendations, the National Council for Rural Institutions (NCRI) was established in 1995 at Hyderabad by the Government of India. It is a registered society fully funded by the Government of India.<sup>17</sup>

It is to be noted here that how the newly created NCRI was to function was underlined clearly in the inaugural speech of the then Prime Minister of India, P.V. Narasimha Rao, on 3rd December, 1995.<sup>18</sup> His whole argument was to contextualize the Rural Institutes: they have to create cadres to manage development programmes. The cadres coming out from Rural Institutes should not be job hunters but job creators. The Rural Universities have to act as catalysts to help the communities through ideas, knowledge, skills and technology. These institutions have to transform the unskilled individuals into skilled workers to meet the market needs. The village life situation has to be transformed by implementing the constructive programmes, the activities ranging from village sanitation, water supply, livelihood, literacy, skill upgradation, small industries, infrastructure, communication, credit system and facilitation of panchayat functions. The gap between the higher level government and the people has to be narrowed down. The schemes and programmes evolved by the central government have to be implemented speedily and professionally for which the Rural Universities have to work continuously as facilitators. Appropriate technologies have to be developed in the Rural Institutes and they are to be disseminated and transferred to the communities. In China, two universities are helping rural artisans to prepare articles out of bamboo for export. In this way, traditional universities are working in China to help the rural communities. The existing Rural Institutes in India have to rise to that level to lend their help to the rural community based on their

experience.<sup>19</sup> To evolve new technologies and to upgrade the skills needed by the market are the imperative tasks of the Rural Institutes. In this manner, it was emphatically stressed that the Rural Institutes are to be contextualized<sup>20</sup> in the market era.

The Rural Institutes have to act as a support base for rural communities to make use of the opportunities coming from economic globalization and, at the same time, if there are threats from globalization, they are to be tackled by the community through the new Panchayati Raj System. Such a kind of contextualization has to be done in all Rural Universities.<sup>21</sup> Communities have to be in touch with the Rural Institutes for their needs. A new cadre has to be created to manage the rural development programmes. These Rural Institutes are to be integrated with the larger society by which needed skills, capacity, technology and idea input will be provided. It was with this vision that the NCRI was created.

#### **Assessment of the Second Phase**

It is necessary to assess to what extent the second attempt to establish Rural Institutes and Universities has taken shape and to what extent the old Rural Institutes have lived up to their objectives. The NCRI was created only to rejuvenate the existing institutions and to establish new ones too. Hence, the assessment has to cover the NCRI and the old Rural Institutes surviving until now. First, one has to understand that rural development activities are facilitated not only by the Rural Institutes but also by many agencies in this country. There are government training institutions, specialized research institutes of higher order, departments (e.g. Rural Development) in traditional universities, civil society organizations continuously working for rural development by training the stakeholders involved in rural development activities, both leaders and officials, preparing needed cadres for rural development, assisting field work or working as outsourcing units. They are not designated as rural academic bodies but they do work for rural transformation and rural reconstruction.

Even after sixty years of continuous rural development activities by several agencies with plenty of schemes and programmes and pumping of huge resources, we could not make a bold assertion that conditions have been created in the rural areas to facilitate a decent human life with all basic facilities. Where are we now, in the human development report? Our position in human development will reveal our real achievements and failures. Even smaller countries with less growth have gone up in human development. Till now we have developed a perception among the people that 'development' is the work of the government and not of the community. People have

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developed a dependency syndrome and consider and perceive themselves as beneficiaries and petitioners, not as development participants or citizens. It is an irony that some of our districts are larger than some countries in the world. Even within a state, one finds a vast difference between or among the districts. Even within a district, one finds much difference among the blocks. Genuine and effective decisions are taken, programmes are evolved, but to operationalise the same in different regions and sub-regions, concrete action plans are needed locally. Generic decisions, policies, programmes and schemes are chalked out, but to dovetail them to the specific area, we need a specific action framework for implementation. Who will create such a plan at the district level and sub-district levels? The 74th Amendment to the Constitution of India says that it is mandatory on the part of every District Planning Committee to prepare a development plan for the whole district. But there is no district plan machinery barring in a few states.

India has got a vast human resource but they are not being used profitably. In the era of globalization, for global products, markets are found even in remote villages. But to find a market for local products, there is no integrated system. As a result, cottage and village industries are ruined. Many traditional skills have disappeared. Village life is not self-reliant but is dependent. All economic activities are city and town centric. Hence, one finds large-scale migration from villages to urban areas. The majority in the villages are living in sub-human conditions. These are the reasons for our stagnation in the Human Development Index.

Three centuries ago India and China retained half of the wealth and riches in the world with half of the population in the world. Now India, though poised for 8 to 9 per cent growth, cannot proclaim that it has enabled the people to lead a decent and dignified human life.<sup>22</sup> Yet 71 per cent of the population is living in the rural areas. Of them 58 to 60 per cent rely on agriculture for their livelihood. Agriculture does not contribute substantially to economic growth and farmers have committed suicide due to crop failures arising from the vagaries of the monsoon. The water level has gone down. Sanitation is poor in rural areas. Public schools have poor facilities and show ineffective functioning. Skills in the rural areas have disappeared as they are not in demand. People have been reduced to beneficiaries and consumers rather than development participants. Still villages are in a feudal set-up as an agro-based economy is practiced and a hierarchical caste system plays a predominant role alongside patriarchy.

To bring about the needed change in the rural areas everyone looks to educational institutions. Why do we look to educational

institutions for rural transformation despite the plethora of government programmes for rural development? For establishing effective linkage between the government and the communities, we need catalyst institutions. It does not mean that there are no higher educational institutions in the rural areas. There are many institutions in the rural areas but they are prototype Engineering Colleges, Arts and Science Colleges, Paramedical Training Institutions and even Medical Colleges. They are all just located in the rural areas. But there is absolutely no connection between the community and the educational institutions. Very near to the engineering colleges, villages are affected due to inadequate water supply and poor sanitation. This is not being attended to. It could be solved very easily by the intervention of the engineering colleges. Very near to medical colleges poor women and children are affected by anemia and malnutrition. They could be attended to by the medical colleges. In reality they are not doing so. These educational institutions are modelled on the colonial pattern, which always commanded the intellectual resources of the people and never sought to educate the natives and draw out the best from them. The system excludes Dalits, women and tribals. Further, the structure of these educational institutions has not been democratized, but remain hierarchical, nurturing the feudal culture. They are not only feudal and exploitative but also patriarchal. The staff are career oriented. They do not connect themselves with the society in the absence of a mandate for outreach programmes. By overcoming all these problems, educational institutions have to be reorganized to meet the requirements of the community. It is to be recognized and understood that the educational institutions have a rich potential to be extended to the community.<sup>23</sup> But, unfortunately, we do not have an institutional mechanism to transfer ideas, technologies and skills to the rural communities. Before the introduction of new Rural Institutes, the existing educational institutions had to find a way to reach out to the communities.<sup>24</sup>

In each and every college, a department can be created for outreach programmes as a special drive of the University Grants Commission, by which systematic steps can be taken to conduct outreach programmes in the communities very near to a college or university. By doing so, many of the issues and problems can be investigated by the academic institutions and, based on the findings, policy advocacy can be done by the same institutions. By doing all these activities, universities and colleges can establish effective linkages with the society. Thus, even the traditional and conventional colleges and universities can reach out to society.

The Rural Institutes were brought under the administrative system

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of the UGC, which is meant for conventional universities. The Vice-Chancellors appointed for a term of three years want to follow the guidelines of the UGC as it is the main funding agency, instead of moving as per the objectives of the Rural Institutes. It is necessary that, to manage the Rural Institutes, we identify persons with a deep understanding of the functioning of the Rural Institutes. But in reality, on many occasions, we cannot find persons with such a background to lead the Rural Institutes. Further, the fundamental principles that shaped the edifice of the Rural Institute, the Gandhian framework, is yet another issue to be discussed. When basic and post-basic education were given a go-by, how could Rural Institutes thrive?

It is mandatory for the Rural Institutes to prepare the people for self rule and build the capacity of the people to participate in the development process. The development framework enunciated by Gandhiji has to be followed.<sup>25</sup> The National Council for Rural Institutes was created to streamline the Rural Institutes. But the Rural Institutes were not brought under the domain of the NCRI. It became an entity like the ICSSR, the ICHR and other institutions to provide funding support to the institutes working on the objectives and programmes of the funding agencies. Though the NCRI was initially under the guidance of Dr. Aram, former Vice-Chancellor of Gandhigram Rural University, and later Mr. L.C. Jain, a noted Gandhian, the NCRI was not placed on a sound ideological and financial footing. Both of them were highly respected Gandhians and recognized persons in the policy making bodies. When they were in the NCRI they were close to the government also. They could have impressed upon the policy makers the need of strengthening of the NCRI and bringing the Rural Institutes under the ambit of the NCRI. Both of them struggled with the bureaucrats even for the normal functioning of the NCRI. As a result, the NCRI emerged as a funding agency to sponsor some of the activities of the institutions which are well within the Gandhian framework of activities. That is why the officials are asking why we need the NCRI to fund educational institutions and NGOs as we have the UGC and the Rural Development Ministry to fund these institutions respectively? We could not create a set of institutions which are well within the framework of the NCRI.

The central government has declared that it would create world class management institutes, technology institutes, science institutes, central universities and so on. There is no mention about world class Rural Institutes to prepare cadres for rural development activities. Policy makers concentrate more on economic growth and human resource development in cities and towns and forget about the well-being of the people who are in the rural areas. Rural reconstruction

and rural transformation need a totally different governance system, administrative system, livelihood system, economic system and credit system for which a new set of cadres are needed. An organic interaction is needed between the academy and the communities. Gandhiji framed an ideal village system and this will be a referral point. This ideal village system has its own value framework. Keeping this in mind, the university has to work towards that goal. One should not assume that the interaction between the institute and the community is free. There is the state, which takes up the responsibility of bringing development to the community. It takes decisions, evolves policies, prepares plans and allocates resources for all development activities. Yet development cannot be achieved. To achieve development, a catalyst action has to be performed by the Rural Institute. The New Panchayati Raj System has been established for which local body leaders and functionaries have to be trained and they are to be supported. As per the requirements of the Constitution of India, every district has to develop a development plan with the active participation of the people. As per the 14th Finance Commission recommendation and decision of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, every Gram Panchayat should prepare a participatory development plan, which is called Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP). It is mandatory on the part of the Gram Panchayats to prepare a plan to get the funds from the central government. For the preparation of the district plan, and Gram Panchayat Development Plan, a planning machinery and a support structure are necessary. All development schemes, which are implemented in the rural areas, require awareness among the people for implementation. The needed awareness has to be created. The available rural skills have to be enhanced. The skills have to be linked productively with the market system. A new support system is needed for farmers to overcome the present crises. A strong emphasis on research and development is required to support SHGs and village and cottage industries.

### **Rural University Framework**

To get clarity on the concept of Rural University, one can go through the experience of Visva-bharati University at Santiniketan. Dr. Ramachandran had explained the experience with adequate clarity.<sup>26</sup> It is not a mere transplantation of city education in a rural area. It is a deeper process of a synthesis of the rural background with the challenges of modern society. Visva-bharati University demonstrated the very natural ambience with simplicity and scientific living conditions along with aesthetics. Students will be able to understand the beauty of nature and the rhythm and cadences of nature with

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human interactions only when they are allowed to live with nature. Tagore emphasized the great values of Truth, Beauty and Goodness embedded in the ancient rural culture. This hoary past has to be rediscovered and the values have to be re-nourished as part of the activities of a Rural University. Though he emphasized the rediscovery of the old values of the rural culture of India, he emphatically and assiduously argued in favour of a synthesis between the good values of the old rural culture of India and the values of modern civilization. Even at the dawn of independence, our leaders did not have the courage to introduce or support the indigenous system of education. Even the intellectuals did not have the requisite arguments to support the new system. It is only the Gandhian scholars who conducted some experiments along those lines. To portray the characteristics of a Rural University, I rely on the observations of Dr. G. Ramachandran as he was instrumental in establishing Gandhigram Rural Institute. Being a Gandhian Scholar and a student of Rabindranath Tagore, his observations about Rural University are basic and authentic.

Rural University should be founded on an ideology that recognizes the value of certain material, mental and spiritual values found in the ancient rural civilization and culture of India. This should be undertaken without contradicting the modern scientific and technological values of the present day. The whole process of development is aimed at achieving cooperation for collective life, either at the family level or at the community level. Cooperation, adjustment, and tolerance were part and parcel of the predisposition of the people in the rural areas.

Rural life is rooted in decentralization of political and economic power and resources with the aim of reaching out to the maximum of people. Rural University takes higher education to the doorsteps of the people. The rural higher education is imparted through the occupation of the people. It never keeps the people away from their occupation. It works on the improvement of the occupation through adoption of modern technology and scientific devices. Agriculture was the main basis of their occupation and, hence, the system of education is based on agriculture primarily.

Further, the Rural Higher Education also touches upon the allied activities such as village industries and handicrafts. It should be optimum in size but its reach has to be extensive through the outreach programmes. Extension methods play crucial roles in this university system.

Rural University should be in a position to rely on its own resources both human and material. Teachers and students should be engaged in production activities. Rural University will follow the two-language formula. One is the mother tongue or regional language and Hindi,

the national language. Any other language like English can be added. More than creating job seekers in the market, men and women will be prepared through proper orientation to develop themselves into persons of integrity and civic mindedness. While orienting the students, the best spiritual traditions will be used. Rural University must revitalize the whole rural area where it is situated. Rural University campus will reflect the real transformation that takes place in the rural areas where the institute is located. Here, one should register that even before the government took initiatives, there should be experiments done by the non-governmental organizations.

