GANDHI MARG

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Contents

Notes & Comments

Book Reviews

Obituary

Editorial

THE RUSSIAN WAR against Ukraine has taken an ugly turn recently, with no signs of a respite soon. The withdrawal of Russia from parts of Ukraine gave the impression that the worst phase was over. But the recent developments following the annexation of the seemingly pro-Russian republics and the more virulent attacks on civilians and vital installations to disrupt service delivery suggest the transformation of the war into a protracted one. The Ukrainian case indicates that human beings are still caught up in animosities that question our claims of humanity and civilized conduct. EU, which created a security community within its jurisdiction, should have played a more influential role by maintaining a certain degree of independence from the US. The reverberating effects of the war on several economies are incalculable. One does not hear news about the tragic side of the war on social media platforms.

When thinking about Putin and his actions in instigating this violence, it is unfortunate that the Russian people will have to face the consequences of this war. Already, Russia is reeling under sanctions placed on the country by the rest of the world. The Ukrainians are fighting a massively unbalanced war, and it is difficult to see a future in which they will be victorious. Often in wars, we fail to turn our attention to the civilians. For most Russians, this was not a war that they wanted. Ordinary Russians will suffer due to the blunders of their leaders. But one should not underestimate Putin. He declared that Russia has "different weapons of destruction" and that he would use "all the measures available to us" to win the conflict in Ukraine when it appeared that he was being cornered by the setbacks in Ukraine and mounting domestic unrest brought on by a call-up for mandatory military duty. He ordered missile and drone attacks on key Ukrainian cities to underscore Russia was not on the back foot in Ukraine.

Given the extent of US aid to Ukraine on the one hand and Russia's enormous resources and big nuclear weapons on the other, it has

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become harder to see what conditions peace could reach, except for ultimate victory for one side or the other. There is no powerful movement for peace. Few prominent persons warn about how rapidly and destructively this war could expand and turn Europe into a radioactive wasteland. We must raise pressure for a foreign policy to end the fighting and negotiate a settlement. Russia cannot avoid blame for this conflict, but NATO countries that rejected Russian proposals of de-escalation last year, including a pledge from both Moscow and Washington not to put nuclear warheads outside their borders, are equally to blame. However, no solution is possible without acknowledging how institutional hostility toward sizeable Russian minorities, which exist not only in Ukraine but also in Latvia and Estonia, with a sizeable portion still denied citizenship, plays a part in fostering Russian nationalism.

This issue of the journal has four articles in the main section. The first article by K Gireesan explores whether the B2V' initiative in Jammu and Kashmir is citizen-centric. The second article by Maneesha Pandey makes a reassessment of the Environment Impact Assessment and Sustainable Development in the light of the Hindu Tradition. The third article By Mathew John M and Latha Nair R looks at the claims of the transhumanist project and its discontents. Akhil Sanil's paper is on the commemorative iconology of Gandhi through static art and its implications for national integration. Kingshuk Bhattachargee discusses the evolution and activities of the Abhay Ashram in the article that follows. The last paper is on Kasturba Gandhi by Anupma Kaushik. In the notes and comments section, we have a piece on Sahadeb Patro and Swati Samantaray writing on the syncretic understanding of the religion Gandhi embraced, drawing on the theosophist tradition. The issue also has two book reviews. We hope this issue will provide enough food for thought to the avid readers of *Gandhi Marg.* This issue ends with an obituary of Ela Bhatt.

JOHN S MOOLAKKATTU
Chief Editor

'B2V' Initiative in Jammu and Kashmir – How far is it Citizen-Centric?

K Gireesan

ABSTRACT

The government of Jammu and Kashmir started the innovative programme "Back to Village" in an effort to connect with the populace at the local level and foster a sincere desire for a living wage. The programme intended to revitalise Halqa Panchayats in the State and the Decentralized Governance system as a whole. This essay examines the exercise's setting, theoretical viewpoints, distinctive characteristics, and process documentation. Additionally, it analyses the exercise's advantages, disadvantages, opportunities, and difficulties from the viewpoint of the citizen.

Key words: Back to village - Decentralised Governance - Halqa Panchayats - Participatory Development – Citizen-centric Governance

Background

THE GOVERNMENT OF Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) initiated an ambitious and extensive programme titled Back to Village (B2V) towards 'reaching out to the people at the grassroots level in order to create an earnest desire for decent standard of living'.[1] This was taken up as a flagship initiative by the State Government. B2V, a unique initiative to usher development and empowerment of Panchayats in Jammu and Kashmir, was launched in 2019 when the State was under President's rule.

B2V programme has been conceived to ensure that developmental initiatives are built on the feedback and cooperation of the people. Hence, they shall be more result-oriented, leading to a greater

probability of success than those which are top-down. While official machinery has to guide and assist, the primary responsibility rests with the people to improve local conditions. It was aimed at 'involving the people of the state and government officials in a joint effort to deliver the mission of equitable development, by energizing Panchayats and directing development efforts in rural areas through community participation'.[2] It emphasized the importance of ensuring people's participation, 'not merely as an agent in the execution of the development works, but as owners of the entire programme'.[3]

This paper discusses the exercise's context, unique features and process documentation. It brings out the theoretical perspectives of such development initiatives. It analyses the exercise's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges, which may help in the scalability and replicability of the exercise in different parts of the country and outside. It also brings out the specific outcomes of the initiative that may be considered to enhance its scope and sustainability.

The author conducted interviews with the key informants, like elected functionaries of *Halqa Panchayats* and community leaders. Telephonic interviews were held to seek supplementary information from the same respondents and others. This was necessary as the country had mobility restrictions due to the pandemic. Before the onset of the pandemic, focus group discussions with members of women, youth, and farmers from the area, non-participant observation of the selected areas, etc., were held in the Jammu region. Secondary data was gathered from relevant Govt. offices, *Halqa Panchayats*, reports, dailies, and other documents.

The Context

B2V programme aimed to direct the development efforts in rural areas of J&K through community participation, to create a strong desire for an improved and decent living standard, and to take necessary measures to realise them with the active involvement of citizens from the locality. Major goals of B2V were 'energising *Panchayats*; collecting feedback on the delivery of government schemes and programmes; capturing specific economic potential; and, undertaking an assessment of needs of villages'.[4] B2V has the potential to rejuvenate the decentralised governance system in the State of J&K with emphasis on revitalising *Halqa Panchayats*[5] and to provide citizen-centric governance. As part of the initiative, gathering feedback on the delivery of programmes and schemes from the primary stakeholders for whom they were intended to benefit is an important function. In addition, it includes resource mapping; assessment of needs, concerns, issues, and problems; setting priority for intervention, etc.

As a sequel to the differences in the coalition government by the People's Democratic Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Government led by Mehbooba Mufti collapsed, and the State of J&K was put under Governor's rule in June 2018. Initially, the Legislative Assembly was kept under 'suspended animation' and the State's governor gave the political parties a chance to explore the possibility of government formation by permutation and combinations. Subsequently, the legislative assembly was dissolved, and the State was placed under President's Rule as per Article 356 of Indian Constitution on 20 Nov 2018. President's rule in the State was subsequently extended with the approval of Parliament.

B2V was launched when the Governor ruled J&K with advisors' help after the Legislative Assembly's suspended animation. Though the *Halqa Panchayats* were constituted after the elections to the Local Governments, they were not very active and vibrant. The Local Governments could not take up need-based and demand-driven initiatives as they were badly affected by the inadequacy of funds at their disposal. And the bureaucracy in the State was not very much pro-active as it believed and acted more for maintaining the 'status-quo' in administration. There was a 'deficit of representative democracy' prevalent in the State, and the whole population was partly disillusioned with the political system at the state and sub-state levels. The launching of the B2V programme in J&K by the Governor needs to be analysed in this context.

Theoretical Perspectives

J&K is a strategically located and politically sensitive part of India. By virtue of sharing the International Border / Line of Control / Line of Actual Control with the neighbours like China and Pakistan, the strategic location of the area is very significant. The State of J&K was placed under the President's rule a number of times during the past. The state has witnessed several conflicts since its formation, both internal and external. Though the state has enormous potential for agriculture, floriculture, horticulture, tourism, etc., it could not generate enough revenues to bring economic stability. J&K is one of the states of the country with 'Special Category Status' where the Government of India used to make large investments for realising development and welfare, to provide security and to sustain peace. This becomes very much imperative considering the area's strategic importance, political sensitivity, ecological significance, and economic development.

Despite the arguments that whether conflict precedes development or under-development leads to conflict, the countries/ regions/ areas

affected by conflicts used to have issues of socio-economic development and political power across the world. A study linking economic development and social conflicts reported that 'social conflict and economic development are organised around three views: Higher standards of living reduce the probability of conflict; inequality nurtures conflict; and most conflicts in developing countries are ethnic in nature'.[6] This shows that increase in standard of living of the population can reduce the possibilities of conflict whereas inequality can promote the chances of conflict. It also points towards the significance of taking specific measures to improve the life and living of the population, especially in conflict-affected areas.

It is known that 'only if all segments of society, especially marginalised groups, have a chance to participate, economic development can contribute to prevent further conflict'.[7] It reinforces the importance of involving the community members in the development and highlights the strategy behind incorporating the views and ensuring participation of all sections of the society, especially the marginalised.

In a research study on conflict and development,[8] it was noted that evidence from the conflict-affected field remains sparse, scattered and largely based on case studies; and, policy interventions are rarely evaluated and monitored. It is reported that micro level and household data can go a long way towards bridging the gap between country level data and event causality during and after conflict within local communities. This highlights the importance of gathering data directly from the population, in order to take up appropriate follow-up measures for development and welfare for them.

In a cross-national study of the relationship between ethnic diversity and development,[9] the authors viewed that diversity dividends are best explored at the sub-national level, in regions, administrative areas, cities, etc. This is because when ethnic interactions occur within these units, they avoid the problems of the artificiality of borders. This shows that ethnic diversity and development can be better addressed at the lowest administrative units like local governments.

Local governments are the flag-bearers of democracy and decentralized system of governance in India. The true spirit of democracy depends on the active involvement and participation of the people in the decision-making process to address their needs, concerns, issues, and problems, in the order of priority desired by them. With the active participation of the local population in planning, implementation, and monitoring, the local governments could bring positive changes. To realise that, the Local Governments shall be

devolved with adequate funds, functions and functionaries. They could bring significant changes by using the resources available at their disposal. Linking the elected leaders of the local governments and the local population with the officials of various Government departments/ agencies will enable the analysis of the locality's issues and problems and factor them into the process of participatory planning more effectively and efficiently.

In this context, the empowerment of elected leaders, community members, officials, and other stakeholders becomes significant. According to Narayan,[10] empowerment framework includes the provision of basic services, improved local governance, improved national governance, pro-poor market development, and access by poor people to justice. Among all these, providing basic services to the population has been the most significant as it forms the basis for the remaining functions. An approach focused on generating demand from the citizens and people's organisations, is quite significant in ensuring access to basic services in a locality.

Basic services include enhancing access to all marginalised groups and effective use of basic services such as health care, education, water, sanitation facilities, housing, waste management, roads, etc. In this background, the initiative of B2V became very significant, as it visualised an attempt to take a proactive approach towards providing basic services to the village community by involving them in planning from below.

Similar Initiatives

Before discussing the details about B2V programme, a number of initiatives taken up within the country and outside with certain similar features need to be looked into. 'Operation *Barga*' was an initiative taken up in the State of West Bengal by the Left Front Government in 1978. It was a land reform movement carried out in the State for recording the names of *bargardars* (sharecroppers) while avoiding the time-consuming method of documenting through the settlement machinery. The ultimate aim of the movement was to facilitate the conversion of the state's sharecroppers into land owners, in line with the spirit of the Indian Constitution.

Prajala Vaddaku Palana, which may be considered the predecessor to the *Janmabhoomi* programme by the Telugu Desam Government in Andhra Pradesh, was launched on 2 October 1995. This was to bridge the gap between the people and the state administration. It was a two-way process in which the Government officials understood the people's problems through direct contact, and the people got an opportunity to represent their issues, problems, and grievances directly

to the officials. The programme had its thrust on people-centred participatory development.

Government of Kerala initiated the *Jana Samparka Paripadi* (Mass contact programme) in 2012 when the United Democratic Front ruled the state. It was conceived as a platform for the Chief Minister (which was later extended to other Ministers) to directly meet the people, hear their complaints and take possible and quick action. The thrust of the programme was to bridge the gap between the people and the government by removing the red-tapism, that came on the way of providing just and speedy delivery of services.

The 'Go to Village' mission was launched in the State of Manipur on 1 May 2018. It was a significant initiative made to rejig the bureaucracy and to make them serve the people more effectively and in a time-bound manner. As part of the initiative, the officials from different Government departments were instructed to be available at the designated village on a specified day to address the pending issues/grievances of the people then and there. This was a unique initiative made to take the 'Secretariat' to the villages for the larger benefit of people.