### **Contextualization**

The whole exercise has to be done in the backdrop of globalization and the existing social and economic realities of rural India. Addressing those contextual rural problems is a tough task and that too through Gandhian framework is an even more challenging one.<sup>27</sup> Globalization has brought newer technologies and free flow of resources. A Rural University has to produce a cadre of outstanding individuals not to seek jobs but to create jobs and manage development in the rural areas.<sup>28</sup> Since Indian society has a rich tradition, culture and civilization it should have a strong knowledge base. Hence, they are to be explored, and investigated. Rural University should be in the front of policy advocacy. It has to explore alternative approaches to rural development which are sustainable. It makes use of globalization opportunities and at the same time it avoids threats of globalization.<sup>29</sup> Now Nalanda University is in the formative stage, which is going to concentrate on eastern knowledge.<sup>30</sup> It is to be noted that there is a general argument in India that the educational system in India has not been concretely erected on Indian needs and ethos, which has ultimately affected the whole fabric of the Indian society.<sup>31</sup> In this context, the proposed Nalanda University and the Rural Universities will be of immense use to evolve a meaningful system of education in line with the culture and ethos of India.



### Rural Institute in a New Context



It should have a slim structure and delivery point should be broader. It need not follow the existing pattern of traditional universities. It has to extend Research and Development (R&D) support to all rural development activities. Be it self help groups or agriculture or small scale industries or sanitation or water supply or traditional health practices or waste management, natural resource management, or energy from alternative source, or upgradation of rural skills, or enhancement of rural technology or rural governance or micro level planning, all can get the needed support from the Rural University. The new Rural University will not be in comfort zone, but it will be working on the challenges thrown up by the rural communities. It not only creates cadres for rural development, but also train and orient the existing staff of rural development departments. Further, it will build the capacity of the elected representatives of the local bodies. It will have effective linkage with rural communities, rural organizations and institutions. It should emerge as support institution for the rural communities and the government for effective management of rural development programmes. The new rural university will have a social audit system for its functions. Its impact on the society will be

evaluated every five years by fixing certain observable indicators. The existing Rural Universities can be taken away from the UGC and put under the NCRI. The funds have to be routed through the NCRI. The Rural Institutes need not follow the conventional universities. It can develop its own pattern as the experience of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmadabad, suggests.

### **Conclusion**

One cannot say that the Rural University has emerged as a mature educational system in India. Ever since it was recognized as a system of education in India, efforts were on to conceptualize and reconceptualize rural higher education, and yet government had not fully committed to extend support to this system of education. The institutions created with the rural institute nomenclature have delivered goods and services more than the traditional higher educational institutions modelled on the western pattern. The Rural Institutes had been functioning with lot of systemic barriers and challenges. The challenges have not been faced and responded to as they require teachers with extraordinary adventurist spirit. Rural Higher Education has to move along an adventurist path. It needs extraordinary teachers and students. But the barriers are system related and imposed by the funding agencies. At all times governments provided only token approvals and not extended full-fledged support. All the experiments have not yielded the expected results, but they have indicated the potential of such education. Most of the Rural Institutes joined the mainstream not because of the failure of the education system, but because of the poor support extended to this new experiment by the government. The farming communities, craft communities, marginalised, fishing folks, tribal communities are in deep trouble. The problems faced by the rustic folk have been intensified by economic globalization. Environment and ecology are in deep crises. Hence, a new rural university system has to be established to respond to the challenges of the rural society due to the impact of globalization. The new rural university system has to be need-based, contextual, outreach and advocacy-oriented. The new system should have manageable structure and delivery points. Extension and social audit system will be in place in the new Rural University system. Such Rural Institutes can be created within the framework of Institutions of Excellence of the Government of India.

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9. K.C.R. Raja (ed.) *Thoughts and Talks of G. Ramachandran* (Gandhigram: Gandhigram Publications, 1964) pp. 310 – 312.
10. In the Communication of Govt. of India, Ministry of Education, No.55-5/47-3/3 dated 4<sup>th</sup> November 1948, there was no mention of Rural University, but in the section (IX) in the terms of reference, there was a mention of the need for more universities on a regional or other bases. Taking the cue from the above, a separate section was written.
11. Arun Kumar Dave, "A Rural University – Need of the Nation" *Ailaan* Vol. II: No. 11 (Feb., 2009).
12. Since rural India had its own livelihood, culture, trade, skills, crafts and so on for 80 per cent of the population, the author of the chapter in the Radhakrishnan Commission wanted to bring about transformation and reconstruction, keeping the core values of India in focus and for this he suggested a new framework of education for rural development. Further the whole edifice of the framework has to be anchored on the concept of 'Nai Talim.' As per this chapter, the expansion of higher education should have been on this framework. But, unfortunately, it did not take place. Later there were different versions of the need for Rural Universities. One set of arguments is that it has to educate the rural masses formally and informally. Another set of arguments is that this university has to have live linkages with communities. It has to conduct outreach

programmes. Yet another argument is projected about the role of Rural University: it has to extend ideas, information, technology, skill, and capacity and so on, to the rural communities through its outreach programmes and students learn by doing such activities. There is one more argument that it has to do research on rural development issues and help the community and the government to achieve the target of their activities.

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**G PALANITHURAI is Rajiv Gandhi Chair Professor for Panchayati Raj Studies, Department of Political Science and Development Administration, Gandhigram Rural Institute – Deemed University Gandhigram – 624302, Tamil Nadu with nearly five dozen books to his credit on various aspects of Panchayati Raj and Rural Development. Email: gpalanithurai@gmail.com**





Gandhi Marg Quarterly

39(2&3): 205–216

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<http://gandhipacefoundation.org/>

ISSN 0016—4437

# Nation and Nationalism: Revisiting Gandhi and Tagore

*Saurav Kumar Rai*

## ABSTRACT

*Indian public sphere, in the recent years, has become a potpourri of performative nationalism. Subject citizens are now supposed to prove their national loyalty and consciousness quite often publicly. Unfortunately, loyalty of the citizens is judged by their stance over such performances. In such an atmosphere it becomes significant to revisit the ideas of two major original thinkers of Indian politics – Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore as to how they viewed the idea of nation and nationalism. Certainly both these towering figures seldom favoured such performing aspect of nationalism and even less the judgmental value attached to such performances. In fact, as delineated by this article, the present times, in many ways, resembles the context in which Gandhi and Tagore developed their critique of the aggressive version of nation and nationalism which had been gaining popularity during early twentieth century. Hence, the present frenzied situation provides the appropriate context to return to some of their ideas.*

**Key words:** Nation, nationalism, internationalism, Gandhi, Tagore

## Introduction

WHILE TRACING THE evolution of the ideas of patriotism and nationalism through the ages Johan Huizinga in his lesser known but excellent work *Men and Ideas* (1984) argued that by late nineteenth and early twentieth century the idea of nationalism became the powerful drive to dominate, the urge to have one's own nation, one's own state and to assert itself over and above, at the cost of others.<sup>1</sup> Such an aggressive complexion of nationalism could be seen in India

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as well by late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the form of rise and growth of the trends of extremism and revolutionary terrorism represented by people like Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Aurobindo Ghosh respectively at pan-Indian level. This aggressiveness of the idea of nationalism disturbed many of the contemporaneous thinkers throughout the globe. In the Indian context, it was Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore who systematically developed a critique of contemporary nationalism.

Both Gandhi and Tagore were quite novel and contrasting in their respective approaches towards the critique of contemporary nationalism. While Tagore considering imperialism as an external expression of nationalism cherished the idea of 'internationalism' by moving above the narrowness of the idea of nationalism; Gandhi, on the other hand, brought the idea of internationalism within the fold of nationalism thereby broadening its horizon and making it more assimilative and tolerant.

*Mahatma Gandhi and his idea of accommodative nation*

To begin with the ideas of Gandhi on nationalism, one of the statements by him is self-evident that how he established the essential harmony between the seemingly contradictory concepts/ideas of individualism, kinship ties, regionalism, nationalism and internationalism:

The individual has to die for the family, the family has to die for the village, the village for the district, the district for the province, and the province for the country, even so a country has to die, if necessary, for the benefit of the world.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, for Gandhi, 'it is not the nationalism that is evil, it is the narrowness, selfishness, exclusiveness which is the bane of modern nations which is evil.'<sup>3</sup>

Gandhi's seminal work *Hind Swaraj* (1909) also reflects the above mentioned notion of nationalism. In fact, when one looks at the very title of the booklet *Hind Swaraj*, it is not just about *swaraj* or self-rule, rather it is also about 'Hind' or 'India' which is a 'nation.' At the time of writing of *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi was fully aware of those who had been celebrating violence and aggression in the name of nation and Gandhi wanted to address them particularly. Gandhi, in fact, as pointed out by Anthony J. Parel, has addressed four basic questions regarding Indian nation and nationalism which is scattered throughout his *Hind Swaraj*. The first address is against those who assert that India is not a nation. Secondly, Gandhi, in *Hind Swaraj*, deals with the relationship of religion and language to the concept of nation. Thirdly, the booklet

assesses the contributions that the Indian National Congress made to the evolution of Indian nationalism up to 1909 and evaluates the merits and demerits of its extremist and moderate factions. Finally, *Hind Swaraj* focuses its special attention on so-called nationalist elites of the time viz. the lawyers, the doctors, and the rest of newly educated Indian intelligentsia.<sup>4</sup> While addressing all these questions Gandhi continuously recapitulates his ideas on nation and nationalism.

Beginning with the first question, Gandhi criticizes all those who believe that India, prior to British rule, was not a nation. Such people believe that it were the British who for the first time brought together the scattered and relatively hostile regions and communities of the subcontinent by conquering it thoroughly and establishing what has been referred to as '*Pax Britannica*' or 'peace of the British Empire.' At the same time they also believe that modern technologies such as railways, telegraph, etc. were crucial in development of India as a nation. Now, Gandhi in his *Hind Swaraj* offers a systematic critique of all the above assumptions. According to Gandhi, India has been a nation right from pre-British time which is evident from two inherent attributes of Indian civilisation – one is its accommodating capacity and the other is existence of certain places of pilgrimage scattered throughout India.

According to Gandhi, for any country to be designated as 'nation,' it must have the accommodating capacity or say the people calling themselves a nation should have the sense of being a community, despite having differences amongst them as individuals. Here, Gandhi seems to anticipate the essence of Benedict Anderson's celebrated theory of nation as an 'imagined community' – imagined as both inherently sovereign and limited.<sup>5</sup> According to Gandhi, no other civilisation exhibited such a superb accommodating capacity as Indian civilisation. For centuries it kept absorbing foreign culture, religion, etc. thereby making them her own. In the similar context, Gandhi has used the term '*praja*' (literally means 'subject'), instead of '*rashtra*,' as the Gujarati/Hindi counterpart of the English term 'nation.' This is largely because while '*rashtra*' underlines some idea of power, '*praja*' implies the idea of people or community. Furthermore, Gandhi also used the concept of '*sama*' (occasional gatherings) to emphasise the accommodative nature of Indian nation. According to Anthony J. Parel, when Gandhi was using this concept of '*sama*,' he seems to be quite close to Renan's notion of 'fusion.' Ernest Renan had argued that 'fusion of people' was an essential condition for the formation of various nations in Europe.<sup>6</sup>

Gandhi, further, emphasises the important role played by its wandering '*acharyas*' (ascetics) and scattered pilgrimage centres in



developing the aforesaid accommodative character of Indian civilisation. According to Gandhi, these *acharyas* mostly used to travel the length and breadth of India, either on foot or on bullock carts, and this slowness of their journey used to provide them with ample opportunities to establish close contacts with the locals wherever they went, thereby developing or creating a common consciousness. These *acharyas* at the same time tactfully established important pilgrimage centres in almost every part of India – right from North to South, from East to West – everywhere. When the common people visited distant places of pilgrimage scattered throughout India they also developed common consciousness with different groups and people whom they met in their way to pilgrimage. Thus, distant places of pilgrimage and ‘slowness’ of journey, according to Gandhi, were the main factors in developing common consciousness amongst the people inhabiting such a diverse and stretched geography. It provided its inhabitants an opportunity to establish some sense of linkages and some sort of understanding of the people of different culture, geography, language, ethnic origin, so on and so forth. All this, as argued by Gandhi, was destroyed with the coming of railways as it reduced the pilgrimage to a mechanised action and the vast opportunity of accommodation generated by ‘slowness of movement’ was lost. Thus, Gandhi viewed modern technologies such as railways rather inhibiting the growth of accommodative character that every national community should have. With the coming of railways holy centres of distant places more or less became tourist centres and lost their real motives with which they were established as discussed by Gandhi.

Moving towards the second aspect, Gandhi, in *Hind Swaraj*, has also dealt with the crucial issue of relationship of religion and language to the concept of nation. Many people believed at that time that India would cease to be ‘one’ nation as soon as the British rule would vanish from Indian land. This was largely because of multi-religious groups that inhabit India. This is an argument essence of which can be seen even in contemporary times. However, Gandhi used to believe that India has a brilliant opportunity in this regard to put a novel example in front of the world. To quote Gandhi: ‘India cannot cease to be one nation simply because people belonging to different religion live in it.’<sup>7</sup> To understand this assumption of Gandhi, one has to firstly understand his meaning of religion. According to Gandhi, any religion has two parts – core/inner and periphery/outer. While periphery of any religion determines the social organisation of the people following it, the core is constituted by the ethical beliefs of that system. Now, according to Gandhi, various religions might differ in their outward

appearance or the social organisation of respective followers, at the core all religions are same. Once people realise the core of their religion communal tensions will wither away, thereby creating the possibility of a nation having multi-religious inhabitants. In fact, Gandhi poses a counter assessment that 'in no part of the world are one nationality and one religion synonymous terms.'<sup>8</sup> Had it been the case, then entire Europe would have been 'one' nation, but this is not so.