Just ahead of the polls to the legislative assembly in West Bengal, a mega outreach programme titled as *Duare Sarkar* (Government at doorsteps) was rolled out in 2020. This programme was taken to ensure the doorstep delivery of government schemes. As part of the programme, benefits of at least eleven state government-run schemes were made available to eligible people in the special camps. However, due to COVID-19 pandemic, not much progress in its implementation could be found.

Initiatives with similar features were also noted from South Korea and Nepal. During the 1970s, in the Republic of Korea, the *Saemaul Undong* (New Village Movement) was launched. It was a community-driven development programme with thrust on voluntary participation of people and active public support. The nationwide development movement was made with the slogan of diligence, cooperation, and self-help.

By comparing various initiatives mentioned before, the B2V programme could find the closest one from Nepal, where the 'Back to Village National Campaign' was launched a few decades ago. Probably, the B2V programme in J&K was greatly influenced by the national campaign in Nepal, which was in operation during 1967-1975. The campaign was carried out in the rural areas of Nepal, aiming to direct development efforts to the country's rural areas, which were predominantly limited to the urban centres. It could be viewed as a special drive for creating social awareness among the rural population

and to get their support in implementing various flagship initiatives of that country. As part of the national campaign, civil servants and students from the cities were sent to live in rural communities, participate in development work, and serve as teachers in village schools. In the backdrop of these initiatives from within the country and outside, features and operationalization of B2V in J&K shall be examined.

Unique Features of B2V

As part of the B2V initiative, the entire administrative machinery of the State Government was geared up, motivated, and encouraged to visit all the 4483 *Halqa Panchayats*.

The B2V initiative is significant owing to the following features.

(a) B2V is a unique initiative and is the first of its kind.[11]

(b) The initiative was made when the State of J&K was placed under the Governor's rule as no party/ coalition could muster a majority to form the Government. Significantly, elections to the *Halqa Panchayats* in the State were held after several years, but adequate funds were unavailable.

(c) The initiative emphasises the ownership of development by the local people, and the officials from different Government Departments are responsible for implementation with their guidance and support.

(d) It visualises a co-ordinated approach by the *Halqa Panchayat* touching all aspects of village life and not through the officials from different Government departments.

(e) It has the potential to sensitise and re-orient the senior bureaucracy (drawn from different Government Departments and Agencies) in J&K by enabling them to observe, analyse and document the field realities. Thus, the whole initiative helped the bureaucracy to present its humane face to the population, re-orient itself before the community and receive positive feedback.

(f) It could lead to early follow-up actions on priority areas/ issues that were largely ignored or not adequately attended.

(g) It can give a healing touch and soothing effect to the citizens struggling with multiple issues/ problems.

(h) It is expected to provide impetus to governance and development in J&K by providing an excellent opportunity to the citizens to make the bureaucracy accountable and transparent in the absence of an elected leadership at different 'spheres'[12] of Government.

Process Documentation of B2V

As part of the initiative, one Gazetted Officer was designated and

deployed in each *Halqa Panchayat*. The designated officer was expected to interact with the elected members (present/former), officials at the field offices of different Departments of the State Government, community leaders/ key informants, functionaries of Development Organisations/ NGOs, and all other key stakeholders to get impartial, unbiased and genuine feedback from the rural population.

The first phase of B2V initiative was made during 20-27 June 2019. As part of the programme, one senior official (Gazetted Officer from a Govt. Department/ Corporation/ Agency) from the State Government was directed to stay in a designated *Halqa Panchayat* for two days and one night. Around 5,000 officers reached out to the people in about 4,483 *Halqa Panchayats* in J&K.

Giving details about its launch, the spokesperson of the State Government mentioned that it is 'to bridge the gap between achievable and achieved goals in development, take governance to doorsteps of the rural and inaccessible areas, and generate credible and empirical feedback.'[13] The programme was expected to help streamline the government's developmental schemes and welfare initiatives to maximise its impact and outreach. Energising panchayats and directing development efforts in rural areas through community participation were also visualised through the programme.

The maiden attempt generated much interest, enthusiasm, and positive response from the public. It raised the general public's expectations about possible solutions to several long-pending issues. The senior-most officials of the State Government including the Chief Secretary; Secretary, General Administration Department; Principal Secretary, Department of Animal and Sheep Husbandry, and other senior officers of Govt. of J&K visited several far-flung areas, militancy-infested localities, and border area villages as part of the initiative.

During the field visits and overnight stays in the village, the officers interacted with the community leaders and all other sections living in the locality. Through these interactions, the officials understood the pressing needs, issues, and problems of under-development in the locality, realised the ineffectiveness/ delay/ no response for several pending demands, etc. They also tried identifying priority sectors/ areas/topics/projects that needed early interventions. In addition, the field visits made by the senior officers of the bureaucracy and informal interactions they had with the elected members of the *Halqa Panchayat* and with the community in their natural field settings, brought a positive image of the Government.

The interventions that were followed up after the field stay resulted in sustaining the hope by the community about this initiative.

It was reported that the programme 'is getting a massive response, especially from people in the militancy-infested areas.'[14] The Prime Minister of India in his periodical address to the nation through All India Radio appreciated the programme. He said it would have "ripple benefits with thrust on community mobilisation and numerous possible opportunities that may come to the community.'[15]

The second phase of Back to Village (B2V2) was organised during 25-30 November 2019. B2V2 focused on 'the follow-up of the first phase, ensuring the functionality of panchayats in terms of manpower, cent percent coverage of beneficiary-oriented schemes and doubling of income of rural people by giving impetus on the rural economy.'[16]

As part of the preparatory works for effective supervision and monitoring of the field visits, interactions, and reporting of the second phase, control rooms were set up by the Deputy Commissioners in their respective Districts. During the B2V2, the visiting officers were explicitly instructed to gather requisite details about 'languishing projects',[17] in addition to major developmental plans, schemes, and projects carried out in the area to help formulate District Plans.

To understand the process very clearly, a series of preparatory steps and actions were taken. The specific steps taken as part of the operationalisation of the initiative are listed below.[18]

Step 1 : Formation of District level co-ordination cell.

Step 2 : Formation of Sub-Divisional level co-ordination cell.

Step 3 : Preparation of the list of Liaison officers.

Step 4 : Preparation of deployment list of Gazetted Officers deputed for B2V programme.

Step 5: Preparation of the deployment list of Gazetted Officers from within the district.

Step 6 : Preparation of the deployment list of Gazetted Officers for each *Halqa Panchayat* in the District.

Step 7 : Preparation of the deployment list of facilitators in each *Halqa Panchayat*.

Step 8 : Preparation of List of Schools, *Panchayat Ghar*, etc. nominated as the venue in each *Halqa Panchayat*.

Step 9 : Preparation of B2V Handbook.

Step 10: Preparation of B2V presentation.

Step 11: Preparation of the list of activities to be carried out by various Govt. Departments at the *Halqa Panchayats*.

Step 12: Preparation of Action Plan by the relevant Govt. Dept. such as Action Plan – Agriculture, Rural Development Action plan, etc.

Drawing lessons from the previous two phases, phase III of the Back to Village programme (B2V3) was held in different parts of J&K

for ten days during 2 - 12 October 2020. Significantly, before the implementation of Phase III of the B2V programme (B2V3), the administration completed its three-week pre-B2V *Jan Abhiyan* (Public campaign). Under the pre-B2V programme, the administration focused on the '*Jan Sunvayee* (Redressal of public grievances), *Adhikar Abhiyan* (Public service delivery) and *Unat Gram Abhiyan* that gave thrust on delivery of development at the *Halqa Panchayat* level'.[19] Since the Government has given administrative power to *Panchayat* members, they were optimistic about the results of B2V3. As part of the preparatory measures, special camps were held by the Rural Development Department at Sub-division/ *Tehsil* / Block/ *Halqa* levels in the districts.

Phase I of the B2V programme (B2V1) was an introductory and interactive programme to understand people's demands and grievances. Phase II of the B2V (B2V2) focused on the devolution of powers to the *Halqa Panchayats* and tried to understand how they function and their grievances and demands. Phase III of the B2V programme (B2V3) was specially designed on the format for grievance redressal, based on the inputs gathered from the previous two phases. It was reported that 'B2V3 aims to build on the foundations of B2V1 and B2V2. And the focus of B2V3 was on implementation and execution'.[20]

The author contacted the *Sarpanches/ Panches* of number of *Halqa Panchayats* from Jammu as well as Kashmir regions in two spells, Dec 2019 – Feb 2020 and Nov-Dec 2020.[21]

Analysis of B2V

B2V initiative is in the infancy stage, but the expectations and hopes it has raised among the rural population of J&K have been quite significant. Analysis of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges (SWOC) of the B2V has been made here. This analysis is expected to enable the organisers and other stakeholders to make necessary changes in the approach, contents, and operationalization strategy in the subsequent phases. It is expected to contribute to the initiative's replicability and scalability in different parts of the country and outside. This will also help the community and other stakeholders to receive optimum benefits from the programme.

Strengths:

- This initiative is quite ambitious and unique. It is the first of its kind launched in the state. Hence, the initiative's outcome has significance, as it was taken up on an experimental basis.

- The initiative has the inherent potential to orient, sensitise and enhance awareness among the bureaucracy about the field realities through participant observation, interactions, analysis, and documentation.
- Through such initiatives, bureaucracy will be able to address the issues/problems of the community with a 'humane touch'.
- It enables the bureaucracy to re-orient itself before the community and receive positive feedback from the general public through formal and informal ways.
- Enables the administration to gather regular feedback on government schemes and programme delivery.
- When organised at periodical intervals, such visits and interactions will enable genuine feedback on any programme/ scheme/ project in a longitudinal manner.

Weaknesses:

· There was a huge turnout of people and a very high level of enthusiasm during the first phase of B2V. But with almost no change / no result of the complaints/ representations made by the leadership and community members during the first meeting, the participation rate came down drastically in the subsequent phases.[22] This was revealed during the Interactions with the *Sarpanches / Panches /* Community members from the sample *Halqa Panchayats* in Jammu and Kashmir regions. Significantly, these leaders have their affiliations with different political parties, but their responses were more or less uniform.

- Because of no significant change in status/ no result after the B2V1, the local leadership were also demotivated, resulting in poor participation of community members in the subsequent phases.[23] They started viewing B2V programme in a routine manner like any other conventional programme with all its demerits.
- Initiating activities by ensuring the convergence of funds from multiple sources has entered into certain operational issues.[24] Delay in disbursement of funds has not created issues for the present but will also create difficulties in the future also.
- If organised regularly by bureaucracy and by taking a more pro-active stand than the elected representatives, such initiatives will gradually result in the generation of aversion in the minds of community towards the elected representatives. This is not a desirable trend in the democratic system.

Opportunities:

- An initiative like this could provide an opportunity for the bureaucracy to 'fill the vacuum' created by the absence of elected representatives.
- It enables the bureaucracy to develop compassion, empathy, and understanding of the field situation by ushering development and welfare to the target population by providing issue-based support on a priority.
- The absence of elected representatives in the area, owing to several internal and external factors, could result in serious socio-economic-political issues for the community for so many decades. In such a scenario, such 'soft touches' will have a cooling effect and positive impact in the 'hearts and minds' of the general public.
- It is expected to provide the requisite impetus to governance and development in J&K by providing an excellent opportunity for the citizens to enhance accountability and transparency in the political sub-system.
- Micro-level initiatives could result in early and appropriate follow-up actions on priority areas/ issues that the leadership largely ignored or inadequately attended for several years. For example, most of the areas highlighted the non-availability of their own building to Anganawadis.[25]
- Evidence-based policy initiatives could be made due to field-specific inputs.
- Micro-level initiatives could lead to useful inputs for the formulation of policy initiatives and interventions by the Local Government. For example, one of the Village Panchayats in India took the bold and creative step leading to the formulation of a 'Sports Policy'.[26]

Challenges:

- The absence of adequate follow-up has resulted in a drastic demoralising effect among the local leadership and the community. This was well reflected in the poor participation of community members as well as local leaders in the subsequent phases.[27] Regaining the confidence of leadership and the community will be a major challenge if the State Government wishes to sustain the efforts of B2V.
- With the reduced participation of the local leaders and community members, even the visiting officials started taking the B2V visits routinely, with no special significance attached.
- In many *Halqa Panchayats*, the official who visited the village for the second time differed from the first visit.[28] This resulted in poor continuity to the field realities, issues, problems and priority.

- Such initiatives for realising governance and development at the grassroots level may result in challenges/ threats in future, if such events are organised by not actively involving the elected representatives at different spheres of Government.
- Undesirable interference by the bureaucrats in the implementation of programmes was also reported.[29]
- Though there is no doubt about the motive and intention behind such initiatives, continuous practice of such initiatives will weaken the democratic system, which has its edifice built on the representation of the citizens as well as on the capacity, efficiency, and responsiveness of the elected representatives. The initiative could be broadly seen as a 'stop-gap arrangement' in the absence of a functional democratic and representative system for the people.

Outcomes

An attempt has been made to identify the results and follow-up of the initiative that was held in three phases - during 20 - 27 Jun 2019, 25 - 30 Nov 2019 and 2 - 12 Oct 2020. As a consequence of the abrogation of Article 370, bifurcation of the State into two Union Territories (UT of J&K and UT of Ladakh), there were several restrictions on communication and mobility in the area. Subsequently, the promulgation of the Citizenship Amendment Act has added fuel to the ongoing situation in certain regions/ pockets of the UT of J&K. In this situation, it was not possible to go for a detailed inquiry through personal visits to different parts of the region. Hence it was decided to take feedback from the elected functionaries of *Halqa Panchayats* from different parts. In addition, efforts were made to receive inputs from a cross-section of the community as well about their satisfaction level regarding the process of B2V and its outcomes. Accordingly, feedback was gathered from key informants from the selected *Halqa Panchayats* of the Jammu and Kashmir regions.

Details regarding the follow-up actions taken in the *Halqa Panchayats* after the B2V gave an interesting picture of the outcome and possible direction of the initiative.

(a) Increased enthusiasm: The rise in enthusiasm among the local population has been an important outcome of the initiative. The kind of enthusiasm the population shows, disregarding the aspects of age, gender, religion, community status, occupational status, economic level, etc., towards the B2V initiative, have been very promising.

(b) Revival of faith and trust in the system: The operationalisation of B2V in three phases has resulted in the revival of faith and trust of the community in the government system. This was introduced at a time when the expectations of the local population about different

Governments, from Local to the Centre, were found to be low.

(c) Community becoming more vocal and logical: In the process, community members across different regions, religions, categories, and economic statuses, have openly expressed their everyday needs, concerns, issues, problems, and priorities.[30] Significantly, this was beyond their conventional aspirations for local economic development, social justice, and civic functions, unlike previous occasions, where they either used to keep quiet during the discussions or keep away from such meetings.

(d) Active presence of Govt. officials: The mandatory instructions to the designated Govt. official (Senior Officers of Gazetted status) to spend two full days and one night In the village itself was revolutionary considering the conventions and practices of bureaucracy.[31] As part of the initiative, each designated official was instructed to stay in the village itself for the period, conduct formal/informal interactions with different stakeholders, engage selected categories of population such as youth and women in focus groups discussions, participate in the Special *Grama Sabha* convened by the *Sarpanch* of the *Halqa Panchayat*, actively involve and participate in the discussions, document their issues/ problems and priorities of the area, etc. The duration they spent in the village, their proactive manner of seeking inputs from the community, their approach towards the people, etc., were a definite departure from the practices adopted during their routine visits in the past.

(e) Diversity of Govt. officials engaged in the exercise: Govt. officials from different State Govt. Departments were selected to be part of the B2V initiative.[32]

(f) Involvement of senior Govt. officials as Nodal officers/Supervisors: As part of the initiative, Senior Govt. officials, including Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers from the J&K cadre or Kashmir Administrative Service (KAS) officers were given responsibility as Nodal Officers. This resulted in giving a serious touch to the whole exercise.

(g) Problem identification and prioritisation at a micro level: The exercise also helped the officials to prioritise the issues/ problems in a given locality through a participatory approach.

(h) Extensive use of participatory techniques in the process: The Senior officials generally started their field visits in the area by carrying out transect walks across the village. That was followed by community interactions and group discussions with various social categories like women, youth, farmers, etc. And they have also adopted participatory methods and techniques for data collection from the field.

(i) Documentation of community-oriented projects: Most of the

projects proposed by the local leadership and the community were in the areas of water supply, drainage, road construction, waste management, waiting shed, etc.[33] This was a clear difference from the earlier practice of raising demand for individual beneficiary schemes.

(j) Enhanced scope for convergence: B2V could bring in enormous scope for ensuring convergence of different programmes/ schemes by the Central, State, and Local Governments. Senior Govt. officials engaged in identifying the scope for convergence of resources in the field was ably facilitated by the key functionaries of the *Halqa Panchayats*, experienced community members, social activists, and other stakeholders. Thus, the initiative could find numerous opportunities to bring in multiple sources of revenue for realising different community development projects. In many places, convergence of Central Finance Commission allocations along with MGNREGS and other sources of revenues were ensured in the additional proposals made during the B2V initiative.[34]

(k) Forward and backward linkages: The initiative gave a perfect scope for establishing linkages and strengthening with the past projects. This could be realised to a greater extent due to the excellent facilitation by the key functionaries of the *Halqa Panchayat* (past as well as the present).

A close review of the various steps, sequence of activities and procedural steps / procedures of operationalisation of the B2V highlight that dedicated thrust and focus could bring about significant changes in the socio-economic-political eco system of the *Halqa Panchayats* and other areas. However, there is a need to revisit the utilitarian value of such initiatives, as many local leaders relate such initiatives as 'flash in the frying pan' with more cosmetic and short-term changes and without the serious, long term and significant impact on the ground. It was reported that many persons stayed away in the third phase owing to 'non-fulfilment of promises made during the previous rounds, the political uncertainty in the valley and the ill-timing of the programme when farmers are busy harvesting their crops.'[35]

Summing up

B2V is an ambitious, creative, and unique attempt to ensure citizen-centric governance at the grassroots level. It has the potential and possibility to empower citizens by enhancing the provision of basic services. Initiation of such an exercise in strategically located and politically sensitive area like Jammu and Kashmir is quite significant. Despite several merits, it may be seen as a 'stop gap arrangement' to provide a healing touch and soothing effect to the long pending issues

of the population in the absence of an elected State Government and 'weak Local Government system.'[36] However, to bring sustainable solutions at the grassroots, there is no better solution than empowering the Local Governments by devolving more funds, functions and functionaries.

It would be interesting to compare the process and results of the three phases of B2V programme as some of the *Halqa Panchayats* came into action, more actively in the second and third phases. In contrast, several others lost steam after the first phase. While appreciating the intent, motive, and initiative behind such an effort taken up in J&K, it is imperative to take up a comprehensive review of the programme.

Notes and References

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6. Ray, D., and Esteban, J. "Conflict and Development", *Annual Review of Economics*, 9, (2017), p.288.
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10. See Narayan, Deepa (Ed.). *Empowerment and Poverty Reduction – A Source Book*, (Washington DC: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2002), p.31.
11. Though number of initiatives from different parts of India such as Operation Barga (West Bengal), *Prajala Vaddaku Palana* (Andhra Pradesh), *Jana Samparka Paripadi* (Kerala), Go To Village (Manipur) and *Duare Sarkar* (West Bengal) were noted, the B2V programme stands unique among them.
12. The word 'Sphere' is suggested here in place of Level, Tier or Stratum to indicate different forms of government from *Halqa Panchayat* to the Union Government. 'Spherical Autonomy' is one of the core

principles of decentralisation. It provides 'sufficient autonomy' to all the governments in their own domain, irrespective of their size, position and range of functions. The author views that the conventional words such as level, tier and strata undermine the 'spirit of spherical autonomy' along with reinforcing the pattern and practices of hierarchy in decentralised governance, which is not healthy.

13. Press Trust of India (PTI[a]). 2019. *J-K Govt. to organise 'Back to village' programme to reach out to people a grassroots level*, Srinagar, June 15.

14. Press Trust of India (PTI[b]). 2019. *5000 officers to visit panchayat in J-K for Back to Village-2 programme,* Srinagar, Nov 20.

15. Modi, Narendra. 2019. PM Modi appreciates 'Back to Village' programme in Jammu and Kashmir. Mann Ki Baat delivered through All India Radio, New Delhi, July 28.

16. PTI[b]., Ibid.

17. 'Languishing project' refers to a project that just sits on the shelf and never gets finished. An example of languish is a plant that is never watered and that gets sicker and sicker.

18. <www.budgam.nic.in> accessed on 02 Feb 2020.

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21. Interactions were held with Captain (Retd.) Hansraj, *Sarpanch*, Gagian *Halqa Panchayat*, RS Pura Block, Jammu District; and Surjit Kumar Choudhary, *Sarpanch*, Flora *Halqa Panchayat*, Suchetgarh Block, Jammu District. On similar lines, information was gathered from Bilal Ahmed Wani, *Sarpanch*, Soaf 'A' *Halqa Panchayat*, Breng Block, Kokernag Tehsil, Anantnag District; Shahzada Begum, *Sarpanch*, Safapora 'B' *Halqa Panchayat*, Safapora Block, Ganderbal District; and, Mohamed Tahir Quadri, Former *Upa-Sarpanch*, Gundkhalil *Halqa Panchayat*, and Member, District Development Council (DDC), Bandipora District. Interactions during Nov-Dec 2020 were made through mobile due to pandemic situations.

22. This was shared by Bilal Ahmed Wani, *Sarpanch*, Soaf 'A' *Halqa Panchayat*, Anantnag District during the interactions.

23. This was indicated by Mohammed Tahir Quadri, former *Upa-Sarpanch* of Gundkhalil *Halqa Panchayat* and Member, DDC, Bandipora District during the discussions.

24. This was explained in detail by Surjit Choudhary, *Sarpanch*, Flora *Halqa Panchayat*, Suchetgarh Block, Jammu District. As a follow-up of the B2V1, a work of 300 metre long metalled road was taken up by the *Halqa Panchayat* with equal funds from the 14th Central Finance Commission (CFC) grants and other sources. The contractor who completed the work on time was able to receive only the funds

allocated from 14th CFC but the remaining part is not yet received. The delay in making timely payment for completed works is a matter of embarrassment to the *Sarpanch* and other key functionaries of *Halqa Panchayats*.

25. This aspect was personally verified by author during a programme organised for the capacity building of the elected leaders of *Halqa Panchayats* of J & K held in RS Pura, Jammu in Aug 2019.

26. Bedadka *Grama Panchayat* of Kasaragod District in Kerala led by Adv. C Ramachandran as its President took an innovative step for the formulation of a 'Sports Policy for Bedadka GP' in a participatory manner involving all key stakeholders. In the run up to the finalisation of the draft policy document, the *Grama Panchayat* organised a 'Virtual Grama Sabha' through whatsapp which encouraged an active and productive discussion with several useful inputs in the exercise.

27. During the discussions with Mohammed Tahir Quadri, former *Upa-Sarpanch* of Gundkhalil *Halqa Panchayat* and Member, DDC of Bandipora District, it was known that he took personal interest in mobilising village community to actively participate during the visit of the Govt. official (A Senior Engineer from the Irrigation Department of J&K) to the village during the first phase of B2V. However, with no significant follow-up realised at the ground forced him to keep away from B2V2 as he felt embarrassed to face the community by raising their hopes further.

28. This was indicated by Captain (Retd.) Hansraj, *Sarpanch* of Gagian *Halqa Panchayat*, RS Pura Block, Jammu District; Surjit Kumar Choudhary, *Sarpanch*, Flora *Halqa Panchayat*, Suchetgarh Block, Jammu District; Tahir Quadri, Former *Upa-Sarpanch*, Gundkhalil *Halqa Panchayat* and Member, DDC, Bandipora District and Shahzada Begum, *Sarpanch*, Safapora 'B' *Halqa Panchayat*, Safapora Block, Ganderbal District during the discussions about the outcome of B2V initiatives. For example, in Flora *Halqa Panchayat*, an Executive Engineer from the Rural Development Department visited the area as part of B2V1 during June 2019. However, during B2V2 in Nov 2019, the visiting official was the Block Veterinary Officer, Nagrota Block, Jammu District. On similar lines, in Safapora 'B' *Halqa Panchayat*, it was the District Horticulture Officer, Ganderbal and BDO, Wakura Block, Ganderbal during the B2V1 and B2V2 respectively.

29. This comment was made by Janab Shareeq Ahmad Mir, President of All Jammu and Kashmir *Panchayat* Association and reported in the daily Kashmir Monitor on 24 Sep 2020.

30. This was shared by Mohammed Tahir Quadri, former *Upa-Sarpanch*, Gundkhalil *Halqa Panchayat*, and Member, DDC, Bandipora District during the discussions about the outcome of B2V initiatives.

31. This matter was highlighted by Captain (Retd.) Hansraj, *Sarpanch*, Gagian *Halqa Panchayat*, RS Pura Block, Jammu District during the

discussions about the outcome of B2V initiatives.