Afterwards talking about the relationship between language and nation, Gandhi does agree that any nation should have a 'lingua franca' establishing communication between its multi-lingual or multi-dialect inhabitants. In the case of India, while Gandhi respects the role of English language in this regard, he refuses its continuation as, according to him, in due course of time English language has turned into hegemonising tool. English has no longer remained just a language as many people have started utilising their knowledge of English to gain administrative posts, favours, etc. That is why, Gandhi advocates the necessity of developing a new lingua franca of India free of hegemonising tendencies of English language. He also emphasises on the mutual exchange of each other's language by people speaking different languages. For example, a North Indian should study at least one South Indian language and vice versa, a Hindu should study Urdu/Arabic/Persian, a Muslim should try and learn Sanskrit, so on and so forth. However, in all these processes, as per Gandhi, one should never demean or underestimate his/her own mother tongue and he/she should always try to enrich his/her mother tongue.

Thirdly, Gandhi deals with the role of the Indian National Congress in developing India as a nation. According to Gandhi, the Indian National Congress is a pioneer association that brought together people from almost all parts of India and from all communities. In order to substantiate this argument, Gandhi, in *Hind Swaraj*, especially referred to three Congress nationalists by name Naoroji, Gokhale and Taiyebji – a Parsi, a Hindu and a Muslim, respectively. By highlighting this trio, Gandhi indirectly substantiated his claim of the accommodative character of Indian civilisation as well.

Gandhi, in *Hind Swaraj*, also deals with the heated debate of the age that was going between the Moderate and the Extremist factions of the Congress. Although Gandhi believed that the Moderates were too polite in demanding their just rights, however, at the same time Gandhi nowhere supported the Extremist tactics. This was largely because, according to Gandhi, if *swaraj* (or self-rule) would be attained through extremist ways then the 'English rule vanish but Englishness will prevail.' As expressed by Gandhi, it would lead us to some violent form of nationalism and nation-state of which India had been victim

of for preceding two centuries (the hint here was towards the English nationalism). In fact, according to Gandhi, the Extremists wanted 'the tiger's nature, but not the tiger;' they wanted to make 'India like England.' He further adds: 'when it becomes England, it will be called not Hindustan, but *Englistan*. This is not the *swaraj* that I want.'<sup>9</sup>

In the above mentioned statement one can clearly see Gandhi's critique of western concept of nationalism and its aggressive tilt. In fact, Gandhi wished to develop an Indian kind of nationalism which would be far more accommodative and more rooted in Indian traditions and cultures rather than being influenced from the West. Gandhi, in this regard, openly condemned the Extremists who were impressed by the violent tactics of the Italian nationalists like Garibaldi and Cavour in their project of nation-building and attaining *swaraj*.

The last thing that Gandhi addressed in his critique of nation and nationalism in *Hind Swaraj* is the question of so-called national elites such as lawyers, doctors, and the modern professional class taken as a whole. Gandhi very clearly states that the interests of these national elites do not necessarily coincide with those of the *praja* (or people). He sees fair possibility of the national elites acting in their own interest, exploiting, deceiving and oppressing the people at large in the name of the nation; something which is going on in present times. Gandhi explains this thing in detail in two of his sections of *Hind Swaraj* entitled as 'The Condition of India: Lawyers' and 'The Condition of India: Doctors.' According to Gandhi, these modern professional classes of a nation whether they be doctors, lawyers, scientists, administrators, elected representatives, business executives, etc. who proclaim themselves as torch-bearers of nationalism are basically aimed at modern objectives i.e. accumulating more and more wealth and gaining status in society in the name of nation. For Gandhi, if a nation really wants to attain *swaraj* or self-rule then it has to get rid of the curse of these symbols of modern civilisation. Here comes the Gandhian concept of self-sufficiency at all levels as the most fundamental trait of a nation – a concept which he developed in his subsequent writings and programmes such as *Key to Health* (to get rid of modern kind of doctors), constructive village programmes, advocacy of Panchayat system (to get rid of lawyers and modern kind of professional politicians and administrators), so on and so forth.

Thus, Gandhi designed his own kind of nationalism and developed his own unique idea of a nation which was completely different from the prevalent ideas of nation and nationalism of early twentieth century. To sum up, it was a nation or 'India of his dreams.

*Rabindranath Tagore and his perceived inhumanness of the idea of nation and nationalism*

Moving towards Rabindranath Tagore, as has been argued, he considered imperialism as an external expression of nationalism and cherished the idea of 'internationalism' by moving above the narrowness of the idea of nationalism. However, Tagore was not antithetical to the idea of nation and nationalism from the beginning. In fact, Tagore had been a passionate supporter of nationalism during the first decade of the twentieth century and many people derived inspiration from him in this regard. However, his disillusionment with it started taking place towards the final phase of the Swadeshi Movement when the trends of political extremism and revolutionary terrorism developed in this entire movement. It was in this context that Tagore suddenly disappeared from the political scene at the high time of the Swadeshi Movement. In this regard, when Abla Bose (wife of the famous scientist J.C. Bose) in one of her correspondences with Tagore, in 1908, asked him that why he was getting upset when things were unfolding in a much aggressive manner against the oppressive colonial rule by deriving inspiration from his constructive programmes and *Atmashakti*, Tagore replied: 'Patriotism cannot be our final shelter, my refuge is humanity.'

Tagore's disillusionment with nationalism grew further in the second decade of the twentieth century when the ugly face of nationalism revealed in Japan's deadly war of aggression against China, in Europe's march towards the global conflict of 1914-18 and in outbursts of 'revolutionary terrorism' in India. From now on, Tagore turned into a fierce critic of nationalism. He argued that nationalism was just another name for appropriation, by brute force if necessary, of the wealth, and raw material of other countries, and that nationalism would ultimately breed isolationism and violate the highest ideals of humanity.

Referring to the aggressive tilt that nationalism had taken in most parts of the world including India in early twentieth century, Tagore argued that very soon it would destroy the civilisation. According to Tagore, the very idea of nationalism has now been stripped of its human element and it would ultimately precipitate a new form of bondage in the name of its pursuit of freedom and right to self-determination. However, this does not mean that Tagore had abandoned his anti-imperialist strand. In fact, as pointed out by Ashis Nandy, Tagore although rejected the idea of nationalism but professed anti-imperialist politics throughout his life. In fact, this kind of stand of Tagore, according to Nandy, created some sort of confusion among

most of the Indian nationalists of the time for whom nationalism, patriotism and anti-imperialism were a single concept.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, it was not just the violent aggressive form of nationalism which Tagore opposed; rather he was equally skeptical of non-violent nationalism represented by Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement. Tagore called non-violent form of nationalism as a 'parochial nationalism' threatening an isolated view of the country. In fact, on the issue of nationalism a very interesting debate took place between Tagore and Gandhi captured brilliantly by Romain Rolland in his work on Gandhi and in one of his diary account, where he has brought out the differences made by C.F. Andrews between Gandhi and Tagore.<sup>11</sup> Actually, Tagore believed that in the contemporary atmosphere nationalism was bound to take a violent turn and hence it was better to abandon this idea altogether rather than trying and changing it. According to Tagore, there was no use of generating so much passion for a concept (i.e. nationalism) for which there was not even a parallel term in India's own languages. Here Tagore tries to hint towards the western-ness of the concept of nationalism. In fact, transformation of Japan into an imperialist country was very much alarming for Tagore and he found nationalism as the root cause of this evil transformation of Japan. Tagore, during his visit to Japan, openly condemned Japan for behaving like a 'western nation' and forgetting its traditional cultural heritage of non-aggression.

According to Tagore, since nation-state emerged in the post-religious laboratory of industrial capitalism, it is only an 'organisation of politics and commerce' that brings 'harvests of wealth' or 'carnivals of materialism' by spreading tentacles of greed, selfishness, power and prosperity. Hence, nation, as conceptualised by Tagore, is not 'a spontaneous self expression of man as social being' as most of the people think; rather it is a 'political and commercial union of a group of people, in which they congregate to maximize their profit, progress and power.' In other words, it is an expression of 'the organised self-interest of a people where it is least human and least spiritual' (all these views have been taken from Rabindranath Tagore's *Nationalism* (1916) which is compilation of three of his lectures 'Nationalism in Japan,' 'Nationalism in West' and 'Nationalism in India').

Furthermore, Tagore points out that economic interests, geographical boundaries, a common territory and heredity generally bind people into a nation. However, once bound into a nation the spirit of conflict and conquest, and not cooperation, gains the upper hand, thereby turning nation into a 'geographical demon' which like a selfish individual pursues power, wealth and importance at the cost of others. While doing all these things, this 'demon,' according to

Tagore, fosters in its own people both a false pride in their own race and nation and a hatred for others.

Commenting on the above mentioned critique of nation and nation-state by Tagore, Mohammad Qayum argues that 'the very fact that nation-state is a mechanical organisation, modelled on certain utilitarian objectives in mind, made it unpalatable to Tagore, who was a champion of creation over construction, imagination over reason and the natural over artificial.'<sup>12</sup> In other words, Tagore's basic problem with nation was that it was artificial and lacked humanness. In fact, Tagore in his speeches has made a significant difference between the governments of earlier period and the government of nation i.e. nation-state. According to Tagore: 'the difference between the two is same as the difference between the handloom and the powerloom. While in the products of handloom the magic of man's living fingers finds its expression, and its hum harmonizes with the music of life, the powerloom is relentlessly lifeless and accurate and monotonous in its production.'<sup>13</sup>

The aforesaid views of Tagore on nation and nationalism also found their expression in various novels, poems and other literary works produced by him. Ashis Nandy in this regard has analysed three well known novels of Tagore – *Gora* (1908-09), *Ghare-Baire* (1916) and *Char Adhyaya* (1934). According to Nandy, the problems which Tagore found with the idea of nation and nationalism appeared in these three novels at politico-psychological level in *Gora*, politico-sociological level in *Ghare-Baire*, and at politico-ethical level in *Char Adhyaya*.

Thus, Tagore replaces the mechanical idea of nation and nationalism by his own idea of '*swadeshi samaj*' which was an embodiment of social relations that were not mechanical and impersonal but based on love and cooperation, and of a society where everyone was in tune with everyone else in the world. Hence, the idea of internationalism which was so dear to Tagore was not the socialist or Marxist internationalism of the workers of the world uniting, but one of spiritual kind based on the harmony of different races and religion.

### **Conclusion**

The very purpose of the above discussion is to show the futility and dangers of the aggressive tilt which the popular outlook on nation and nationalism have acquired in Indian public sphere. If this trend continues Indian nation and nationalism will be soon stripped of all its humanity and accommodative character, thereby generating jingoism. This danger was something which had alarmed Gandhi and

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Tagore way back in early twentieth century. In fact, there is a thin line which differentiates between love for the nation and jingoism. While love for the nation generates compassion, jingoism generates hatred. This hatred can be for other national communities or for specific communities residing within the same nation. Moreover, judgmental attitude based on public performance of nationalism would only lead towards an unusual situation where people will be forced to abide by the love for the nation just like any other law and would not necessarily feel it from within. There is need to restrict India from turning into a 'geographical demon' under the influence of the so-called 'torch-bearers of nation' devouring its own age long citizens and forcing them to abide by a specific brand of nationalism. Here it is significant to contemplate the ideas of Gandhi and Tagore on this very subject as no national figure of India can be greater 'nationalist' than these two personalities.

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SAURAV KUMAR RAI is Senior Research Assistant, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi-110011; Mobile: +919717659097 Email: skrai.india@gmail.com



**Special issue on Gandhi-Kumarappa Perspective on  
Decentralisation and Development (Vol. 39, No. 4).  
January –March 2018**

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*July–December 2017*



# GANDHI MARG

Quarterly Journal of the  
GANDHI PEACE FOUNDATION

VOLUME THIRTYFOUR □ NUMBER ONE □ APRIL-JUNE 2012

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Phones: +91-11-23237491/93, Fax: +91 +11-23236734

E-mail: [gpf18@rediffmail.com](mailto:gpf18@rediffmail.com), [gandhipeacefoundation18@yahoo.co.in](mailto:gandhipeacefoundation18@yahoo.co.in)



Gandhi Marg Quarterly

39(2&3): 217–232

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<http://gandhipacefoundation.org/>

ISSN 0016–4437

# Gandhian ‘Sarva Dharma Samabhava’ and Indian Secularism

*Persis Latika Dass*

## ABSTRACT

*Gandhian secularism of ‘Sarva Dharma Samabhava’ is distinct from the western concept of secularism advocating total separation of state from religion. Though he was deeply religious, he was against any proposal for a state religion even if the whole population of India had professed the same religion. Gandhi understood that it was impossible for western secularism to take root here. He therefore advocated a religious policy based on mutual respect, understanding and dialogue between different religions as the only key to secularism in multi-religious India. According to him, it would mellow down the prejudices, dissolve the misconceptions and end the stereotypes regarding members of other religions right from childhood.*

**Key words:** Secularism, Gandhi, India, Multi-Religious, Inter-Religious Education, Prejudice

## Western Concept of Secularism: East meets West

THE DICTIONARY OF the Social Sciences edited by Julius Gould and Williams L. Kolb (1964) and compiled under the auspices of ‘The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization’ offers two definitions for the term ‘secular.’ According to the first definition, “In its most universal usage in social science the term refers to the worldly, the civil or the non-religious, as distinguished from the spiritual and the ecclesiastical. The secular is that which is not dedicated to religious ends and uses.”<sup>1</sup> The description perfectly fits the popular western concept of secularism where state and religion are considered to be at loggerheads, functioning independently in

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their respective spheres with no space or possibility of overlapping. The second definition in the dictionary widens the scope of the term and according to it, '...the secular is not synonymous with the profane, unholy, infidel, godless, irreligious, heretical, unhallowed, faithless or any similar terms. It subsumes them, but...includes a great deal more....'<sup>2</sup> In this sense, "culture is secular when its acceptance is based on rational and utilitarian considerations rather than on reverence and veneration." This particular elucidation concurs more importance to rationalism and utilitarianism as chief constituents of secularism than it being anti-religious thereby bringing it quite close to the following statement by George Jacob Holyoake, the pioneer philosopher credited with coining the term secular, "Secularism is a form of opinion which concerns itself only with questions, the issues of which can be tested by the experience of this life itself. It is clear that the existence of deity and the actuality of another life are questions excluded from secularism, which exacts no denial of deity or immortality from members of secularist societies....Atheism may be a personal tenet but it cannot be a secularist tenet, from which secularism and atheism are separate."<sup>3</sup> The above stated exposition is quite vocal in shattering the mythical animosity between secularism and religion. Thus, Holyoake's secularism was not against religion but emphasized more upon the temporal rather than life after death, in brief, a non-religious philosophy that focussed on human well being and the materialistic means of achieving it. The absence of rigidity in Holyoake's secularism makes it receptive to religion too, if the latter becomes a source for human peace and harmony. It is this deliberation that coincides the western secularism with Gandhian secularism, paving the way for the nuptial between the 'secular' and the 'religious.'

#### **Gandhi: 'Sarva Dharma Samabhava'**

Gandhi was a man of religion. For him human life was incomplete without an "immovable belief in a Living Law in obedience to which the whole universe moves."<sup>4</sup> All his life's endeavours, social, political, religious, were aimed at abiding by this omnipotent 'Law' personified as 'God' in popular imagination. As to the attributes of this magnanimous and all pervading power, he said: "God is Truth and Love. God is fearlessness, God is the source of Light and Life, and yet above and beyond all these. God is conscience. He is even the atheist of the atheist. For in His boundless love, God permits the atheist to live."<sup>5</sup> However, his religion was never formal or customary and confined within the religion of his birth, but a "religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and which, ever purifies. It is the

permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find full expression and which leaves the Soul utterly restless until it has found itself, known its Maker, and appreciated the true correspondence between the Maker and itself."<sup>6</sup> Having realized the universal and democratic nature of God, Gandhi developed an uncompromising belief in the fundamental unity underlying the outward diversity of the different religions of the world. He wrote: "The Allah of Islam is the same as the God of Christians and the *Ishwar* of Hindus....All worship the same Spirit but as all forms do not agree with all, all names do not appeal to all. Each chooses the name according to his associations and He being the Indweller, All-powerful and Omniscient, knows our innermost feelings and responds to us according to our hearts."<sup>7</sup> Gandhi understood the intricately woven national fabric of India, where men of varied cults and sects interacted with each other at every socio-economic level, generating an inherent need for peaceful cohabitation. In keeping with this scenario he advised, "The need of the moment is not One Religion, but mutual respect and tolerance of the devotees of the different religions. We want to reach not the dead level, but unity in diversity....Wise men will ignore the outward crust and see the same Soul living under a variety of crusts."<sup>8</sup> He wanted his countrymen to stay away from fanaticism and thrive under the spiritual insight of tolerance by reading the scriptures of the different Faiths from the standpoint of the followers of those faiths. He said: "True knowledge of religion breaks down the barriers between Faith and Faith. Cultivation of tolerance for other Faiths will impart to us a true understanding of our own...The only possible rule of conduct in any civilized society is, therefore, mutual toleration."<sup>9</sup> Gandhian 'toleration' signified neither sufferance nor condescension but sprang from his positive recognition of all the great religions of the world. Being a pragmatic, he wrote: "The golden rule of conduct is mutual toleration seeing that we will never think all alike and we shall see Truth in fragments from different angles of vision"<sup>10</sup> and being "tainted by the imperfect handling of imperfect men,"<sup>11</sup> religions will always be subject to right and wrong or good and evil, hence the necessity of 'tolerance,' which by its disposition does not indulge in any such debate.

Gandhi preached what he practiced. Having been born in a religious household, Gandhi was familiar with the ritualistic aspect of 'Vaishnavism,' visiting the *Haveli*, memorizing *Rama Raksha*, reading the *Ramayana* and occasional recitation of the *Bhagavat* by a local priest. However, his first brush with serious philosophical religion came in England, where the 'Theosophists' introduced him to the English

translation of 'Gita' titled 'The Song Celestial' by Sir Edwin Arnold. It is at the encouragement of his non-Hindu friends that Gandhi read the 'Gita,' the core book of the religion of his birth. The experience stimulated the desire to read books on other religions as well. He was greatly impressed with the 'Sermon on the Mount' and with an innate urge to search for a common discourse, compared it with the 'Gita.' Books on Islam made him appreciate the austerity and brotherhood ingrained in its followers. Thus, it was the reading of these varied religious canons and heart rendering discussions with his friends that made him a staunch believer in the ideology of 'secularism' formally professed as Gandhian 'Sarva Dharma Samabhava.' Though, Gandhi advised reading different religious scriptures to the adults he knew "...if we are to reach real peace in this world and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with children: and if they will grow up in their natural innocence, we won't have to struggle, we won't have to pass fruitless, idle resolutions, but we shall go from love to love and peace to peace, until at last all the corners of the world are covered with that Peace and Love."<sup>12</sup> The British education system was based on the popular western concept of secularism and did not include religious education in its curriculum. Gandhi was dissatisfied with the existing system and wanted to evolve a scheme based on his experiences and experiments that would best serve the needs of the future citizens of a multi-religious India. Gandhi was extremely perceptive of the true nature of India, cradle to many of the leading religions of the world. On being questioned about his views on religious education he declared, "India will never be godless. Rank atheism cannot flourish in this land. The task is indeed difficult. My head begins to turn as I think of religious education. Our religious teachers are hypocritical and selfish; they will have to be approached."<sup>13</sup> This realization of the lack of virtuosity of the priestly class drove him to suggest a curriculum for the study of religions in school education. His programme for religious education was published in article form in his periodical *Young India* in 1928 and is so comprehensive in its content that it may be regarded as a blueprint for a future endeavour of the same kind in present day India. He wrote:

A curriculum of religious instruction should include a study of the tenets of faiths other than one's own. For this purpose, the students should be trained to cultivate the habit of understanding and appreciating the doctrines of various great religions of the world in a spirit of reverence and broad-minded tolerance. .... There is one rule, however, which should always be kept in mind while studying

all great religions, and that is that one should study them only through the writings of known votaries of the respective religions....This study of other religions besides one's own will give one a grasp of the rock-bottom unity of all religions and afford a glimpse also of that universal and absolute truth which lies beyond the 'dust of creeds and faiths.'

Let no one even for a moment entertain the fear that a reverent study of other religions is likely to weaken or shake one's faith in one's own....Study and appreciation of other religions need not cause a weakening of that regard; it should mean extension of that regard to other religions.

In this respect religion stands on the same footing as culture. Just as preservation of one's culture does not mean contempt for that of others, but acquires assimilation of the best that there may be in all the other cultures, even so should be the case with religion<sup>14</sup>

When Gandhi wrote the above for public reading, he had already attempted the same on the young girls and boys living under his tutelage at Tolstoy Farm in South Africa and as per his claim the experiment was not fruitless. The children were saved from the infection of intolerance, and learnt to view one another's religions and customs with large hearted charity. They learnt how to live together like blood-brothers. Defending his venture he further said: "And from what little I know about the later activities of some of the children on Tolstoy Farm, I am certain that the education which they received there has not been in vain. Even if imperfect, it was a thoughtful and religious experiment."<sup>15</sup>

To quote Ramchandra Guha, a social historian and an Indian biographer of Gandhi, "Gandhi encouraged inter-religious dialogue, so that individuals could see their faith in the critical reflections of another. One of his notable innovations was the inter-faith prayer meeting, where texts of different religions were read and sung to a mixed audience."<sup>16</sup> To add to Guha, before Gandhi, Raja Rammohan Roy, the Father of Indian renaissance and the founder of Brahmo Samaj, too had done the same during the meetings of the 'Samaj' with its 'Bhadralok' Bengali members exposed to modern western education as back as nineteenth century, but what makes Gandhi unique is, he attempted the same with a heterogeneous group of illiterate Indians belonging to different castes, classes, creeds and genders.

### **Secularism in Post-Independence India: A Shattered Dream**

Post-Independence India, emerging from the ashes of partition, adopted 'secularism' as one of the pillars to bolster and guide its

political and social functioning. The forefathers envisioned that “the nation is above and apart from religion; religious belief is a matter of private faith; and this secular spirit will bring into being the nation as a viable, homogenous, generous, governable entity.”<sup>17</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister and the supposed scion of Gandhian legacy in India was wholeheartedly dedicated to the ideology, though his version had more of western shade than what his mentor had envisioned for India. In such a scenario, the Indian Constitution came closest to Gandhian ‘Sarva Dharma Sambhava,’ when in spite of rejecting the concept of state religion, it gave the citizens of India freedom to practice and propagate faith of their choice. Coming back to the man who controlled India’s destiny from 1947 to 1964, and vouched as a staunch uncompromising ‘secular’ by both his admirers and critics, Nehru tried his best to channelize the Indian imagination away from common religion by christening the newly built industries and dams as future temples of India. He is even believed to have asked the first president of India, Dr Rajendra Prasad not to attend the inauguration of the renovated Somnath Temple in Gujarat, for he thought that public officials should never publically associate with faiths and shrines.<sup>18</sup> However, many social historians blame him to have lacked any ‘clear doctrinal plan of action’ like Lenin and Kemal, and gave ‘for a time, an illusion of permanence.’<sup>19</sup> The fifties were not bereft of communal riots but the incidents were sporadic with few casualties. 1961 witnessed the Jabalpur riots with 108 deaths in a single incident, forcing Nehru to form the National Integration Council. Over the years, the riots continued unabated (1969-Ahmedabad; Ranchi-Hatia, 1971-Bhiwandi, etc.),<sup>20</sup> becoming more intense, and engulfing medium sized towns, touted as bastions of orthodoxy and conservatism along with being hot beds of communal propaganda. According to Kuldeep Nayar, till November 1980 nearly 5000 cases of communal violence had been recorded, with Muslims leading the casualty in both death and loss of property.<sup>21</sup> Mrs. Indira Gandhi, like her father, did nurture socialist leanings in her initial years, but the exigency of politics made her woo certain communities, especially in the post-emergency period because of the government programme of forced sterilization resulting in police firing at Muslim crowd in Turkman Gate, Delhi and Muzzafarnagar district.<sup>22</sup> According to Mushirul Hasan, “The last phase of Indira Gandhi era witnessed an unprecedented spurt in religious fervour and marked polarisation of Indian society on communal and sectarian lines.”<sup>23</sup> From 1980 to 1982, Biharsharif, Godhara, Ahmedabad, Pune Solapur, Meerut, Baroda, burned with communal frenzy due to the mushrooming of numerous religious militant organizations. Operation Blue Star, followed by the

assassination of Mrs Gandhi and the resulting Anti-Sikh Riots (1984) in Delhi shocked the nation. During Rajeev Gandhi's tenure the Governments' appeasement policy towards different religious groups opened up a Pandora's Box, evil effects of which can still be felt. Reversing the Supreme Court judgement in Shah Bano Case under duress from few orthodox Muslims as well as opening up the locks for Ram worship at the disputed Babri Masjid site, proved the hazy and elusive nature of secularism followed by Indian State. The December, 1992 demolition of Babri Masjid by 1.5 lakh Hindu followers, is considered a watershed moment in the history of Indian secularism. The incident was succeeded by such violent riots across India (1992-1681 killed, 10,417 wounded; 1993-952 killed, 2989 wounded)<sup>24</sup> that their repercussion were reported across the border as well.<sup>25</sup> Demolition had to be followed by construction, thus, in the wake of such attempts, came the February 2002 incident at Godhra and the Ahmedabad riots, in which 2000 Muslims lost their lives. Social Scientists claim that Post-Godhra, till date, many incidents of communal conflagration had been reported, but none, of the intensity and magnitude as the former. In present times, it is more of mob lynching that seem suitable to the fundamentalists, involving less bloodshed yet generating enough terror to give nightmares to the secular minded. Globalization has spawned an innate need for ontology tilting the average Indian more towards the ritualistic nuances of his caste and religion. Physically harming the other community has taken a backseat in the wake of Multi-National Companies entering the Indian economy. Nowadays a planned segregation of the target community is more on the cards. Majority and minority, both, suffer with unfound insecurities. The former overcome it by overtly criticizing the culture and lifestyle of the minority along with theoretically supporting its own fundamentalist groups. The minorities, in view of their numerical disadvantage, show a marked preference for the 'ghetto living,' and having lost faith on the state's ability to protect them, many a times join ranks with the terrorist outfits from both within and outside the nation. In this bedlam may be added the overseas members of both the groups funding and fuelling the coffers of the fundamentalist militant organizations respectively.