32. This was indicated by Shahzada Begum, *Sarpanch*, Safapora 'B' *Halqa Panchayat*, Ganderbal District and Surjit Choudhary, *Sarpanch*, Flora *Halqa Panchayat*, Jammu District during the discussions.

33. This matter was shared by Janab Shabir Ahmed Bhat, Social Activist, Safapora 'B' *Halqa Panchayat*, Ganderbal District during the interactions.

34. This aspect was shared by Surjit Choudhary, *Sarpanch*, Flora *Halqa Panchayat*, Jammu District during the discussions about the outcome of B2V initiatives.

35. Malik, I.A. 2020. Why Has the 'Back to Village' Programme Failed to Take-Off in Kashmir ?, *The Wire*, October 13, Srinagar.

36. 'Weak' Local Government does not indicate that the *Halqa Panchayats* in Jammu and Kashmir are weak. It is used to highlight the lack of thrust for devolution of functions, funds and functionaries by the State/ UT to the Local Governments to the desirable extent for them to function as 'Institutions of Self Government'.

K GIREESAN is Director-SOG, School of Government, MIT World Peace University, Kothrud,   Pune – 411 038. Mobile: 9445400855; E-mail: gireesan.k@mitwpu.edu.in; gireesan.decentralisation@ gmail.com

Reassessing Environment Impact Assessment and Sustainable Development in the light of the Hindu Tradition

Maneesha Pandey

ABSTRACT

If implemented, the new Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA 2020) draft will let India's government push ahead with certain horrendous projects that cannot be termed less than "environmental terrorism." The Hindu tradition has always exemplified nature and revered it. Thus, it makes it all the more important to assess and deliberate before drafting such environmental laws. Nothing in the Hindu scriptures or tradition suggests that nature can be traded as an economic commodity. The Hindu sages had warned against ignorance towards the interrelationship of a man with nature and against exploiting its resources. We should heed their words, and formulate an EIA draft in consonance with our ancient practices and beliefs. This article focuses on explaining the recent EIA 2020 draft in light of our traditions and values.

Key words: Disaster management, Environmental Impact Assessment, Hindu Scriptures, Religious Practices, Traditions

A MASSIVE PORTION OF the Nanda Devi glacier broke off in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district, causing catastrophic floods and a deluge in the Alaknanda river system on February 7, 2021. The gushing waters washed away many hydroelectric stations and buried many lives along the banks. Geophysicists have confirmed that the extreme damage is due to the weakening of a mass of rocks due to uncontrolled hydel power projects in the upper stretch of Rishi Ganga creating a

"weak zone". Moreover, the avalanche intensified the crash owing to the steep slopes of the mountains in the region. Placed upstream of the Alaknanda River, the Rishi Ganga Power Project was the first one to be completely ravaged by the avalanche. The sediments and debris from this plant caused further damage to other State-run hydel power projects, such as the Tapovan and Pipal Koti and the private Vishnuprayag project.[1] In 2019, a petitioner, Kundan Singh, from Reni in Chamoli, Uttarakhand, filed a public interest petition at the Uttarakhand High Court against the Rishi Ganga Power Project. He alleged that the project set up near the village in 2005 threatens the rights of Reni's residents to preserve their cultural heritage and leads to environmentally unsound practices of endangering the river and the wildlife in the area. The Uttarakhand High Court issued notices to the Centre and the State governments and asked them to reply within three weeks to the petition. Sadly, the cause-effect relationship between the scale of hydrological disasters and energy projects is quite evident today. The apprehensions of Reni's residents are still unfolding with similar disasters in waiting whose magnitude is not only related to the perils of global warming but people's greed and reckless civil engineering. The worst fears of residents of Nani (Choti) Kashi, a historic village in Chamoli district of Garhwal in Uttarakhand, came cascading as a new 444MW Vishnugad-Pipalkoti Hydroelectric power project jointly by Tehri-hydro development Corporation and World Bank has been located in this fragile area. This project has set up a muck dumping zone right above the sanctum sanctorum of the Lakshmi Narayan temple established by the great Adi Shankaracharya. This historically relevant village is threatened with the loss of its lives, homes, and ancient temples.[2]

Most hydel power projects along the Rishi Ganga Project faced umpteen public opposition. Environment impact assessment (EIA) is formulated under the Environment Protection Act 1986, which is supposed to safeguard the interest of man and its relationship with nature alongside sustainable existence. Ironically, the Draft of Environment Impact Assessment (EIA, 2020) allows ex post facto clearance and disengages public participation while being more favorable to the mining, infrastructure development, thermal, nuclear, hydropower projects, real estate, and other industrial projects. The Indian government has transformed the entire Himalayan region into a resource frontier devoid of ecological value, treating it as a barren wilderness. Undoubtedly, post-2013 Kedarnath flash floods had seen a consensus on appropriate land use planning and watershed management practices for the Uttarakhand Himalaya and the adoption of 'best practice' norms for construction projects to minimize damage

to ecosystems.[3] But lately, the State and the Central administrators have chosen to throw caution to the winds and grant approvals to dozens of hydroelectric projects incompatible with a landscape already susceptible to volatile natural threats.

Environmental degradation, species extinction due to climate change, and resource pollution are some of the century's biggest challenges. This can only be tackled through collective action from governments and people globally. Developed countries have always supported economic growth and have remained soft on strong environmental laws responsible for economic loss. In contrast, Indians always displayed public stewardship toward the positive environmental impact on biodiversity and climate goals, even beyond the legal framework. The Indian civilization has always maintained a balanced pattern in the man-environment interaction, and the societies never entirely depended on a single kind of livelihood. Evidence from the ancient Indian civilization clearly shows that well-balanced societal groups engaged in varied types of occupation, so the foragers co-existed with farmers from time immemorial. Traditional Indian communities never demonized any living form and lived peacefully with every animal, plant, and natural phenomenon. Tribal and indigenous communities always formed a part of natural well-being, and based on the ancient concept of "One health perspective", it establishes that the well-being and fitness of people are inextricably linked to the health of animals and the environment.[4] On this front, India remained committed to international initiatives like the Bonn Challenge, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreements. Robust and well-implemented laws through efficient energy policies and afforestation should primarily be the critical components of National Climate change mitigations. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) defined EIA as a tool to identify a project's environmental, social, and economic impacts before decision-making. Given this backdrop, the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) draft 2020 proposal weakens environmental protection policies, resulting in widespread public concern.[5]

This paper attempts to deal with the environmental consciousness in the Indian scenario. However, environmental awareness is better understood in the context of past, present, and future perspectives. The environmental problems depend greatly on the contemporary style of thinking and living. There is an urgent need to reevaluate and restructure EIA 2020 in the wake of the recent natural disasters, taking lessons from religious practices.

The Genesis of Sustainable Environmental Practices in India

Since time immemorial, India has always been at the forefront of saving the environment. The Hindu scriptures such as the centuries-old Vedas, Vedanta, Upanishads, and Puranas abound in spiritual and poetic references to Mother Earth, where the environment is teeming with life, where trees, mountains, and rocks are revered as shrines, and the rivers are the sources that support physical and spiritual life. The hymns in the Purushsukta in the Rigveda and the Yajur Veda describe a cordial relationship with the Paryâvaraò, which in literal terms means the environment that comprises *Pari + Avaraò*[6] This emphasizes that five basic elements are necessary for life on earth,[7] and are revered and cited as *Devata* in the Vedas.[8] The features and components of *Devatas* are explicitly explained through the Vedic mantras and show us a "Way of life" to live in harmony with nature. It is referred to in the Atharvaveda's Bhumisukta that stipulates that Mother Earth nourishes and provides for all living creatures.[9] The hymns and prayers convey that Mother Earth possesses immense wealth and can deliver innumerable fruits to humankind, but also warns man not to overexploit her.[10] For Rishi (the sage), the earth is not just the root substance for consumption but also the mother and the son himself.[11] The Rigveda and the Yajurveda symbolize the "water" as an "elixir and medicine"[12] and forbid anyone from polluting it.[13] The Vedic Rishis instruct not to exploit nature but to utilize it freely.[14]

The Rigveda also stressed the importance of the plantation of trees and the maintenance of forests. Trees purify "air," and "air" is referred to in the Vedas as "the giver of life, the purifier, and disinfectant". In fact, it has been mentioned in Yajurveda[15] that though cutting trees is an inevitable need of humans, the practice should be balanced, and the indiscriminate felling of trees should not be encouraged. Surprisingly, the ancient texts also spell out how plants should be cut and the branches pruned from the axial and paraxial buds so that new branches could grow from that area. The ancient practice of performing Yajna does not mean offering elements in the fire but purifying the air using Ayurvedic products and elements. Maybe that is the reason that the importance of *Panchamahayajna* (*Brahmayajna, Devayajna, Atithiyajna, Balivaisvadevayajna, Pit[yajna*) has been mentioned in the texts. It is manifest that we as humans must perform our duties towards the Mother Nature, which include: 1) *Brahmayajna*- to associate our minds with nature; 2) *Devayajna* - regular fumigation with natural herbs and chanting; 3) *Atithiyajna* - to facilitate the enlightened; 4) *Balivaisvadevayajna* - to feed all other living beings,

and 5) *Pit[yajna-* to respect our elders.

'Dharma' has become a part of the standard English dictionary, but derived from Sanskrit, it means 'reconstruct and rehabilitate'. Dharma is enshrined as any orderly ecology, society, and environment that should not be endangered through anthropogenic actions. Antagonism between Nature (Prakriti) and humans (Purush) can disrupt the deep connection between life, ecology, and the environment. Humans, for their greed, had devised certain short-sighted policies that were oblivious of their responsibilities to nature and deviated from Dharma.[16] Somehow, with the onset of Islamic rule in the 12th century, India witnessed a sharp decline in ancient holistic practices of sustainable living. The Islamic towns in India were not ecologically viable despite extensive planning and stunning architecture. Due to natural factors, many of them degraded or became uninhabitable.[17] The most vital aspect to notice is that the development of these Islamic cities had completely ignored other pertinent factors like the controlled use of forests and wildlife.

The British Raj in India saw the setting up of many large port cities like Kolkata and Bombay for administrative and commercial purposes and the comfort of the White settlers. Later, the British enacted various legislations not to protect the environment entirely but to safeguard their vested interests so that the laws helped them with the provision of raw materials and not polluting to the extent of degradation.[18] Post-Independence India enacted laws to control water pollution (1974) and air pollution (1981) and became a signatory to the Stockholm Declaration (1972) on Environment. But it was only after the Bhopal Gas Leak Disaster in 1984 that the country passed an umbrella Act for environmental protection in 1986. Environment Impact Assessment in India is statutorily backed by the Environment Protection Act 1986, which contains various EIA methodologies and process provisions. The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, under the Central government, takes all such measures for "protecting and improving the quality of the environment". India notified its first EIA norms in 1994 that regulated all activities to obtain prior environmental clearance, activities that access, utilize, and affect (pollute) natural resources.

Disconnect and Discontent in EIA Draft 2020

The need of the hour is to keep the process of development synchronized with the availability of resources. Resource management is the key to sustainable development. Regions, where the extraction and utilization of resources occur must be prioritized while framing policies to balance the overuse of resources in a particular area while

underusing them in some other parts where it will not harm the environment. This will ensure that the entire world grows together as a balanced unit and does not feel the pressures we were exposed to during the recent pandemic. During the lockdown period, the environment has shown the world that it can heal and rejuvenate itself quickly the moment industrialization stops. We need to take a lesson from this and plan our development judiciously.

On March 12, 2020, the Ministry of Environment of Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) released a new draft Environment Impact Assessment (EIA). Under the Environment (Protection) Act of 1986, the EIA is a process that prevents industrial and infrastructure projects from being approved without prior investigation. This requires prior approval and clearances through the EIA process. Environmental impact assessment evaluates the likely environmental impacts of a proposed project on development. The projects are denied or granted environmental clearance based on the assessments done by the panel of experts. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) defines EIA as "an examination, analysis, and assessment of planned activities with a view to answering environmentally sound and sustainable development".[19] The EIA aims to provide a methodology to eliminate or minimize the adverse impact of developmental projects and simultaneously be cost-effective. It encourages the adaptation of mitigation strategies in development plans. The development plans need to be within the limits of the capacity of assimilation.