Unfortunately, after more than a decade in the twenty-first century, India still stands divided, in fact the gap has never appeared so unbridgeable, it has simply come down to 'we' and 'they,' with hatred spewing against each other at social networking sites, talks of the 'Ganga-Jamuni' Indian culture appearing like mirage at the far end. The dismal scenario coerces us to ponder upon the nature and efficacy of 'secularism' adopted by Post-Gandhi Indian leadership to guide



the nation. Indian secularism, instead of forging amity and harmony between the Hindu majority and Muslim minority, has turned out to be an instrument of hatred and tension. Charged with favouritism towards minority and interference in religious rituals of the majority, it has become the object of farce and ridicule in contemporary India. Scholars of communal history of India cite numerous theories to explain the occurrence of communal riots ranging from reasons as common as elopement, eve-teasing to the different communities vying for the same land, professional rivalry, struggle for resources and market, conversions, music before mosques, cow slaughter and many a times systematically engineered also. Economic competition, whether for natural resources or market monopoly, between the majority and minority will continue because it is a natural process and would be same even in a homogenous society, in fact, the present day Globalization, proclaimed as means to economic development and easing communal tension by a significant section of Indian intelligentsia, may further add to the antagonism. International brands will hit the already wobbling vocation of the Indian artisans mostly belonging to the Muslim community, while create cut throat competition for MNC's middle and lower level jobs among the educated in both the communities. Still it is inevitable, but what really disappoints is that most of the scholars deliberating the issue, miss the root cause behind such prejudice and distrust that ignite minor squabbles into full flared riots as well as false propaganda regarding each others' religious rituals and customs, done purposely by sectarian groups transforming harmless peace loving people into excited blood mongers. Herein again, Gandhi could come to the rescue, with his panacea of religious education and dialogue, offered and practiced hundred years ago to make the 'religious' Indians empathise with each others' faith.

### **Religious Education: Road to Salvation**

"Cultural diversity is something to be enjoyed. It is not a problem. The problem is ignorance. It is ignorance that provides the fuel of fear, prejudice and hate."

*Terry Davis, Secy. General of the Council of Europe.  
First Forum of Alliance of Civilizations, Madrid, 15-16 January 2008*

### **Historical Legacy**

The rest of the world may be waking lately to the virtues of Intercultural exchange and dialogue, but the ancients of India had already done so more than a millennium ago. Emperor Ashok carried the legacy of liberal religion in his bloodline, his father, Bindusar was a practicing Hindu, his grandfather, Chandragupta Maurya was a Jain,

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while he himself pursued Buddhism. Incidentally, he was also the ruler of the first empire of India with cosmopolitan ingredients of race, creed, caste and religion. Not only did he insist on a moral code of living that he had envisaged from Buddhism, but he also advised and made efforts towards encouraging his subjects to study and know about each other's faith way back in third century BC. The inscriptions on his Rock Edicts stand witness to his ideology of religious forbearance. Edict Twelve states, "Contact between religions is good. One should listen to and respect the doctrines professed by others. Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, desire that all should be well learned in the good doctrines of other religions."<sup>26</sup> Seven hundred years later the Guptas, a dynasty associated with revival of Hinduism and bearing the titles like '*Param Bhagwats*' sponsored generously towards the embellishment of Buddhist Stupas and Vihars. Moving further to eleventh century AD, we come across *Tehqiq-i-Hind* by Al Biruni the Muslim scholar who accompanied Mehmood Ghazni in his Indian invasion. The book is a treatise on Brahmanical Hinduism, wherein Al Biruni has described the philosophy, custom and culture of the religion on the basis of a compassionate study and discussion with the Brahmin scholars of the time. In fact, Biruni has even empathized with the pagan practice of idol worship in spite of being a strong Islamic iconoclast himself.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, medieval history gave us Akbar, the most liberal, and visionary of all the monarchs of the period, and dedicated to the ethos of secularism. Akbar had been a practicing Muslim in the early phase of his life, but with time he comprehended the veracity of all the faiths. This conviction made him invite men of religion at his *Ibadatkhana* in Fatehpur Sikri for an Inter-Faith dialogue and debate and later evolve a separate sect, interweaving the basic tenets of all the religions, called *Din-i-Ilahi*. Thus, the spirit and urge to promote secular interfaith studies dates back to antiquity in India. Gandhi understood and revered this propensity of the Indian psyche and advised the continuation of the same by his countrymen.

#### *Endeavours in the Past*

Many argue that till 1928 Gandhi had been vociferously demanding inclusion of religious education in school curriculum but the 'Wardha Scheme' that came in 1938 to guide the Congress ministers in framing the educational policy in their states, did not contain any mention of religious education. It was not that Gandhi had given up on the efficacy of religious education in Indian context but it was the prevailing conditions and pressures of the time that made him sideline the scheme. He said: "We have left the religious teaching from Wardha

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Scheme of education because we are afraid that the religions as they are practiced today may lead to conflict rather than unity. But on the other hand, I hold the truth that is common to all religions and should be taught through words or through books."<sup>28</sup> Besides, the final draft of the scheme placed before the Congress in April 1928 was not solely penned by Gandhi but debated and deliberated upon in an open house in October 1937 at Wardha by educationists, Congress leaders, ministers and workers, and critically appraised by the Zakir Hussain Committee in December 1937. The rise of communal parties and the British policy of harvesting on religious differences worked as political exigencies on the wording of the fundamental document by the Zakir Hussain Committee. The Committee vaguely limited Gandhian advocacy of religious education as "mutual respect for world religions" to be achieved as one of the aims of teaching social studies.<sup>29</sup> Prior to independence, the Central Advisory Board of Education (1946) had stated religious education to be the business of home and the community of the student concerned. The declaration was in keeping with the policy of religious neutrality followed by the British in India. However, immediately after independence came the Report of the University Education Commission (1948-49) under the chairmanship of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, which formidably denounced leaving spiritual education in the hands of family and community because it may increase "criminal bigotry, intolerance and selfishness."<sup>30</sup> As per the needs of the multi-religious Indian society the Commission recommended:<sup>31</sup>

(1) All educational institutions start work with a few minutes for silent meditation,

(2) In the first year of the Degree course lives of the great religious leaders like Gautama the Buddha, Confucius, Zoroaster, Socrates, Jesus, Sankara, Ramanuja, Madhava, Mohammad, Kabir, Nanak, Gandhi, be taught,

(3) In the second year some selections of a universal character from the Scriptures of the world be studied,

(4) In the third year, the central problems of the philosophy of religion be considered.

For schools it advised reading stories illustrating great moral and religious principles, while at the college level it suggested establishing a Department for Comparative Religions.<sup>32</sup> The recommendations were forthright in promoting the cause of religious education but in 1950 came the Indian Constitution ushering in Article 28(1) and (2) stating that no 'religious instruction' shall be provided in any educational institutions wholly maintained out of state funds and that no person attending such institutions shall be required to take part in any religious

instruction without his consent, functioning as a major deterrent to the votaries of religious education. Post-Independence, the Secondary Education Commission (1953) did accept that education nurtures open-minded tolerant citizens but did not include religious education in its programme.<sup>33</sup> Still the embers were not doused and in 1959 the Central Advisory Board of Education appointed the Committee on Religious and Moral Instructions popularly known as Sri Prakasa Committee. The committee impugned the family and community for stressing more on ceremonial aspect of religion and advocated a general study of different religions at school and college level. The Indian Education Commission (1964-66) echoed the recommendations of the Sri Prakasa Committee, favouring setting up of Departments in Comparative Religion at Universities but cautioned against fermentation of sectarian traits in the literature prepared for the purpose.<sup>34</sup> It could be argued that most of the committees recommended a compulsory and detailed study of religions at degree level, yet they all suggested a basic initiation in the field at school level also. Since then the succeeding National Curriculum Frameworks - 1975, 1988, 2000, 2005, offering guidelines to prepare curriculum for school education in India, included religious tolerance, peace and communal harmony in their principles and objectives but refrained from offering any concrete programme to attain them.

### *Removing the Barrier*

In the wake of the above stated attempts it becomes mandatory to review the meaning of the clauses in the Indian Constitution barricading religious education in Indian schools. To quote a judgement by the Supreme Court of India, given by Justice D. M. Dharmadhikari on 12 September 2002, in a Public Interest Litigation filed against the government, charged with saffronization of education, he said:

A distinction has been made between imparting 'religious instructions' that is teaching of rituals, observances, customs and traditions and other non-essential observances or modes of worship in religions and teaching of philosophy of religions with more emphasis on study of essential moral and spiritual thoughts contained in various religions. There is a thin dividing line between imparting 'religious instruction' and 'study of religions.' Special care has to be taken of avoiding possibility of imparting 'religious instructions' in the name of 'religious education' or 'study of religions'...The experiment is delicate and difficult but if undertaken sincerely and in good faith for creating peace and harmony in the society, is not to be thwarted on the ground that it is against the concept of secularism as narrowly understood to mean neutrality of state towards all religions and bereft of positive approach towards all religion.<sup>35</sup>

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To augment his argument in favour of religious education he further wrote:

The study of religious pluralism can be articulated in generally acceptable way and such attempt has to be made particularly in India which time and again has suffered due to religious conflict and communal harmony. What is needed in the education is that the children of this country should acknowledge the vast range complexity of differences apparent in the phenomenology of religion while at the same time they should understand the major streams of religious experience and thought as embodying different awareness of the one ultimate reality.<sup>36</sup>

Irrespective of the fact whether the allegations of saffronization were valid or not, the line of reasoning offered by Justice Dharmadhikari in reinterpreting Article 28(i) and (ii), pragmatically supports Gandhian plea for religious education. Continuing in the same strain is Rafiq Zakaria, author of *Indian Muslims-Where have they gone wrong?* in which, he quotes an article by Tarun Vijay, editor of the RSS organ 'Panchjanya,' (*Know Thy Neighbour*, Asian Age, 17-11- 2003), wherein he urged both Hindus and Muslims to shed old prejudices and understand each others' sentiments. Stating the reason behind such biases Tarun wrote: "This is because Hindus have hardly tried to know the Muslim mind. We have spent centuries together and yet either have been strangers or enemies. We seldom read their books or the biographies of the Prophet or the history of their growth. We either hated them or tried to patronize them in a secular manner that widened the distance by inches and metres...Hindus should read more and more about Islam, the life of Prophet Mohammad and the Quran, taking care that the books come from authentic sources." The extract, is one of the most candid portrayals of an average majority mind ignorant of the religious culture of the minority. After citing Tarun Vijay, Zakaria urged the Muslims also to do the same. He exhorted them to get acquainted with the spiritual treasures of Hinduism, understand their spirit and inner meanings, appreciate the deeper significance of their epics and shed their prejudices borne out of centuries of misunderstanding. Such a mixing and mingling at intellectual level would help to make both the communities live and let live a union of hearts.<sup>37</sup>

#### *Attempting the Possible*

For globalization to be a veritable success the world needs people bereft of any cultural prejudice, possible only through an empathetic study of each others' culture and religion. The school is a multi-cultural melting pot which constitutes a unique laboratory for learning to live together and it is in keeping with this notion that in 2007 the world

teachers organizations meeting at their Congress in Berlin expressed support for teaching about religions and their history without discrimination as an indispensable element of general culture, intercultural dialogue and citizenship education.<sup>38</sup> When Europe, a predominantly homogenous society can deliberate upon developing a curriculum imparting religious education for its schools, it becomes obligatory for India, a land where gods and traditions change with every village, to do so. After a lengthy deliberation on the efficacy of religious education in India, it becomes veritable, to add to the content and text of such education. Following the Gandhian ideal of including the basic tenets of each religion should definitely constitute the core curriculum as proposed by many scholars referred earlier in the paper, but a brief description of each other's dogmas and rituals is also necessary. The reason being that due to India's rich religious legacy, the Indian psyche is subconsciously aware of the principled unity of all creeds; however, it is the difference in dogmas and ritual, accompanied with ignorance regarding their own as well as others, that forms the crux of misunderstanding and friction among the believers of different religions. To state lucidly, many Hindus feel baffled when their close Muslim or Christian friends do not visit temples whereas they in spite of being devout Hindus suffer no qualm in offering prayers at both 'Dargah' and Church. Such behaviour in the absence of 'dialogue' takes a sectarian colour and mars the harmony in age old relations. If these Hindu brethren had known the history of Christianity and Islam, contributing to their 'monotheism' and strictures against idol worship, along with the fact that 'Upanishads' the highest philosophical literature of Brahmanical Hinduism is predominantly monotheistic, the result would not be so detrimental. Again it needs to be understood that just as certain eating habits have to be observed during 'Pratushan' in Jainism or 'Navratras' in Hinduism, similarly offering animal sacrifice is mandatory during 'Baqr Eid' by followers of Islam. The arguments offered here are for the ritualistic followers of these religions, which are definitely in majority in all the communities, and not for the cerebral followers constituting a miniscule minority and often relegated to the margins by their co-religionists. Also many votaries of ritualistic religion do not even comprehend the nuances about their own faith, let alone others. For example, many followers of 'Vaishnavism' in North India do not know that 'Maha Prasad' offered at 'Shaktya' temples is the meat of the animal sacrifice done as mandatory ritual to please the 'goddess,' or that unlike the vegetarian Brahmins of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, the Brahmins of Bihar, Bengal, Assam, Odisha are predominantly non-vegetarians with fish constituting a mandatory

dish in their 'Shraadh' cuisine. Similarly, Christian and Islamic followers need to be empathetically taught that the Hindu urge for idol worship is quite close to their preference for pictures of 'Kaaba' and 'Jesus' hung on their home walls in spite of strong rejection of idol worship in their respective religions. Again a basic course in history of religions would make the plebeian religionists of all communities know that since time immemorial, victors around the world, irrespective of the peaceful tenets of their faiths have been desecrating and rebuilding the places of worship of the vanquished simply to crush their confidence and self-respect, even if both professed the same religion with minor sectarian differences, and India being no exception also suffered the same. The suggested content may not appeal to the theoreticians but the curriculum is to be aimed for the masses suffering and harbouring age old prejudices born out of ignorance regarding the ritualistic aspect of each other's religion. The textbooks as recommended by Gandhi have to be based on the writings of the votaries of the respective faiths to avoid any kind of distortion or misrepresentation; otherwise the result may prove more detrimental and chaotic than the present state of affairs. Thus, a balanced inclusion of theological tenets as well as elucidation of ritualistic tradition, with the State taking an active interest in the field, would definitely end the impasse secularism has reached in India and forge the nation towards the true spirit of 'Sarva Dharma Samabhava' envisioned by the 'Father of the Nation.'

To conclude, the article is basically an attempt to chafe Indian secularism with Gandhian concept of 'Sarva Dharma Samabhava.' It aims to present a holistic picture of Gandhian secularism that is not simply rhetorical but pragmatic enough to offer solutions. It also endeavours to high light the partial and faulty adoption of Gandhian secularism by Indian State demeaning the concept into a blatant farce, perceived with dislike by the majority and doubt by the minority. The article primarily focuses on Gandhian suggestion for religious education in schools in India and offers arguments in favour of the scheme along with a succinct suggestion at the end on the content of the curriculum for the same.

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**PERSIS LATIKA DASS is Lecturer, Department of History, Sophia Girls' College (Autonomous), Ajmer 305 001 (Rajasthan), Email: [persis\\_dass@yahoo.com](mailto:persis_dass@yahoo.com)**





Gandhi Marg Quarterly

39(2&3): 233–248

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<http://gandhipeacefoundation.org/>

ISSN 0016–4437

# Lessons and Imperatives from Experiments of Basic Education in India

*D. M. Diwakar*

## ABSTRACT

*This paper seeks to explore the relevance of Basic Education experiments in a changing world and the policy implications they have. The paper will endeavour to see whether such experiments have the potential to address the crises in education and create a better society. After a brief description of the conceptual framework, the paper highlights some aspects of education in India. It then looks at the Gandhian understanding of education and the experiments stemming from it. It concludes by saying that changing the market-based system is an imperative, if we are truly conscious of the consequences of the system.*

**Key words:** *Gandhi, education, nai talim, swaraj, technology*

## Introduction

PERCEPTION OF IDEALS of a society sets goals, evolves philosophy, develops corresponding programmes, works out strategies and creates institutions and structures towards achieving the set goals in a particular time and space. In this process, a consciousness of societal requirements is created. Education has been one such programme. It also further implies that the vision of social reconstruction becomes a determinant for the forms and contents of education that such society requires. Thus, it becomes pertinent to set a larger goal of social vision for which a corresponding education system is required. This may have a structural connotation. Initially, education might have been developed as a code of conduct based on

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experience with nature. People acquired consciousness in due course, which turned later into structured wisdom and a powerful instrument for development of a code of conduct, transferring knowledge so derived from one generation to another. People learnt to live and coexist with nature and living beings.<sup>1</sup> It may be referred to as multi-dimensional attainment of learning beyond literacy,<sup>2</sup> literacy for life,<sup>3</sup> strategies and institutions or broadly education system.

Education has been considered as an effective instrument of liberation, equality and justice. Quality of education has been a concern over the ages among the teachers, thinkers, practitioners, policy makers, implementing agencies, and society at large. It is said that education is the science of emancipation. Education liberates from all kinds of bondages; it is not merely a set of skills. It is a much larger canvas than functional literacy. It is rather a science for creating a new human being and society, which in turn is contingent upon the worldview that education seeks to uphold as well as the perspective on social progress. For example, if the perspective is of an egalitarian society, the worldview of education is supposed to be egalitarian. A discriminatory and exclusionary mix of multi-structured and multi-graded education system that India has inherited from the British Colonial Rule, can hardly create an egalitarian society.

Still, the question remains as to whether mainstream education is merely confined to achieve bread and butter or a worldview to create a harmonious and egalitarian social order. This paper is an attempt to understand the relevance of Basic Education experiments in a changing world and their policy implications. Whether it has the potential to address the crises in education and create a better society and world is the moot question. This paper is divided into four sections. Section one deals with the conceptual framework, section two discusses certain aspects of Indian education, section three focuses on Gandhian vision of and experiments in education and section four underlines the need to move in the direction of alternatives to the market-based society.

### **I. Conceptual Framework**

The word education has ever been evolving with varying meaning through time and space. It has been derived from the Latin word *educatus*, which means "bring up, rear, educate," which is related to *educere* "bring out," from ex- "out" + *ducere* "to lead." The verbal form is *educare* from *educere*, which, in turns comes from "*ducere*" "to lead or draw out." This word has been derived from the verb *educere*, which means "to draw forth from within." This was the original teaching method of Socrates of 'drawing from within to think, write or find their own path'. The noun "education" first appeared in the 16th

century in English. It meant “schooling” and is first referred to in the works of Shakespeare in 1588. In Italian, the word “education” still means “upbringing” rather than “instruction.” However, the dominant worldview of mainstream development (i.e., industrialism) is an outcome of industrial revolution, which has its own requirement of market and education, which survived through colonialism. Macaulay was entrusted with the responsibility of designing education for British India, to serve the interests of the colonial masters, which remained for long the mainstream approach to education. Therefore, colonial markets were required to develop for the convenience of the colonial masters, and accordingly, education was designed for the colonies.

Besides mainstream dominant worldview of development (i.e., industrialism), there are *inter alia* two alternative worldviews as antitheses, which I am referring to (i) a blueprint of classless society for social transformation ‘from each according to his/her ability, to each according his/her need,’<sup>4</sup> culminated into a formulation of the Manifesto of the Communist Party,<sup>5</sup> which was experimented in many countries that experienced social transformation in the then USSR, China, Vietnam, Cuba, Venezuela, among others. It sought “to rescue education from the influence of the ruling class”<sup>6</sup> with a programme of “Free education for all children in public schools, abolition of children’s factory labour in its present form, and combination of education with industrial production.”<sup>7</sup> Western Marxist thinkers further elaborated the practical aspects of education.<sup>8</sup> (ii) A blueprint of non-violent social order,<sup>9</sup> which was partially experimented during Indian freedom struggle. But it largely remained in the realm of hypothesis. This document focuses on free education for *inter alia* happiness, dignity of labour, social reforms, equality and swaraj through *Nai Talim*. Gandhi articulated his vision of education and shared it with likeminded people, which are available in his ‘Collected Works.’

It is not important here to underline which one is more relevant, but it is significant that every worldview has its own philosophy, ideology, pedagogy, programmes, strategies, institutions and cadres to achieve its goal. Hence, if we discuss education, we cannot ignore that it is embedded in a worldview. India has not been an exception to this phenomenon.

The Wardha conference of 1937 brought an alternative vision of education through manual training for independent India. The 1948 Education Commission headed by Radhakrishnan, in its report<sup>10</sup> emphasized values, development of basic skills, independence, initiatives for solving problems, discovery and development of humane and constructive talents, and attributes of social responsibility and

cooperation. The National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT) emphasized in 1970 self-realization, human relationships and civic responsibility. In independent India also there was the much discussed Kothari Commission, which took note of Nai Talim. The Acharya Ramamurthy Commission also suggested many reforms.

## II. Glimpses of Indian Education

Indian tradition of education was basically Brahmnical, but nonetheless considered it as a means of emancipation. This perception has very much been ingrained in social wisdom which can be traced back to the dictum '*sa vidya ya vimuktaye*' (i.e., education, which liberates).<sup>11</sup> Oral traditions of learning literature such as *Shruti* (Veda), *Brahman*, *Upanishad*, *Darshana* (Philosophy), *Smriti* (Purana), *Dhammapada inter alia* and institutions, such as *Gurukul*, and Nalanda, Takshshila, Vikramshila universities emerged in ancient India and the main texts for references were Panini, Charvak, Charak, Gautam, Chanakya and Aryabhata.

However, these places and resources of education were meant for upper castes (*Brahmins*, *Kshatriya* and *Vaishya*) and not for lower castes (*Shudras*). Glorification of tradition of 300 B C with expressions like '*vasudhaiv kutumkam*' (whole earth is one family) or '*sarve bhantu sukhinah, sarve santu niramayah, sarve bhadrani pashyanti, ma kashchid dukhbhag bhavet*' (happiness, health, welfare for every one and no should be in distress)<sup>12</sup> show hollowness if we look at the status and treatment that was given to the people of lower rungs of society, i.e., *shudras*, *antyaaja*, *asprishya*, etc. in brahmnical order of Indian society. The fact remains that the majority of the lower rungs of the society have never been treated at par and remained deprived from education, denied access to resources, and relegated to sub human conditions as historically disadvantaged groups.<sup>13</sup> Spread of education in medieval and modern India for downtrodden was emphasised by Sreenarayana Guru, Gadge Ji Maharaj, Mahatma Phule, Periyar, and Ambedkar. But there is still a long way to go. Whatever may have been achieved through mainstream education, contradictory exclusions are also found.

## III. Gandhi's Vision and Experiments

Vision of alternative education of Gandhi can be seen in his seminal writing, the *Hind Swaraj*, consistent with his vision of reconstruction and development, where he argued for education, which ensures dignity of labour as the process of learning in that it reduces the gap between mental and physical labour. It dealt with the objectives of education, which include understanding ethics, character building,

observance of duties and happiness rooted in the culture and life of the people beyond mere learning of letters. Receiving such an education makes one worthy to realize ideals and draws the best out of the individual. Gandhi was of firm opinion that true and original education remains natural, environment friendly and useful in life and results in all round development (moral, cultural and material improvement) of individual and society with self-reliance and dignity of labour. Therefore, education through mother tongue is the best medium.<sup>14</sup>

*Hind Swaraj* remained a reference point at the level of thought, but still how to go about it remained a question. The Beng Bhang Movement acted as an inspiration to formulate alternative education system for India away from the Macaulay framework. After coming back from South Africa, Gandhi had many offers to settle down in Hardwar, Baidyanathdham, Rajkot, and Ahmadabad. Gandhi was conscious of the need for a strategic location to begin his work in India, and he finally decided to work from Ahmadabad primarily for three reasons: (i) he was confident that he could do better service through Gujarati language; (ii) task of revival of cottage industry was in his mind, for which weaving was historically a part of the legacy of Ahmadabad; and (iii) financial support with several potential benefactors in Ahmedabad. Hence, he started the Satyagraha Ashram at Kochrab.<sup>15</sup> He wrote: "We in Ashram believe that the great harm that is being done to the country will continue so long as education is not given along national lines. Accordingly, a National School has been started as an experiment. The aim is to give higher education through the mother tongue and in a manner that will impose no strain. ... In this experiment both mental and physical education is provided. A curriculum extending over 13 years is visualized. This will include, besides training corresponding to a graduate's instruction in the Hindi language, in agriculture and weaving."<sup>16</sup>

Gandhi realized the need for an alternative education system when he returned from South Africa and travelled throughout India. Speaking on education at Allahabad on 23.12.1916 he said: "Education through English had created a wide gulf between the educated few and the masses."<sup>17</sup> First mention of his experiment of alternative education can be traced to the National Gujarati School in a letter that he had written to Naraindas Gandhi on January 17, 1917. He further elaborated his ideas in his speech at National Gujarati School on January 18, 2017, in which he dealt with aims of education beyond job and money, the curriculum to be taught, the medium of education and so on. In the first three years, oral engagement has to be in three dimensions – physical in fields like agriculture, weaving, carpentry, and ironsmith, intellectual in mathematics, history, geography,

chemistry and language, and religious. There has to be free education, paid teachers, and syllabus for the first year. He did not wait for government to offer education, rather he preferred to start his experiment to build public opinion in favour of National Gujarati School which the government could come forward and support.<sup>18</sup>

During Champaran Satyagraha, on April 15, 1917 he wrote a letter to Maganlal Gandhi in which he said: "we should make the experiment of the national school as planned... Let somebody from the Ashram help in teaching weaving." He also managed funds through donation.<sup>19</sup> Gandhi further elaborated his vision on education on 24.3.1917, when he emphasized education in mother tongue, "so long we are not free of our fondness for English, we cannot achieve real *swaraj*." He rightly attached importance to education system to attain *swaraj*: "In my opinion, the key to *swaraj* lies not so much in the hands of the Government as in our system of education."<sup>20</sup> Therefore, he emphasized on education for a larger goal of *swaraj* than just earning bread and butter. Speaking at Second Gujarat Educational conference (October 22-23, 1917) Gandhi emphasized on medium of instruction<sup>21</sup> and love for and faith in mother tongue with numerous examples "by examining the growth and development of various languages," to save about six years time of thousands students, which may save thousands years of a nation. He was of firm opinion: "The system under which we are educated through a foreign language results in incalculable harm."<sup>22</sup> It created fear and distrust. Gandhi also dealt with the scheme for national education at length in terms of subjects and languages.<sup>23</sup>

Gandhi could realize that basic cause of the exploitation of peasants was their ignorance.<sup>24</sup> If they were not properly educated, they might misuse their freedom what they achieved. Therefore, in order to educate them (children and adults) about hygiene, schools should be opened<sup>25</sup>. Initially, Gandhi wanted to open four or five schools only<sup>26</sup> in Champaran. Writing a letter to Merriman, he explained that basic aims and objectives of schools were to connect men, women and children with the culture and help develop impeccable moral character along with hygiene and preparation for livelihood through upgrading traditional occupations with the help of training and education. Literacy was merely conceived as a means to achieve these objectives.<sup>27</sup> Thus, Gandhi was working on many fronts for preparation for freedom and Champaran Satyagraha was a learning experience in the path to freedom and constructive programmes for reconstruction of society.

Gandhi convened a conference on *Buniadi Talim* (Basic Education) at Wardha in 1937 and constituted a committee headed by Dr. Zakir

Hussain, which submitted its report in 1938 and recommended an independent education system incorporating vision of Mahatma Gandhi. Broad features of the report were to impart education through mother tongue, bridge the gaps between mental and physical labour, infusion of value of dignity of labour, character building, dutifulness, morality, self-reliance, and equality, embedded with life, culture and prosperity in order to achieve integrated personality development.