The EIA is a cyclical process and follows interaction in several steps: screening, scoping, public participation, and appraisal. To set up or expand major developmental projects in India, clearance is required from the Ministry of Environment, and Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), following an environmental impact assessment (EIA) under the current EIA notification, 2006 (MoEF 2006). India adopted the principle of public hearing for Environmental clearance (EC) by an amendment of the 1994 EIA Notification in 1997. But somehow, this has been ineffective for several reasons, such as poor quality of information, lack of effective involvement of local communities, and, most importantly, blanket exemption on some projects. A recent article in Economic and Political Weekly shows that the expansion of mining is often guided by pressure from external stakeholders with vested interests.[20]

Since the inception of EIA 2020 by Union Minister Prakash Javadekar, many environmentalists, independent experts, lawyers, activists, and policy researchers have pointed to red flags within the Draft. Three major issues were to be rectified before the implementation. Firstly, the local communities and general public have

been kept aside from consultation under Clauses 14(2) and 26 and given an unwarranted exemption to several large industries and projects such as chemical manufacturing and petroleum products; construction and area development, and buildings, expansion or widening of national highways and widening of inland waterways. Secondly, no clarification is provided by the Central Government regarding the criteria for categorizing projects as 'involving strategic considerations' and hence is open to disproportionately expansive versions. Thirdly, a clause on "post facto clearance" contradicts basic principles related to the environmental rule of law, which has given provision to obtain environmental clearances or permissions even to those deemed illegal projects. The EIA draft 2020 has reduced the time for the public hearing from 30 to 20 days for any application seeking environmental clearance. The EIA 2020 certainly defies India's stand to evaluate and assess the impact of developmental projects. The deficiencies in the EIA have some severe negative dimensions that can potentially defeat the very purpose for which it has been framed.

Instead of strengthening it, EIA compromises on crucial ecological dimensions. Post facto clearance of projects in the EIA can potentially incentivize starting a project illegally without bothering to get prior approval. It would become difficult to severely punish an illegally functioning project on the pretext that the owners had intended to take post facto approval. LG Polymers India Pvt. Ltd., which was illegally running its activity without taking prior clearance and caused the poisonous gas leak in Visakhapatnam, will escape severe punishments in the future. The loopholes that have been provided in EIA are, therefore, self-destructive. Another deficiency is in the clause wherein analysis and consideration of only single-season data have been mandated for clearing a project. This might lead to manipulations in clearing projects by intentionally excluding inconvenient seasons. Everywhere in the world, the assessment is required to be carried out in more than one season, but the new EIA in India allows otherwise. Provision to consider more than one season is technically required because ecological data undergoes a lot of variation across seasons. So an assessment based on single-season data would be misleading.

Much leaves to be desired on the impact of the EIA on human dimensions. Consultation with the communities whose lives and livelihoods might get adversely affected due to a project has not been made mandatory in the Draft. The Draft provides an alternate route for bypassing the requirement of public participation by terming a project as 'strategic'. What is even more worrisome is that it does not attempt to define the term 'strategic' unambiguously to prevent misuse

of such overriding provisions. The problem gets even more magnified as the time window for public response has now been reduced from the existing 30 days to only 20 days. The Draft can be termed inhumane for these reasons. All industrial activities, including infrastructural projects, invariably permanently impact the lives and livelihoods of the communities close to them. Public participation is the only way to minimize negative impacts and provide them with new positive opportunities to improve their lives once the project begins functioning. Reduction of the time assigned compulsorily for such interactions can only result in a greater negative impact, which in some cases could have been avoided by investing time in it.

The third aspect that must draw our attention in EIA is the legal dimension. The new rules provide more control to the Central government than the local administration. This can have a long-term adverse impact on the federal character of Indian governance. In 1992, the National Biodiversity Act provided significant autonomy to the smallest of the local consultative body, like the Gram Sabha. This resulted in saving, conserving, and protecting several precious native biodiversities. The new EIA seems to have shifted from the earlier bottom-up strategy. More power to the Central agency will surely help make decisions faster, but in this process, there is a real danger of local issues and concerns being largely ignored. EIA provisions will make it difficult for India to respect and honour its own commitment to ensuring sustainable growth. The terms like 'strategic' to qualify a project to draw lesser stringent attention will hardly help India keep her commitment to balanced and sustainable industrial development.

It would, however, be misleading to discuss only the negative aspect of the new EIA, as the earlier EIA was also unable to achieve what was intended. Its failure to provide clearance to the projects within a reasonable time limit led to the formulation of new provisions. An era of policy paralysis was witnessed during the earlier regime that slowed down growth and development and could not protect the environment. On the other hand, strict laws and tough provisions often spread corruption, manipulation, and malpractice. Laws that are not framed, keeping reality at the center of their view, often result in a state of anarchy that renders the entire governance process meaningless. When corruption allows the violation of laws to grow to an unmanageable extent, only a practical approach to address the situation should be recommended. Master Plan of Delhi, MPD1962, which was later modified as MPD 2001 and again as MPD 2021, are examples of such exercises. In such cases, the new plans allowed the existing violations to become legal because it was difficult for a

governing authority to implement a rule that identified a major share of activities as illegal.[21] Such a situation arises only due to widespread corruption that gets multiplied further due to the lack of prompt changes in laws to address the issues and situations for which the earlier plans were not framed. A plan that estimated parking requirements in the residential areas way below the growing demands should have been changed more frequently than it was actually done. Regular and effective changes in the plan should have been made to accommodate the real-time growing estimates of a city's commercial-to-residential area ratio. If the governing agency fails to do this, the growth of commercial space to meet the growing demands can potentially result in an impractical and completely useless solution.[22]

On the other hand, the case of making CNG fuel compulsory for vehicles in Delhi in 2001-02 is a remarkable example of how a benevolent and environment-friendly law can err at times. Even though the sensible views of the experts and the well-intended court judgment had recommended CNG as fuel, there was a huge public outcry against the forced implementation of the compulsory use of CNG backed by all the political outfits and commercial units. It is clearly visible that lobbies with pure commercial interest kept throwing many theories in the name of research, indicating that switching over to CNG would be a disaster. People complained about the shortage of CNG fuel as the CNG queues became longer, and bus operators, including Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC), could not get gas after waiting for 8 to 10 hours. Moreover, many NGOs started speaking to the press against the order of the Supreme Court regarding the single fuel mode of CNG for the entire city bus fleet.[23] Besides, frequent breaking down of CNG compressors, bursting of CNG cylinders, and buses catching fire were also highlighted. If the Court had not forced, the public and the government would never have agreed to switch to CNG fuel use. But later, this law was questioned by TERI and IIT Delhi on its technical capability, as they argued that the emission should be controlled and single-use fuel should not be decided since it would create inefficiency in the sector. They challenged the recommendation of the Bhure Lal Committee to the Court. Ironically, the Petroleum Ministry backed off from the claim of IGL that there was unlimited availability of CNG, and by the time the Court met on August 17 200, the situation had changed since the Ministry itself admitted that there was not enough CNG.[24] Thankfully, the Court, experts, and others did not succumb to these tactics. Once the initial period of artificially created problems got over, Delhi was saved from becoming more poisonous for several years after this switching. Yet another example of the Court's intervention in such matters is when

it ordered the removal of toll tax at the Delhi-Gurugram border. [25] The lobbies having commercial interests along with the government used all possible methods and gimmicks to prove that the traffic congestion at the toll counters is not because of the toll collecting activity. Finally, the Court ruled to safeguard the interest of the general public.

While the earlier EIA might have failed to achieve what it intended due to some unjustified and stringent provisions, the new EIA has conditions of other extreme nature. In simple terms, if the earlier EIA had allowed corrupt practices to grow and had slowed down economic growth activities, the new EIA could potentially facilitate illegal activities with the misuse of its provisions.

Reappraisal of EIA in the Light of Ancient Hindu Practices and Beliefs

Bhumi Project, a UK-based project established in 2009 by the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, launched some global initiatives, including the Green Temples Guide[26] for addressing climate change through the "unique contributions of Hindu teachings".[27] Most of the local Hindu communities practice religion in an environment-friendly manner. These communities do not overtly participate in contemporary environmental movements but practice it as part of their beliefs and faith to express Dharma guided by their religious tradition.[28] George James recounted that women folk on Chipko protest sites used to listen and recite religious texts.[29] Though the movement was against corporate exploitation, it had a positive environmental impact as the women involved considered trees religiously sacred. Ironically, the recent Nanda Devi glacier burst and flash flood that wiped off the entire Reni village is the iconic village that started the Chipko Movement in the 1970s. Similarly, the Swadhyaya movement was viewed as an expression of devotion to the divine and not any sort of save the environment project.[30] The Bishnoi community of the western part of Rajasthan is actively involved in keeping a vigil over the poaching of wild animals and rescuing injured animals. They make sincere efforts beyond the realm of religion to organise formal bodies that can fight to save flora and fauna of their neighbourhoods. Many youngsters from the community are studying law and fighting their cases themselves. At the same time, they are working closely with the forest department and have set up many animal rescue centres.[31]

Paradoxically, environmental pollution is also attributed to ritualistic practices in the Hindu communities, like bathing in a river during the Chhath Puja and the emersion of Durga idols and festivities like Kumbh Mela and annual Ganesh Chaturthi, which pollute the

great rivers. Such a level of indifference to environmental harm may lead to questioning Hinduism's very appeal and essence, which seems to have deep underpinnings of ecological sensibility. Thus, it can be said that the Hindu religion or faith cannot form a normative basis for people's actions. Strict environmental laws can only deal with this deep disconnect between the ancient scriptures and present practices. One cannot deny that any laws to be implemented with the support of local Hindu communities in India must be linked to faith. That will help achieve two objectives: saving the environment as well as fostering faith among the locals.

From Welfare Ecology to Welfare Economics: Key to Sustainable Survival

The malevolent relationship of humans with nature has witnessed the worst-ever global pandemic of 2020. One should not forget that a common link exists between climate catastrophe and mass extinctions.[32] Modern civilizations with their wildlife trade, the utter absence of care and compassion for species on earth, and extreme use of nonrenewable energy sources for luxury have caused an extreme disconnect with the biosphere and will soon render life on earth untenable. Unless and until we transform societies, economies, and cultures in order to live in congruity with visions of a higher purpose and find the way back to an integral interrelationship with the biosphere, humanity will continue to suffer and may even cease to exist after a few years. In this context, religious interventions are important wellsprings of resources for such a transformation. Humans are not disconnected from the rest of the cosmos. Humans, animals, plant life, the sun, the moon, the stars, and the entire cosmos are one continuum. Therefore, humans must acknowledge the sacred forces that gave rise to life on an ongoing basis and engage in the idea of ecological consciousness, viewed as necessary for the benefit of humanity and nature through the sacred act of rituals. These rituals are meant to protect the well-being of the human community and offer appreciation and loving care for the earth's beauty and bounty as an essential religious obligation.[33]

A chapter by Vasudha Narayan entitled "Water, Wood, and Wisdom: Ecological Perspectives from the Hindu Traditions" documented that Hindu traditions and rituals are continuously changing, and since there is no central command to enforce them, they are not strictly followed.[34] For example, the sanctity of rivers as Mother Goddesses has conjured great passion and inspired the cleaning up of the great rivers like the Ganga and Yamuna. Thus, with the intervention of gurus, who are responsible for setting the

traditions and rituals according to Dharma, a better coordination of *gyan* and *bhakti* can be achieved. Indians are still deeply rooted in their culture and follow rituals. Thus, spiritual leaders must identify some ways through which environment-friendly practices can be promoted in society. Gurus and teachers can mobilize awareness and organize activities, and these teachers may hold the key to averting ecological tragedy. They should encourage good religious practices through their interpretation of modern scientific knowledge. The seers of our temples should collaborate with scientists, policymakers, and lawyers to reform the practices that have deviated from the original concept and discontinue them as bad practices.

A careful analysis of the Gadgil report on the conservation of the Western Ghats reveals how Gandhian thoughts and methods can help in developing a sustainable economic growth model while protecting the Western Ghats.[35] Development activities interwoven with the Gandhian ideas of *Sarvodaya* and *Antyodaya* can help the present policymakers conceptualize a growth model that will also preserve the environment. Following Gandhian philosophy, policies may be designed that would give due importance to the local level consultations, would tend to be sympathetic to the poor, and focus on organic farming, food crops, and local cottage industries and still result in economic growth.

The larger challenge in front of the policymakers is to rectify the EIA 2020 draft by aligning both the local community and the corporate sector by adopting the following steps: (1) dismissing the discrepancies; (2) re-interpreting old practices and beliefs in ancient texts (3) aligning faith with safeguarding environment.[36] Global population is known to possess strong religious beliefs.[37] Hence, the answer to the present fallacies of the EIA 2020 draft can be countered with more local community participation keeping their beliefs and practices in place. The late Union Minister Smt. Sushma Swaraj said, "traditional Indian knowledge is purely scientific, and Indian lifestyle and philosophy hold the key to solving environmental problems. Instead of carbon credits that are discussed on global forums, green credits should be offered".[38] Thus, the current environmental crisis can be tackled with effective platforms that disseminate desirable morals, values, and practices concerning environmental ethics.

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MANEESHA PANDEY is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at Hindu College, University of Delhi. She has over three decades of teaching experience, and her areas of interest are Public policy, Public administration, Indian Politics, Environment laws, and policies.
Email: pandeymaneesha@gmail.com

Transhumanism: Mere Science Fiction or Emerging Reality?

Mathew John M
Latha Nair R

ABSTRACT

This paper elaborates on transhumanism, its emergence, and how it is adapted into different arenas of social and cultural life. It discusses the three objectives of transhumanism-super-intelligence, super-wellbeing, and super-longevity, and their respective visual adaptations in the British series Black Mirror. It also looks at transhumanist technology, the significant issues it can pose to humanity, and a number of specific questions relevant to the movement, both in favour and against.

Key words: *transhumanism, posthumanism, science fiction, hedonism, singularity*

IN THIS MODERN ERA, generating ideas and launching revolutions without being challenged is quite impossible. Ever since the Age of Enlightenment, every aspect of being human, including politics, international relations, food, transport, communication, and life itself, became open to question. Postmodernism emerged in the late 20th century as an aftermath of the Age of Enlightenment and heavily critiqued modern life. Then came posthumanism, which critiqued life itself. Post-humanism aims to tease out the flaws of traditional human existence, from accepting death as a part of human life to acknowledging prehistoric hunter-gatherer instincts. Transhumanism, however, gave the possibility of enhancing human life and making it more efficient with the help of technology.[1]

Julian Huxley popularized the term 'transhumanism' through his

article *New Bottles for New Wine* (1957). Huxley says, "mankind will transcend itself – not just sporadically, but in its entirety, as humanity. Man remaining man, but transcending himself, by realising new possibilities of and for his human nature".[2] In *Transhumanism* (1968), Huxley says, "…it is as if man had been suddenly appointed managing director of the biggest business of all, the business of evolution-appointed without being asked if he wanted it, and without proper warning and preparation. What is more, he can't refuse the job. Whether he wants to or not, whether he is conscious of what he is doing or not, he is in point of fact determining the future direction of evolution on this earth. That is his inescapable destiny, and the sooner he realises it and starts believing in it, the better for all concerned."[3] The new age transhumanists believed that human nature evolved, not just technology. They believed that humans became more intelligent, healthier, and physically able. Transhuman philosopher Max More developed and truly revolutionised Huxley's notion of transhumanism in his essay *Transhumanism: Towards a Futurist Philosophy* (1990). More suggested that the foundation of human primitivism can be eliminated by the advanced technology that evolved over time. He criticises how religion is the biggest obstruction to human advancement.

Many aspects of transhumanism are similar to those of humanism, such as respect for reason and science, dedication to advancement, and a preference for this life over any hypothetical "afterlife.".[4] More further developed his notion of transhumanism in *The Philosophy of Transhumanism* (2013) where he states, "transhumanists want to apply technology to overcome limits imposed by our biological and genetic heritage. Transhumanists regard human nature not as an end in itself, not as perfect, and not as having any claim on our allegiance. Rather, it is just one point along an evolutionary pathway and we can learn to reshape our own nature in ways we deem desirable and valuable. By thoughtfully, carefully, and yet boldly applying technology to ourselves, we can become something no longer accurately described as human- we can become posthuman."[5] Later philosophers like David Pearce and Nick Bostrom concurred with Moore's ideas. Pearce and Bostrom started the transhumanist movement through their initiative, 'Humanity+.' Francesca Ferrando depicts how transhumanism and posthumanism are similar to each other and also how they differ. In her essay *Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism, and New Materialisms* (2014), she says that both theories share the idea that the human is in a fluid state and susceptible to change or "mutation." However, both theories arose from different roots and had different perspectives even though their fundamental elements are mostly similar, and both came into existence almost simultaneously.[6]

Transhumanism became a genre when traditional fiction that was mythical and magical gave way to science fiction. As technological innovations erupted by the end of the 19th century, the ideas presented through transhuman literature also experienced a certain vastness. It became the most influential genre in the 20th century mainly because it depicts innumerable narratives that pertain to different angles of human life through technology, including futuristic predictions and speculative modifications of history. It is also a literature of speculations that extensively portrays what it means to be human and what could happen if the world is no longer anthropocentric. Transhuman literature is also unique because of its wide platform for imagination. Most transhuman fiction is sceptical of futurist technology and is set in or ends with a dystopian hangover. They show what could go wrong if the technology we have developed fails to function in the way it was intended at its creation. The ever-growing need for 'updation' pushes the boundaries of a technology's true intention and diverts into what the public gets hooked on. Transhuman literature in a way predicts the fantastical realities that could befall humanity in the near future. Since it is a philosophical study of technology that might enable humans to surpass their human limitations, transhuman philosophers write about medicine and cognitive enhancement, genetic engineering, cloning, artificial intelligence, and similar topics.

The theoretical aspect of transhumanism can be understood in terms of three objectives: super-intelligence, super-wellbeing, and super-longevity, the so-called three supers. Super-intelligence is self-explanatory, which is what it says, making humans superintelligent. The presence of the automata has been consistently present in fiction from the time of Homer. But these were mere speculation and nowhere near actuality. By the end of the 19th century, some narratives introduced android characters, such as E.T.A Hoffmann's *The Sandman* (1816). The latter half of the 20th century saw a plethora of transhuman fiction centred around the idea of artificial intelligence or intelligence beyond normal. Philip K Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968) is still seen as one of the seminal texts in transhumanism that predicts how the line between human and machine gets so thinned out that it becomes impossible to distinguish between the two. In the Indian Ayurveda tradition, we have references to the usefulness of *Rasayanas* (chemical formulations) to prolong life and the properties of the soma plant to rejuvenate oneself to a youthful state.[7]

Most super-intelligence narratives portray technology that allows the human brain to be more efficient. Elon Musk talked about how technologies that would be considered just mere extensions of the human body would become very common in the 2020s. Martin

Heidegger also shares the same thoughts, and his work on technology fits in with a tradition in philosophy called phenomenology. In *Being and Time* , considered his magnum opus, Heidegger talks about how our use of technology will eventually make it disappear as an external factor and withdraw from our attention. This would mean that instead of experiencing the technological entity itself, people would start experiencing the world through it. Enframing has gained control of our projects in the technologically dominant world and the way we perceive beings as they are. That is to say, technology's real power comes from constraining how we perceive ourselves. Heidegger's idea of authenticity is an exhortation to the individual to persistently remember the transience of his/her own existence.[8]

But when talking in a realistic sense, amplifying a person's thinking capability would most certainly have grave repercussions and should be done gradually and carefully. It would also be extremely difficult to develop a common system or algorithm that can be applied uniformly to everyone. Everyone's brain thinks differently, and it is important to focus on that aspect of the brain, which helps collect and retain information. Photos and videos show how a certain memory or moment can be captured and replayed. What if a device can get implanted inside you so that you would no longer need an external device to access such information? It would certainly open up opportunities for different sorts of embodiment.

Even though there are several adaptations of technology used in transhuman fiction, including *Bladerunner* (1982), which deals with the struggle to distinguish between an android and a human in the 2020s, and *Back to the Future* (1985) that dwells on time travelling and the butterfly effect, it was the 21st-century British science fiction anthology series *Black Mirror* that catapulted into immense popularity due to the technological predictions it made. The closeness these narratives have with reality is uncanny. It is based on the technological innovations that could happen from the technology we have today. The third episode of the first series, "The Entire History of You," depicts a world where people have contact lenses or "grains" that can record everything the eyes see, and people can rewatch them at their own convenience. They can access memories and scrutinize them as much as they want. The episode shows how the protagonist finds his wife involved in an extramarital affair by accessing and arranging information from "grains" of different people. The amount of intervention and surveillance in a person's life increases when people are more connected. This brings forth the dilemma of whether super-intelligence is a boon or bane. If devices allowed people to become superintelligent, can everyone be trusted with such an enhancement?

When people are not at the same level, it shows a stagnation of evolution. It is always difficult for a service to simultaneously benefit the entire human race.[9]

The second of the supers is super-wellbeing, a state where humans have immense resources and everyone is, in plain simple words, happy. The idea behind super-wellbeing is for all of humanity to be rid of internal suffering, fear, and anxiety. Human genetics must be altered rather than allowing technology to erase suffering. The evolutionary instincts are given prominence, and our biology is afforded enough time to evolve to attain well-being. A spine-chilling yet comical version of this super-wellbeing can be witnessed in the movie *Wall-E* (2008), where humanity is sustained in outer space on a spaceship since earth is no longer habitable and is just a junkyard for electronic waste. A society in perpetual contentment can be interpreted in innumerable ways. A hypothetical situation would be where everyone treats each other with kindness and smiles. This idea is stretched by *Black Mirror* in their third season's first episode, "Nosedive." In a world where people are branded as social media influencers and celebrities based on their number of followers, this episode brings forth the idea of rating people. The higher the ratings are of a person, the more accessibility to services and fame they gain in society. The natural human behaviour of judging commodities by reviewing the ratings they get is the same treatment such a society practises as well. Society is forced to be nice to others; one cannot abuse or even argue against something or someone for fear of getting their ratings dropped. China had hoped to fully implement its social credit system by 2020, although some components, such as a personal social credit score, are already in place. This rating is based on a person's credibility and dependability. If a person's score is low, the ability of that person to access certain services, privileges, and concessions will also be low, which can lead to protests from those who lose out.[10]

When we behave out of anger or hatred, we may injure others and lessen their capacity to thrive, impacting our own well-being. In Huxley's Brave New World, overuse of the drug soma alleviates social ills and gives everyone the "warm fuzzies". However, Bostrom says it would be better for us to use the highly skilled yogis and monks as our models since they have learnt to control and tame their desires and appreciate life and feel it.[11]

Though transhumanists also strive to erase the genetic makeup that causes anxiety and sadness, negative events or outcomes cannot be avoided. Even if humans are about to produce a neutral reaction to both positive and negative outcomes, they must deal with hedonic adaptation. The "Hedonic adaptation" is a term coined by Brickman

and Campbell in their article *Hedonic Relativism and Planning the Good Society* (1971). Hedonic adaptation is the psychological process by which people become accustomed to a positive or negative stimulus, such that the emotional effects of that stimulus are attenuated over time.[12] Likewise, we think that technology is essentially neutral. It can have good or bad effects and who might control it and where the line is drawn is important.

Super-longevity is supposedly the far-fetched notion among the three supers. Dying at an older age seems natural, except for transhumanists who wish to eliminate this preconception. They argue that one can attain near immortality through physically enhanced technology, better medicine, or preserving consciousness, also known as digital immortality.[13] "San Junipero", the fourth episode of the third season of *Black Mirror*, shows the possibility and the speculated outcome of such a scenario. The elderly are given a chance to live their afterlife in a simulation of heaven. Their realistic proposals of a large technologically living company storing data in servers fit a real-world organisation such as 'Humanity+', especially since the elderly are prioritized first in an experiment of nostalgia therapy. However, the result of this is the suffering of existentialism for living much longer than they are used to. There are other forms of attaining super-longevity other than digital immortality. It can be argued that the creation of artificial intelligence is a creation of a consciousness that can live forever. Suppose an android with artificial intelligence capability can brush off the mortal physical self. In that case, it can achieve immortality since the body degenerates, not the consciousness. If the body and the mind can be separated, then the body can be ditched, and the mind could live on forever. There are also other methods of attaining super-longevity, such as cryonics, genetic mutation, and anti-ageing. In a way, the human factor is seen as a weakness, and striving towards mechanisation and automation is deemed as progress.

Transhumanism views human physical limitations as restrictions on the realisation of human potential. It works to eliminate all of them while acknowledging and frequently welcoming the possibility that doing so could render us no longer unambiguously human. Radical human advancements in longevity, health, intelligence, emotion, morality, and other areas are among the goals of transhumanism. The first depictions of cyborgs, bionic humans, and genetic freaks appeared in science fiction. Are people starting to apply these concepts to their own lives after being inspired by these visuals, which could impact how humans evolve in the future? What is remarkable about this is that, in addition to how science and real-world events affect science

fiction, imaginative concepts from science fiction can someday become a reality.