#### **A. Gandhian Education: Nai Talim**

Concept of *Nai Talim*, although originally articulated in the concept of education in the *Hind Swaraj*, was later developed through experiments, conferences, discussions and resolutions<sup>28</sup> on education in the course of the freedom struggle with categorical emphasis on development of mind through manual training suitable for the requirement of society with state support.<sup>29</sup> He emphasized on “education for life that would answer the need of our millions.”<sup>30</sup> These discussions can be found in the ‘Collected Works.’

Many national institutions of education were established throughout the country for alternative education for independent India such as Kashi Vidyapeeth, Bihar Vidyapeeth, Gujarat Vidyapeeth, Yadavpur National Council, Gurukul Vidyapeeth, Jamia Millia Islamia, Andhra National School of Arts, Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth, and so on. In 1937, an Education Committee of nine members — Aryanaykam, Asha Devi, Vinoba Bhave, Kaka Kalelkar, Mashruwala, Krishnadas Jaju, J. C. Kumarappa, Khwaja Ghulam Saiyidain, and T. K. Shah was set up under the Chairmanship of Dr. Zakir Hussain, which submitted its report in 1938. In order to develop integrated personality, the Committee recommended adopting a New Education System with psychological perspectives to protect students from the backlash of bookish learning. The New Education System will necessarily remove differences between mental and physical labour and inculcate the value of the dignity of productive labour. This will lead to enhancing production capacity and self-reliance.

The results of the experiments of *Nai Talim* were initially very encouraging with the support of provincial government. Till 1940 there were more than five thousand Basic Schools, twelve teachers training schools, two teachers training colleges and seven refresher course centres. But the withdrawal of government support during the Second World War brought these experiments to a phase of decline. Yet many conferences of *Nai Talim* were organized. Finally, in the name of Common School System, all these initiatives were shelved by the government and all distinctions have been removed. However, experiments of *Nai Talim* also continued in Gujarat, Maharashtra,



Kerala, West Bengal and other parts of the country.

A detailed review of *Nai Talim* after fifty years (1937-87) of education at Sevagram identified the following four reasons for the stagnation in experiments:<sup>31</sup> (i) shifting of priorities from creating students and teachers for *Nai Talim* to participation in national calls like Quit India at the time of Gandhi himself or Bhoodan Gramdan by Vinoba (ii) merger of all activities into one banner of *Sarva Seva Sangh*, where *Nai Talim* lost its identity, (iii) apathy of the State to provide equal opportunities to all and (iv) teachers could neither be transformed into master craftsmen nor teachers could be recruited from peasants and craftsmen. Hence, teachers were not different from the Macaulay system certificate holders.

### B. Experiments in Bihar

During Champaran Satyagraha, Gandhi opened three schools (i) Badharva Lakhansen on 13.11.1917 (ii) Bhitiharva on 20.11.1917 and (iii) Madhuban on 17.01.1918.<sup>32</sup> Later, the number of schools multiplied and now the remnants of 391 basic schools are still found in Bihar after the formation of Jharkhand. These schools have teachers, students and infrastructure, which hardly correspond to basic schools of Gandhian concept. However, many steps were initiated intermittently by the Government of Bihar to revive these schools, such as the Bihar Education Minister Plan 1991, Vyasji Committee 1999, I. C. Kumar Committee 2001, A three-day workshop in 2004, which the Education Minister of the State also attended, another workshop in 2009 etc., but nothing substantial emerged from these exercises.

At the initiative of the National Council of Rural Institutes (NCRI) a Second National Conference of *Nai Talim* 2011 in collaboration with the Government of Bihar was organised at A. N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies, Patna, which was coordinated by the present author. The conference was inaugurated by the Chief Minister of Bihar, in the presence of the Minister for education and Principal Secretary, Department of Education. The Conference examined the problems being encountered by the *Nai Talim* institutions, listened to the success stories of a few institutions, analysed the inescapable impact of modern education on the Basic Education system and evaluated the propositions put forward. It finally resolved to carry forward the consolidated agenda towards the making of a self reliant society. Bihar had seen one of the most effective *Nai Talim* movements of its time and it was hoped that the state could still play a key role in the resurrection of *Nai Talim*. The Conference brought a set of important recommendations for revival of *Nai Talim*. It emphasised

contextualisation, comprehensive evaluation, induction of peasants and master craftsmen as guest teachers, implementability, life cycle approach, innovative skills for livelihood, village community school environment, separate syllabus, region specific curriculum framework, specially trained teachers for *Nai Talim*, separate board for administration, etc., (see annexure 1 for recommendations of Conference). In the Conference the Chief Minister announced a three member Committee consisting of Principal Secretaries of Education, Health and Labour to look into the recommendations of the Conference for revival of *Nai Talim*. Government of Bihar constituted a three-member committee in 2011, which adopted most of the recommendations of the Conference with administrative exceptions. Teachers have been appointed to some extent but they are not different from general schools. Syllabus and curriculum framework is also not different. Because of their own traditions, a few schools are still carrying out some basic education activities with private support, which are of course different, but they hardly make the type of schools envisaged in *Nai Talim*.<sup>33</sup>

#### **IV. Attainment Paradoxes**

Education concerns every conscious mind, intellectual, policy maker and social activist and society across the world, as it is considered as one of the effective tools for resolving problems of unemployment, poverty eradication and an equalizer to create an egalitarian society. Many experiments have been carried out, which contributed significantly to the development of civilizations and humanity. Modern education system marked many monumental achievements in terms of institutions, agencies and hard and soft infrastructures of education, training, research and development.

In 1901, only 5.36 per cent of 23.6 crore population was literate in India, where female literacy was merely 0.6 per cent. India has travelled a long way since then. It could achieve 74 per cent plus literacy rate and female literacy has also improved significantly from 0.6 per cent in 1901 to 65.46 per cent in 2011. Besides elementary and secondary schools were established in every village or nearby areas with a few exceptions. The number of universities and colleges, which were merely 25 and 700 respectively in 1947, has increased to 799 and 39071 respectively by 2011. Out of 799 universities, India has 101 technical institutions, 50 medical universities and institutes, 64 agriculture universities and institutes, 20 law universities, 14 women universities and 7 language universities, besides stand alone institutions of national importance.<sup>34</sup> These institutions have contributed remarkably towards development of society and the nation.

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Education has contributed substantially towards generation of knowledge, create better human conditions and amenities, skills, opportunities for better employment, etc., but quality remains an issue so also the question of inclusion. Quality concerns of elementary education have been acknowledged through series of Annual Status of Education Reports.<sup>35</sup> The World Bank Report 2017 on education also expressed concerns on quality of education in India. Concerns of discrimination and exclusion are far more serious; instead of self-confidence, fear, distrust<sup>36</sup> and depression often result, which have often led to suicides.<sup>37</sup>

On the one hand, the country is burdened with a vast pool of unemployed army of deprived people devoid of opportunities to work, on the other hand a handful of elite educated people with non-comparable salary and wealth thrive despite over seven decades of democratic development in our country. One of the reasons *inter alia* behind such failures is continuation of the colonial system of elitist education. "The foundation that Macaulay laid of education has enslaved us... It is worth noting that, by receiving English education, we have enslaved the nation... It is we, the English knowing Indians, that have enslaved India."<sup>38</sup> Although modern education has been addressing many complex problems of a small section of the people, at the mass level, it has been compounding unemployment, accentuating discriminations, poverty and misery as an inevitable outcome. India has been creating many excellent institutions for redress of the chronic poverty, unemployment and intra-regional disparity. However, these efforts are insufficient. Education has largely remained production centric rather than employment centric. Moreover, instead of eradicating gaps of mental and physical labour, modern education has widened such gaps.

Moreover, at the lower level of technology, the professions were considered menial and were left the so-called lower castes, but with the arrival of better technology, the skilled labour was often appropriated by the higher castes. There are numerous examples of these phenomena. Wooden ploughing with oxen is a social taboo for upper castes, but not ploughing with the help of tractors. Weaving is another example. We hardly find weavers children becoming textile engineers or managers in textile industry. Civil engineering and leather engineering are also other areas where the profession has attained respectability making the upper castes to take them up. We can hardly find engineers and managers in Bata or Khadim from the cobbler community who have traditional skills. Similarly, manual scavenging and sweeping have always been left for particular sub groups of scheduled castes, but they can hardly find places ranging from

engineering, managers of Sulabh International or Minister of Sanitary Department. Excluded group of tribes known as Nuts have been surviving on gymnastic demonstrations, but hardly gets chance to become modern athletes. It is precisely because of complete disconnect between professional expertise and the traditional occupational skills in education.

Other stories are far more dangerous. *Bhill* tribes of Sarguja district of Madhya Pradesh may have skills in metallurgy and may understand how to melt iron ore at the right level of temperature just by feeling heat directly, but they do not have the literacy of thermometer or the required certificates; hence they cannot get a professional job for survival. A metallurgy engineer trained with tools can be helpless without them, unlike those with traditional skills. A person trained in swimming pool may not swim against the current in a river to save a drowning person; still may have a certificate to participate in athletic competitions. But the son of a fisherman can save a drowning person from the river but may not have a certificate. A midwife in the village having no formal certificate has been serving the society on the basis of her traditional skills, but can hardly get an opportunity of formal training on the basis of her traditional skills. ANM workers have replaced them from their jobs. Exceptions apart, those who have certificates hardly possess the skills, and those who have skills hardly possess certificates.

Let us ask ourselves questions for this mismatch between having certificates and skills. What certificate did Kabeer have who contributed so much for humanity? Had he been with us today, can the present system of formal education appoint him a teacher? Unlikely. Noble laureate Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore was not having any formal degree. So is the legendary singer Lata Mangeshkar. Even Sachin Tendulkar did not pass matriculation. Larry Paes was denied opportunity to work on web search engine. Can we calculate the skills of Dashrath Manjhi, the mountain man? What certificate did he have? Numerous such examples can be cited.

## **V. Imperatives**

If we round-up the discussion, industrialism has certainly produced more than what can be purchased, as purchasing power is the function of employment and earnings. Uncritical technological drive resulting in labour saving devices has compounded the problems of unemployment further. So-called certificate holders are jobless in clerical and managerial job markets and in the absence of livelihood skills, they are losing their confidence. Those who have livelihood skills even at lower level, are not entitled to enter the labour market

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and suffer from lesser wages and low or zero opportunity cost syndrome. As a result, farmers, who feed others, are hopeless and in distress, often trapped in a hand to mouth existence; masons are homeless, weavers have insufficient clothes for their families and certificate holders themselves are unemployed. If this is the result of growth process and its education system, it needs major corrections. Those, who advocate integrated market and world-class infrastructure, will hardly contemplate any kind of serious overhauling. The powers that be, in politics and policymaking, need to be contested through structural arguments for pro-poor macro policies and social mobilization to create the necessary pressures.

### Annexure 1

#### Recommendations of Second Nai Talim Patna Conference, December 1-2, 2011.

The highly incisive analysis of each and every aspect of the sub-themes and an intense interaction between the speakers and members of the audience finally culminated in the following conclusions:

1. Keeping in view the pressing demand of today's normative needs, and indispensability of modern technology, curricula of *Nai Talim* institutions ought to be contextualized to ensure its acceptance and sustainability without succumbing to the menace of growing consumerism.
2. Teaching and learning should be spontaneously guided by the philosophy of constructivism and not to be seen as independent water tight compartments.
3. The teaching and learning in *Nai Talim* institutions should adopt both conformist and reformist approaches as cardinal principles depending on the temporal context keeping in mind its implementability.
4. The traditional marks based grading system be replaced by a continuous and comprehensive evaluation.
5. Any attempt to impose the syllabus on *Nai Talim* institutions framed independently of these institutions should be forthrightly resisted.
6. Artisans, farmers and people involved in other vocations be inducted in the guest teachers' roll of *Nai Talim* institutions to impart skills in respective fields.
7. In the context of Bihar, *Nai Talim* institutions should accord priority to rural areas where the populace is likely to be more receptive to *Nai Talim* agenda.
8. The learning in *Nai Talim* institutions should follow the life cycle approach to education by giving adequate weightage to cerebral growth, compassion, and livelihood based skill, environment

- protection, austerity and frugality.
9. The syllabus of *Nai Talim* should not only arouse the inquisitiveness of its pupils towards the unknown, but also enable them to learn by self with the teacher assuming a facilitator's role.
  10. The traits of accountability be imbibed to the *Nai Talim* pupils and they be trained in forming correlation with their immediate as well as neighbouring surroundings.
  11. Gram Viswavidyalaya be conceived of where the entire village will form the canvas of a university.
  12. Applicability of revised syllabus be tested in selected schools under government patronage.
  13. Teachers trained under the Macaulay system are not attuned to teach under *Nai Talim* environment and therefore a scientific teaching learning pedagogy should be designed.
  14. National Curriculum Framework 2005 based on a metropolitan approach with a disproportionate stress on information be thoroughly revised.
  15. A sound strategy to be formulated to gainfully exploit the land resources of the Buniadi Vidyalay.
  16. Promotion to technology innovation and dissemination of technology innovations at the grass-root level must be done in active collaboration with different institutions working in this field (eg., National Innovation Foundation).
  17. *Nai Talim* institutions be able to permanently simulate community life in school environment.
  18. *Nai Talim* institutions excelling even in isolation in the remotest areas should be documented to inspire the defunct ones to emulate the former's success stories.
  19. The incompatibility between village governance under Panchayati Raj institutions and *Nai Talim* calls for securing an unbridled autonomy for the latter.
  20. *Nai Talim* system should not be confined to primary and middle school level educations only and be incorporated beyond.
  21. Separate Teachers' Training Institutions for *Nai Talim* teachers be set up to train them become the embodiment of the values ingrained in *Nai Talim* manifesto.
  22. *Nai Talim* system of education be fully residential for both the teachers and students.
  23. Modern subjects like computer and IT should be incorporated in *Nai Talim* syllabus as elective subjects.
  24. Surplus teachers of *Nail Talim* institutions be transferred to teacher – deficient *Nai Talim* schools.
  25. *Nai Talim* system in a well structured form be popularized abroad to foster and disseminate this unique Indian system of traditional value and skill based education
  26. Some of the basic features of *Nai Talim* institutions such as morning prayer and afternoon gamea be introduced in mainstream schools

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as an effort to inculcate the *Nai Talim* values among the mainstream pupils.

27. English must be incorporated as a compulsory subject in *Nai Talim* institutions for the benefit of Biharis intending to migrate to other States.
28. Skill imparting courses must be designed keeping in view the needs of the present market.
29. Along with bringing up a complete human being, *Nai Talim* institutions should also bring up customized human resources keeping in mind the need of the society and that of self.
30. *Nai Talim* institutions should design their curricula and methods of instruction to enable the States to cash in on their demographic dividend.
31. A statutory board under the nomenclature of State Board of Basic Education be set up to oversee the functioning and growth of *Nai Talim* institutions.
32. Gujarat Vidyapeeth should be entrusted with the responsibility to train the teachers in small manageable batches.
33. Nai Talim Sangh following the Gujarat structure be constituted to protect the interest of *Nai Talim* institutions through collective effort across the State.
34. *Nai Talim* institutions should devise a method suitable for imparting instruction to those who can not afford it during normal working hours.
35. Instructions in *Nai Talim* institutions at the primary level be handed over to women instructors exclusively.
36. Pan-Indian form of *Nai Talim* (universalisation of *Nai Talim* syllabus) be discarded with and instead the regional cultural and socio economic diversities be the foundations of *Nai Talim* institutions across the country.

*Acknowledgement: This paper is a modified version of the paper presented at the National Discussion Meet on Gandhian Educational Ideas in Policy Perspective: Relevance, Challenges and Prospects organised by NUEPA from October 3 to 5, 2017.*

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**D. M. DIWAKAR is Professor of Economics and former Director at A N Sinha Institute of Social Studies, North West Gandhi Maidan, Patna, Bihar 800001 email id: dmdivakar@gmail.com**



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*Volume 39 Number 2&3*



Gandhi Marg Quarterly

39(2&3): 249–256

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ISSN 0016–4437

## *Notes & Comments*

# Alternative media for Anti-nuclear and Peace Movements in India

*Napthalin Prabu*

### **Introduction**

AFTER THE FUKUSHIMA disaster in Japan (2011), India witnessed huge protests both online and offline on nuclear power and related issues. The anti-nuclear movement mobilized considerable debate throughout India. The key organizations involved in anti-nuclear activism are Coalition for Nuclear Peace and Disarmament (CNDP), New Delhi, Peoples Movement Against Nuclear Energy (PMANE), Tamil Nadu and Konkan Bachao Samiti, Jaitapur. These social movement organisations were involved in rallies, demonstrations, etc. to demand abandonment of the nuclear power programme in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear accident. More importantly, the information flow for the spread of anti-nuclear cause and peace activism was not clear. Among these movements, only two organizations were focussing on peace and nuclear disarmament in South Asia. One is the Movement in India for Nuclear Disarmament (MIND) in New Delhi which later become CNDP with the primary focus on nuclear weapons, and other is Group for Peaceful Indian Ocean (GPIO) in Nagarkoil Tamil Nadu. GPIO disappeared from activism due to formation of other environmental movements in the

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same locality. These social movement organizations were involved in anti-nuclear power activism at some point of time. This paper attempts to bring out the mode of communication in anti-nuclear power and peace movements by examining three key movements in India, namely Sampoorna Kranti Vidyalaya (SKVV), CNDP/MIND and PMANE.

### Literature review

Ruud Koopmans<sup>1</sup> suggests that the social movement communication involves creating messages that shape collective identification among participants and potential coalition partners, and then getting those messages to bystander publics through mass media to publicize claims and demands. Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow<sup>2</sup> analyses how the frames play a critical role in mobilizing bystanders. Another group of scholars explored the role of mass media, viz. internal movement communication and the broader public values represented by media logics,<sup>3</sup> and framing actions and public sympathy for the cause.<sup>4</sup> The movement media strategy can be classified into four types according to Dieter Rucht.<sup>5</sup> They are abstention (frustration with negative coverage or no coverage resulting in giving up efforts to influence the mass media); attack (campaigning against mass media bias); adaptation (playing the media game and staging events to fit more favourable mass media logics); or creating alternative media (publishing magazines or producing radio more in keeping with movement values). After the emergence of recent Information Communication Technology (ICT), the focus shifted more to ICT tools and their role in social movements. Such studies examined how digitally enabled activism operates within social movement frames (Dan Mercea, 2013<sup>6</sup>; Sebastián Valenzuela, 2013<sup>7</sup>; Sandor Vegh, 2003<sup>8</sup>; Emile K. Vraga et al., 2013<sup>9</sup>; Anne Marie Warren et al., 2014).<sup>10</sup> These studies focussed entirely on the role of mass media and the ICT. The emphasis is less on alternative media.

Bennett, W. Lance and Alexandra Segerberg<sup>11</sup> highlighted that the recent introduction of ICT has influenced the landscape between the social movement and mass media following the emergence of the social media. These tools are used for collective action across the nation and for changing the pattern of mobilization and support different groups. Recently, Nicole Doerr et al.<sup>12</sup> studied alternative media use by Euro May Day Parade and suggested that future researchers need to explore the consequences of alternative media practices that transcend the national level to create new imaginaries, narratives, and collective identifications through transnational diffusion and re-adaptation in movement public. Communication in social movements was recently documented by Bennet and Segerberg (2015). The study

suggested that future studies should focus on how different kinds of media fit into different movements.

The anti-nuclear movement was predominantly explored with respect to the dimension of risk and socio-technical aspects in India (Itty Abraham, 2011;<sup>13</sup> M.V. Ramana, 2011,<sup>14</sup> 2013;<sup>15</sup> Mathai, 2013).<sup>16</sup> The first ever social movement study was carried out in India by Janaki Turaga (1995)<sup>17</sup>. The study compared the Kaiga anti-nuclear movement with environmental movements in Karnataka. The study identifies four phases in the campaign against the Kaiga nuclear power plant. Further, she noted that the absence of long-term strategy to sustain the movement along Gandhian lines was the reason for the setback of the movement. She also explains the legal options used and the absence of a solid leadership in the campaign. Srirupa Roy (2003;<sup>18</sup> 2009)<sup>19</sup> documents the character of the anti-nuclear movement in 1998 and goes back to the 1974 nuclear political crisis and discusses the very question of human existence in the context of nuclear risk. Patibandla Srikant<sup>20</sup> examines the emergence of Koodankulam anti-nuclear movement, the formation of the umbrella organization Social Equity Movement (SEM) and PMANE and public hearings, and how they united the different actors. Raminder Kaur<sup>21</sup> examined the public hearings for the nuclear power plant in terms of their implications for sovereignty. More recently, Sandeep Pandey<sup>22</sup> classifies the movements against nuclear power in terms of criteria such as tactics, allies, and concerns. The literature has not explored at length the use of alternative media for anti-nuclear movement. The research questions that this paper seeks to ask are: (1) What are the means and methods available in alternative media for anti-nuclear communication? And, (2) Why a particular form of media is chosen in a given period?

## **Methods**

A historical method is adopted for answering the research questions. Purposive sampling method was used. Three pioneer organisations were selected. The data include published papers, newspaper articles and web resources<sup>23</sup> from 1980 to 2015.

## **Results**

### **1. Sampoorna Kranti Vidyalaya (SKVV)**

SKVV was formed by Suraidra Gadekar in Surat, Gujarat, in 1985. This organization initiated the journal called Anumukti, an international journal focussing on socio-technical aspects of anti-nuclear movement in India. It came into existence in the year of 1987. Coverage in Anumukti includes critical commentary of other published materials

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on nuclear power issues, diary or report on environmental movements in India and plans and proposals made by nuclear organizations in India. It also covered storage of used fuel in other developed countries like USA, Russia, and Germany and reprinted the nuclear energy news reported in newspapers and other sources. The journal also served as a forum of concerned citizens to express their views on nuclear power issues in India and connect to likeminded people everywhere. Almost parallel to this, CANE NEWS anti-nuclear newsletter emerged from Bangalore. It is an initiative of Citizens Against Nuclear Energy. It aimed at disseminating the happenings in Kaiga nuclear power plant. CANE newsletter existed for a short duration only.

#### **Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (2000)**

Coalition for Nuclear Peace and Disarmament (CNPDP) is a successor organization of Movement in India for Disarmament and Peace founded in 1984. CNDP is a significant network organization involving doctors, scientists and journalists. The agency also maintained few web sources, for example, Indian Doctors for Peace and Development (IDPD), which is spread across the country. The CNDP used the web 1.0 and 2.0 platform for its activism. First, we will discuss the Dianuke.org and secondly the Dianuke Facebook Public Group. Dianuke.org<sup>24</sup> is a website developed and maintained by the Coalition for Nuclear Peace and Disarmament, New Delhi. It has vast resources on nuclear issues, and it also acts as a repository of information for anti-nuclear groups, with articles mainly focussing on India. It also provides facility for the general public to receive articles published on nuclear issue through subscription as email free of cost. Dianuke Facebook group was a public group created with the intention to share articles, recent information/news, videos on the nuclear issue. This group has a large number of members especially the youth. Apart from this, the anti-nuclear activists use their personal Facebook account to disseminate information on nuclear power issues, and every anti-nuclear group has its own Facebook group in the regional languages (for ex: stop Koodankulam Atomic Power Plant; Public group). Apart from these web sources, the anti-nuclear information on India was available on Green youth group and SAAN website due to the membership of the activists in those groups from India. Green youth (Google group) was used as a platform to exchange of messages on anti-nuclear movement and related events (<http://groups.google.com/group/greenyouth?hl=en-GB>).

#### **PMANE (2001)**

The Peoples Movement Against Nuclear Energy was founded in the *Volume 39 Number 2&3*

year of 2001. This movement is the organization that undertook the Koodankulam campaign. The PMANE initially used Green youth Yahoo group for communication. After 2011, the leader of this movement reached the public through Social Networking Sites (SNS) such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. The existence of activists on social media received more support from the public than offline. The activists share their press news, link to external sources on nuclear disaster and involve in dialogue with policy actors through these platforms. The public supporters and social movement participants formed groups for discussion and event planning on these SNS. For example, the stop Koodankulam Atomic Power Plant group.

### **Discussion**

This paper throws some light on the use of alternative media for information dissemination in the Indian context. The Anumukti was more focussed on campaign and for unifying the groups than catering to information flow compared to the Dianuke and Facebook groups. Secondly, the shift in focus on unifying and more emphasis on news related to the nuclear disaster, in turn, become more passive than active. The advantages of the offline print media and the web 1.0 and 2.0 have altered the interaction pattern among the sender and the receiver of information. The first alternative media, the Anumukti journal, acted as a platform for interaction among the social movement organizations. More information was related to the various campaigns. The later adoption of the web 1.0 and 2.0 platform such as the Yahoo groups enabled the social media platform to be used to connect the activists on a one-to-one basis. On the whole these are mainly focussing on knowledge transfer on nuclear issues than the broader campaign and shifted their agenda from mobilization to informational campaign.

The adoption of web1.0 and 2.0 technology has reduced the cost of circulation and broke the difficulty in accessing anti-nuclear materials. Further, the interactive and web-based technology, particularly videos on nuclear disasters, strengthen the claims of the anti-nuclear groups. During the journalism phase (Anumukti) the anti-nuclear groups were unable to explain the nuclear disaster to the laymen. However, the situation turned opposite after the Fukushima disaster in Japan 2011 due to the “informational blast.” Sharon M. Friedman (2014)<sup>25</sup> after four months of Fukushima disaster observed “Google returned 73,700,000 results for the search term ‘Fukushima’ and 22,400,000 results for the search terms ‘Fukushima and radiation.’ Internet made huge amount of information available on Fukushima accident, higher than the earlier Three Mile Island Accident (USA)

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and Chernobyl disaster in USSR (present Ukraine). He concluded that due to the presence of internet the general public actively participated in the discussion on the nuclear power issues on blogs and Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube by expressing their views and getting feedback, in addition to the information available through traditional news media. This natural phenomenon after the year 2011 helped the alternative media channels of Indian anti-nuclear groups for collecting and spreading the online news through Dianuke and Facebook pages and groups.

The recent ICT tools also helped the anti-nuclear groups for anti-nuclear movement activity such as mobilization for protest and involvement in deliberation with policymakers. It also helped the movement leaders to connect with their fellow activists around the globe and to convey messages accurately in quick time and at low cost. However, the internet can be one form of communication. In Koodankulam anti-nuclear movement, the call for participation, was mainly through offline mode. Future researchers need to explore why and how activists use mouth to mouth communication in social movement when ICT is available.

### Conclusion

This paper shows that anti-nuclear movement initially used journals as alternative media and later shifted to ICT to utilize the advantages of technology. The adoption of ICT, however, affected the landscape of communication within the anti-nuclear groups. For instance, the interaction between the anti-nuclear organizations later shifted to the activists and the general public. Secondly, both anti-nuclear power and weapon organizations make use of the social media (Web 2.0) for the cause. This is mainly due to the advantages of the platform.

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**NAPTHALIN PRABU is a Ph.D. Student in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences ABV-Indian Institute of Information Technology and Management Gwalior, India**  
**Email: [naphthalinprabu@gmail.com](mailto:naphthalinprabu@gmail.com).**



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