What is the promise of transhumanism? In contrast to the wars, genocides and drug abuse that characterize contemporary societies, transhumanist tales demonstrate intelligence, inventiveness, and maturity rather than highlighting humanity's incompetence, destructiveness, and youth. According to transhumanists, this is our greatest strength as a species. Why not make the most of what we have to offer and use technology to advance humanity? Critics argue that while it is a compelling message, no responsible person should accept without hesitation the idea that science and technology can save us in the wake of the twentieth century's gas chambers, chemical and nuclear warfare, and environmental devastation. Many research and development projects are funded by corporations and the military, primarily focusing on profit and weapons. Technological catastrophes occur, and solutions often fail.[14]

Three methods of indefinite life extension are theoretically possible: biological, bionic, and virtual (mind uploading). Biotechnology and genetic advancements are the foundation of the biological approach. Its main objectives are to stop telomere shortening and prevent degenerative mutations from occurring during cellular replication and rejuvenation. In addition, the immune system might be genetically strengthened, with genetic flaws eliminated or fixed to prevent debilitating and chronic illnesses. These methods would, at best, slow down the ageing process. The advancements in nanotechnology and robotics are the foundation of the bionic approach. It aims to use artificial alternatives for various bodily parts. Synthetic blood, skin, and advanced prostheses for replacing arms, legs, or organs are a few examples of this technology. Nanobots may also be used to treat sick organs, and neuroenhancers may be inserted into the brain to preserve and even enhance cognitive abilities, including memory, IQ, attention, and others. A bionic being could theoretically have an indefinitely long life if the artificial parts were properly maintained or replaced as needed. The virtual approach, often known as mind uploading, is primarily based on advances in artificial intelligence and neurotechnology. This virtual method entails collecting brain information and transferring it afterward by digitising the information present in the brain, such as memories, experiences, and personalities, into a machine, thus making the mind liberated from the limitations of the body. The mind-uploading project pushes secularisation to an unprecedented degree by attempting to bring everlasting life solely under human control, eliminating God from the human existential horizon in the Christian sense, and developing

a different eschatology altogether.[15]

There is considerable optimism among the adherents of the transhumanist projects. In Hughes' transhuman transcendence theory, democracies that support citizens using safe and beneficial improvements lead to a more just, egalitarian, affluent, and peaceful world in the long run. Cyborg people will be more capable and active citizens and be able to offer more to the community and society because they are enhanced by biotech, nanotech, and neurotech. As improved citizens become more socially active, society goods rise; as more people benefit from this bounty, their quality of life rises; and as a result, they give more to the common good. This is known as a "virtuous spiral."[16]

Transhumanists claim that what they try to create is not a cruel world of human monsters like Hitler. Instead, they looked to create not just a human world but a more humane one, which would produce extraordinary persons like Gandhi. Bostrom says:

> If there is value in being human, it does not come from being "normal" or "natural", but from having within us the raw material for being humane: compassion, a sense of humor, curiosity, the wish to be a better person. Trying to preserve "humanness," rather than cultivating humaneness, would idolize the bad along with the good. One might say that if "human" is what we are, then "humane" is what we, as humans, wish we were. Human nature is not a bad place to start that journey, but we can't fulfill that potential if we reject any progress past the starting point.[17]

Bill McKibben openly rejects the transhumanist concept that greater longevity is a prerequisite for self-fulfillment. He contends that the average human life is enough time to live a meaningful existence and that mortality increases the value of life. Because people will avoid experiencing actual struggle, life extension and upgrades will dilute human experience and impair character development.[18] Paul Lauritzen questions how a bio-privileged class will interact with others who have been inadequately or not at all upgraded. Will they pity or disdain those who cannot afford augmentation or decide to forgo it, given that ageing and chronic illness impact physical appearance and productivity? He is concerned that the stark contrasts in lifespan and life experience may weaken a sense of shared humanity and run the risk of obstructing compassion and encouraging prejudice.[19]

Coming to eugenics, one of the underlying assumptions of transhumanism, if the parents' expectations about their offspring are met, the child will be accepted into the family. The child can be perceived as defective and less appealing if the unfavorable characteristic is not changed. Total rejection occurs when the unborn

child is aborted to stop the unwanted trait. Unconditional love entails complete acceptance without restriction. In this instance, the child's acceptance is contingent upon his or her absence of the undesired characteristic at birth. This way of thinking still places a strong emphasis on getting rid of the weaker person. The parent-child relationship and, ultimately, the family unit, which is the cornerstone of society, may suffer from the parent's conditional acceptance of the child.[20]

The fact that some people are less brilliant than others is not unfair, even if it limits their life options, but allowing this imbalance to continue would be unfair. This is the stance advocated by John Rawls in his Theory of Justice. The manner in which institutions handle these realities is what make them just or unjust.[21] The question of how the life-enhancing technology is created, who will be the test subjects, as well as who will have access to it and be able to purchase it, should it become commercially available, is one of the most significant ethical and religious dilemmas presented by efforts to substantially increase human longevity.[22] Further, radical life extension's mechanistic philosophies appear to encourage an unhealthy dualism between humans and their bodies and between humans and the world.[23] What implications do transhumanism have for ecology? The advocates are optimistic. They say that when molecular nanotechnology is developed, it would be possible to manufacture practically any good in an environmentally sound manner. Furthermore, cleaning up a large portion of the mess left behind by the outdated fabrication techniques used today would be possible. This would establish environmental standards for cleanliness that conventional environmentalists today hardly dare to imagine.[24]

According to Brown, most people's lives are currently "mediated in some way by science and technology." However, not all bodies undergo scientisation in the same way. Other, frequently racialized [as non-white] bodies become useful as raw sources and labour, valued for their biological capacities, while privileged bodies (white) enjoy life-improving scientific operations like vaccinations, organ transplants, and other advanced medical procedures.[25]

When are we likely to reach that crucial stage of transhumanism? A likely year is 2045 described as the year of the singularity characterized by "the culmination of the merger of our biological thinking and existence with our technology, resulting in a world that is still human but transcends our biological roots"[26] with humans and machines becoming 'one'. Additionally, suppose we get tired of our biological bodies and want to be without such restrictions. In that case, we can decide to upload the essence of our consciousness into a

computer, where we will be able to exist indefinitely and communicate with others by projecting avatars of ourselves in the way we desire to appear.[27]

How does transhumanism sync with capitalism? This is a moot question. Nicolas Le De´ve´dec writes:

> Precisely, transhumanism does not stand out by its capacity to question the capitalist order and its central values of performance, surpassing one's limits, growth, and permanent productivity and flexibility. Instead, it naturalizes it completely by instructing us to chemically and biologically adjust. From the transhumanist point of view – and again, even the branch calling for social and progressive commitment – it is always the human being that is unfit for the future; a future which is always naturalized and so taken for granted. Never does transhumanism, whatever its variation, seriously consider that it is this very future – the capitalist future of indefinite growth and technical progress – that is fundamentally maladapted to establishing a truly human society[28]

Transhumanism advocates for the intentional extinction of the human species because biological humanity, the outcome of a protracted evolutionary process, is not merely a defective "work in progress" but also a kind of life that is fundamentally flawed and should not exist. In other words, "transhumanism calls us to commit collective suicide as a species."[29] Tirosh-Samuelson adds: "Hedonic engineering is not a prescription for cultural depth and creativity; it is a prescription for childish shallowness that regards having fun and feeling good above all other values."[30]

Should transhumanism be accepted for all the good things that its proponents vouch for? It is in this context that the idea of cis-humanism has some relevance. For cis-humanism, minimal technological change is sufficient for human beings. In fact, we should acknowledge that the ecological problems we face in the Anthropocene are partially the result of our faith in rapid technological advances. Cis-humanism accepts our biology for everything it entails - sexual reproduction, love, friendship, care, dependence, and death. These phenomena and cultural responses to them give form and meaning to cis-human life even as it tries to improve upon the traditional understandings of being human.[31]

Transhumanism engineers the long-standing human goal of perfection and our intrinsic propensity to surpass limits, expressing the modernist ambition to rule the world. However, it misguidedly expects us to bring our own downfall by developing superintelligent machines that render humankind obsolete. Reading Gandhi's Hind Swaraj makes us conscious of the limits to human progress centred

around technology, based on hedonist principles couched in the language of human liberation. Yet Gandhi believed in the quest for human perfectibility especially progress in the direction of nonviolence. Whether technology can take us to that stage is still a matter of speculation, although many transhumanists think so. Enthusiasts of transhumanism have now formed transhuman political parties, which seek to make the old Left-Right divide obsolescent in favour of a technology-oriented consensus. According to these groups, technology holds the key to resolving the majority of the issues afflicting humanity today, including those related to health and ageing, inequality, climate change, resource conflicts, cultural and social differences, demographic shifts, and issues of social cohesion.[32] The incentive for people to engage in conflict, whether motivated by the desire to seize the resources held by others or ideological hostility, will significantly decline as technologically driven wealth expands. Significant reductions in conflict should result in a marked increase in domestic civil politics and a longer-lasting global peace by reducing and eventually eliminating wars, terrorist attacks, armed uprisings, acts of international sabotage, and covert political instability.[33] Commentators like Sudheendra Kulkarni think that Gandhi was not against technology, and he would have been enamoured with the new technology that artificial intelligence offers, provided it helps human beings shed violence and progress in the direction of nonviolence.[34]

Notes and References

1. In general, the term "humanism" refers to a way of thinking that emphasises the significance of human agency in defining the path of history. This presumption is essential to the humanities, as evidenced by its interest in the nature of epistemology, the nature of being (ontology), the nature of logic, the nature of ethics, and the nature of expressive forms (aesthetics). By developing both within and through humanism, posthumanism seeks to advance past it. By eliminating "the deeply ingrained tendencies of anthropocentric thinking," it hopes to achieve its goal. See S. Susen, *The 'Postmodern Turn' in the Social Sciences*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) & R.Braidotti, 2019 *Posthuman Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019), p.11.
2. Julian Huxley, New Bottles for New Wine (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), p. 4.
3. Ibid., p. 13.
4. Max More, "Transhumanism: Towards a Futurist Philosophy", *Extrophy Vol. 6 (1)* 1990, pp.6-12.

5. Max More, "The Philosophy of Transhumanism." In Max More and Natasha VitaMore, eds., *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), p. 3.

6. See Francesca Ferrando, "Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism, and New Materialisms: Differences and Relations," Existenz, Vol. 8(2) 2013, pp. 26-32. Libertarian transhumanism, democratic transhumanism, and extropianism are the distinct currents that exist within the transhumanist movement. The main assets for each of these roles, but with differing emphasis, are science and technology. The free market is regarded by libertarian transhumanism as the best safeguard for the right to human enhancement. Democratic transhumanism advocates for equal access to technology advancements that could otherwise be restricted to members of particular socio-economic groups and those with significant financial resources, thereby encoding racial and sexual politics. Perpetual development, self-transformation, pragmatic optimism, intelligent technology, open society, self-direction and rational thinking, are the extropian tenets outlined by Max Moore(Ibid.)

7. Sarah Ahamed, Palak Madan, and Avinash Kumar Singh , "Transhumanism in India: Past, Present and the Future" in Newton Lee (Ed.) The Transhumanism Handbook (Gewerbestrasse: Springer Nature, 2019), pp. 701-716.

8. Martin Heidegger, *Being and time*, Trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

9. Being an anthology series, Black Mirror's individual episodes can be viewed in any sequence. The show is an example of science fiction that incorporates speculative elements. The majority of the episodes are set in dystopian near-futures with cutting-edge technologies that emphasise a feature of modern culture, frequently the internet. In "Crocodile," for instance, the Recaller device used to view a person's memories serves as the primary distinction from the contemporary world. With little regard for morality in the cosmos, many of these technologies involve changing the human body or consciousness. They give the user comfort or independence, yet they amplify negative personality tendencies.

10. Leave Nobody Behind: The Future of Societies Amanda Stoel in Newton Lee (Ed.) *The Transhumanism Handbook*, op.cit., pp. 613-618.

11. Michael Burdett & Victoria Lorrimar, "Creatures Bound for Glory: Biotechnological Enhancement and Visions of Human Flourishing", *Studies in Christian Ethics* Vol. 32(2) 2019, p. 246.

12. P.Brickman & D. T. Campbell, Hedonic relativism and planning the good society. In M. H. Appley (Ed.), Adaptation-level theory (pp. 287-305) (New York: Academic Press. 1971).

13. The persistence of an active or passive digital presence after a person's passing is known as digital immortality. Digital immortality

is changing how people grieve and mourn. It is also presenting new problems for the funeral industry and producing new types of legacy.

14. S. J. Lilley, *Transhumanism and society: The social debate over human enhancement* (New York: Springer 2013).

15. Leandro Gaitán, " Heaven on Earth: The Mind Uploading Project as Secular Eschatology", *Theology and Science,* Vol.17(3), 2019, pp. 403-416. Science and technology, in the view of Christian transhumanists, hold the key to bringing about enduring peace and hastening the Second Coming of Christ. In the Bible it is said : "He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore." (Isaiah 2:4).

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27. Ibid., p. 325

28. Nicolas Le De´ve´dec, "Unfit for the future? The depoliticization of human perfectibility, from the Enlightenment to transhumanism", *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol. 21(4), 2018, p. 501.

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2018, p. 204.

30. Ibid., p. 208.

31. Andrew Fiala, "A Defense of Cis-Humanism: Humanism for the Anthropocene", *Essays in the Philosophy of Humanism* Vo. 27 (2019), pp. 1-20.Available from http://americanhumanist.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/art-1-Fiala-A-Defense-of-Cis-Humanism-Humanism-for-the-Anthropocene.pdf

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33. Gennady Stolyarov II, "The United States Transhumanist Party and the Politics of Abundance" , in Newton Lee (Ed.), op.cit., p. 114.

34. Sidheendra Kulkarni, Gandhi Belongs To The Future, Not Past, Of Artificial Intelligence, The Quint, 1 October, 2019, available from https://www.thequint.com/voices/opinion/mahatma-gandhi-artificial-intelligence-science-internet-non-violence-global-village#read-more

MATHEW JOHN M. is a Ph.D candidate in English Literature, Department of English and Languages, Amrita Viswa Vidyapeedom, Cochin, Kerala. Email: mathew2mathewmjm@gmail.com

LATHA NAIR R is Professor, Department of English and Languages, Amrita Viswa Vidyapeedom, Cochin, Kerala.
Email: drlathanairr@gmail.com

The Kinetic Gandhi in Static Art:
A Commemorative Iconology
for National Integration

Akhil Sanil

ABSTRACT

From postal stamps to currency notes to statues, the image of Gandhi becomes part of a system of circuitry, engaging with a mobile public through the medium of visual culture. Such a visual culture subverts challenges posed by remnants of India's colonial past by uniting its people on an everyday basis through these three elements, purposively designed to invoke through collective remembrance—the ethical, political and philosophical variables of Gandhian thought. This paper attempts to delineate how an iconology of Gandhi emerged through stamps, currency notes, and statuary in different spatio-temporalities, with a special focus on post-independence statuary. It will also critically look at the various agents acting upon such an iconology. In essence, this research would answer the question—how does a nationalist iconology of Gandhi through postage stamps, Indian currency and statuary consolidate India as a nation in relation to specific commercial and political challenges in the post-independence period?

Key words: Gandhi image, statuary, stamp, iconology, postcolonial

Introduction

WHEN ALBERT EINSTEIN said of Gandhi on the occasion of the latter's 70th birth anniversary in 1939 "Generations to come, will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth", little did he realise that he could be wrong in prophesying a bleak afterlife for Gandhi.[1] A long-standing testament to the strength and dynamism of Gandhi's legacy is cognisable in the recurring

instances where political rivals scramble for staking a claim on the image of Gandhi for political motives.[2] Consider what the renowned art critic and curator Gayatri Sinha has to say about the afterlife of Gandhi:

> In the other half of the dyad is the popular invocation of Gandhi as a moral avatar, in which form his presence is felt even today. Gandhi returns with little provocation in election debates, pop imagery, cinema, new age gurus, and public discourse on the challenges of globalism and a failing ecological system. We are here then confronted with two Gandhis. The first is the museumised father of the nation, the son of India figure that appears as the imprint of Indian officialdom, an image bearer with the Ashokan pillar or the wheel of justice, a cornerstone of a constitutional promise of peace and civil rights. The other Gandhi, perpetually immanent and in a state of reinvention, is invoked to interrogate the nation that he fathered.[3]

In other words, Gandhi is invoked in modern times either to cement the cornerstone of India the nation-state or to position him as a moral watchdog who is critiquing, commenting, and censuring political developments that can be tagged decadent or degenerate. By virtue of being the father of the nation, he is the omnipotent image of majestic ideals owned by no one and everyone at the same time. Such fluidity allows for the recalling of Gandhi through ritualistic performances like the Republic Day and the Independence Day where regardless of political affiliations, almost every politician draws upon the Gandhi image to make a point. Alternatively, year after year, Gandhi's staff becomes the metaphoric yardstick by which progress and deviation in relation to the nation are measured. Gayatri Sinha demonstrates this phenomenon by examining how curated art-pieces of Gandhi (photographs, stamps, statues, prints, and memorials, among others) are deployed to question and counter-question various discourses on mechanisation, technology, women, ecology, caste, religion etcetera.[4]

In such a context, this article focuses on three elements of visual culture physiologically static in nature, yet dispersing the symbolic Gandhi embedded within, across various spatio-temporalities differently — namely postage stamps, currency notes and statues embodying the symbolic Gandhi. It will also attempt to investigate how a constructive iconology of these three elements enables an understanding of the triumvirate as expediting connectivity to link members of a diverse polity in the face of postcolonial modernity from the 1950s onwards. However, such an integrative process is counteracted by commercial and political agents for self-serving ends,

which will also be explored.

Are stamps and currencies art?

While one of the many purposes of this article is to modify the conception that art is merely an object of beauty within the domain of aesthetics, it would be nearly impossible without a discussion on Kantian aesthetics in *Critique of Judgement*. The twin conditions set forth by Immanuel Kant which eventually became the western golden standard for quality art are: "beauty is a function of judgement" and "art has to be purposive without a purpose".[5] The former simply means that an object is considered beautiful not based on the initial impression one gets of it, but rather because one's mind judges it as beautiful after the application of mental faculties.[6] The latter idea connotes that for an object to be considered art, it needs to meet the condition of appearing to have some use-value, even if it is not realised in actual terms. An important starting point in the debate of national integration through art would therefore have to start by locating how these conditions are met or unmet by the objects of this study—currency notes, postage stamps, and statues. Such an examination will also, consequentially, prove detrimental in exposing some faults in such a western conception as well as reveal the unique way in which these objects not only become authoritative art but also influence political processes as specifically seen in the case of political statuary.

Before subjecting the objects of this study to a close examination through the lens of aesthetic theory, the respective functional roles of stamps and currency notes as a facilitator of communication and a medium of exchange demand a pre-emptive justification to the objection that they do not constitute conventional art, with statues being an exemption. If the images on stamps and currencies do not constitute art, an exercise in analysing how these objects as art disseminate the "aura" of Gandhi's image to connect individuals and the nation would appear futile.[7] Kantian aesthetics in *Critique of Judgement* considers two conditions for good art—"beauty" as a function of judgement wherein pleasure from aesthetic experience is merely a consequence of the mind qualitatively recognising an object as beautiful; an object of art is "purposive without purpose" in that it weaves an illusion of having a purpose without a verifiable counterpart in reality, in the beholder's mind.[8] So for Kant, when it comes to beauty or good art, the pleasure derived from experiencing a stimuli is secondary and consequential whereas it is the mind's ability to make critical appraisals about such an experience that assumes primacy.[9] In addition, the work of art has to maintain a pretence of having a purpose.[10] Not only do the objects of this study debunk the first

condition (beauty as a function of judgement) but, they also point fingers at how such qualitative emphasis on the judgemental faculty of the observer restricts art to the realm of the intellectual avant-garde. They also prompt one to question how the second condition (art has to be purposive without a purpose) unapologetically demands the pretence of appearing to have a purpose, while it is simultaneously negating aesthetic experience to the untrained. Continental philosophers from the school of Marxism, especially Theodore Adorno treats such proclivities towards art scornfully owing to it constituting a means of epistemological control.[11] Adorno acknowledges an uneven power-play and says— "It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist", albeit for him the agent controlling art is a capitalist society that relegates objects to commodity and not unfair intellectualism like in Kantian terms.[12] As an indirect object of a fraught aesthetic debate, the evident and verifiable purpose of postage stamps and currency notes as facilitator of communication and medium of exchange, respectively, while simultaneously remaining capable of registering aesthetic impressions on the beholder, allows for a transformative understanding of art as pleasurable and remaining free of regimented and conventional notions of art. Thus, it may be judicious to accord the status of art to the objects of this study.

Stamps and Currencies post-Independence

The functions attributed to currency notes and postage stamps remain experientially palpable in its everyday operations but the non-apparent and gradually manifesting effects they produce escape even the observant scrutiny of trained eyes, at least initially; the ostensible functions being medium of exchange and facilitator of communication. Also, the non-apparent and gradually manifesting effects impact different spatio-temporalities co-existent within the national demography differently, each object in its own unique way.

Devyani Gupta writes that during the period of 1750-1850 in British India, — "Alternatively, the laying of postal lines also helped the Company secure knowledge about the unknown interiors of the country and assisted it in times of conquest and/or rule".[13] The objective of establishing postal networks, therefore, existed to serve two purposes for the Company: to enhance communication infrastructure while simultaneously being of strategic importance. Having postal networks of circuitry that criss-cross vast swathes of the Indian hinterland made it easy for the Company to gather intelligence since they used reliable *dak* runners who not only delivered posts, but also collected politically significant intelligence related to

matters of security.[14] This was one of the many gradually manifesting effects of the postal network within the Indian sub-continent. In fact, it would not be wrong in saying that if 'divide and rule' was the policy by which the British pitted princely states against each other, the 'division' was facilitated by making invisible geographical incisions on land—as made by these postal networks. It is interesting to note that this very postal network assumed a different function against the backdrop of a different spatio-temporality—namely, the Indian subcontinent of 1950s, where in an almost reversal of its role and function, postal networks became instrumental in uniting territories and communities that were antagonistically pitted against each other.

For instance, postage stamps of Gandhi released immediately after Independence served the unacknowledged and underappreciated role of concealing the nation within its geographical boundaries through the establishment of a comprehensive network of missive circuitry valid only within itself. Bipan Chandra points out that in princely states prior to Independence, autonomous princes colluded with the British in self-preservation against the national movement—the erstwhile Nizam of Hyderabad declared that the agitation was anti-Muslim, the erstwhile Maharaja of Kashmir called it anti-Hindu and the erstwhile Maharaja of Travancore attributed the agitation to Christians.[15] Following the decline of princely authority in communally antagonistic states, the role played by Gandhi stamps in logistically connecting people and symbolically binding them in terms of his philosophy simultaneously, needs to be recognised. However, the spatial impact of these stamps across the nation through provinces was uneven; its temporal effect was more so with the rapid progress in modernity resulting in the decline of the postage system itself.

Similarly, on the economic front, the apprehension of foreign dependency under Nehruvian socialism post-Independence on an international level was marked by a parallel trend on India's domestic ground at a microcosmic level, aggravated by the pace of modernity. While the Indian government was distrustful of foreign dependency immediately after Indian Independence, the people of India were also simultaneously distrustful of strangers, the Partition having left a deep wound on their public psyche. Pulapre Balakrishnan argues that during the 'Nehruvian era' (1950-64), "First, no major foreign assistance was envisaged. This was in keeping with the idea of independent development, a project incompatible with excessive reliance on foreign aid, or even, foreign investment".[16] Rapid urbanisation and demographic relocation punctured economic systems built on trust and dependency in rural areas, with the emergent social reality necessitating more interaction among strangers. In that context,

imprints of Gandhi's image on currencies instrumentally remodelled themselves as conduits of trust and goodwill while symbolically invoking Gandhian principles. This sanctioned a form of indirect dependency while ostensibly projecting an illusion of independency, complementing Nehru's vision of a cohesive India that is economically self-sufficient. Pulapre Balakrishnan writes that "not only does growth in the Nehru years amply exceed what was attained in the final half-century of colonial rule, but the quickening of the economy observed in the second half of the 20th century may be seen to have been already achieved".[17] Such modular economic development established a faster-growing chain of transactional circuitry consisting of currency notes with enhanced public participation. This gradually eclipsed the symbolic function of connectivity performed by stamps in terms of scale, as a consequence of modernity.

Gandhi Statues, Public Sphere, and National Integration

As we have explored the distinct roles played by currency notes and postal stamps bearing the symbolic Gandhi concerning national integration, it might be agreeable to move on to statuary. Major scholarly work within the field of political statuary in the Indian context has been undertaken by Kajri Jain and Sushmita Pati (independently), an art historian and a political scientist, respectively. While Kajri Jain is renowned for mapping the movement of religious and cultural icons from temples and museums to the wider public sphere as embodied along roadside statues, Sushmita Pati focuses on the mechanisms through which colonial sculptures and architecture are refashioned and reinterpreted in the post-independent nation. Kajri Jain points out in the essay "Gods in the time of Automobility" that the relocation of socio-cultural, politico-devotional statues and icons from traditional centres of iconopraxis like museums and temples to the *sârvajanik* (politico-devotional public) suggests implications for the new ways of iconic perception of statues.[18] While her argument considers "politico-devotional" symbols like the Hanuman sculpture, Standing Shiva and clay Ganapati icon as sites of political manoeuvring, these processes are not limited to religious symbols, but also bring national icons under its ambit.[19] So, the pertinent question is—what purpose does a relocated Gandhi image serve, especially at a time when the presence and meaning of colonial sculptures and architecture are subjected to a thorough revision?

Sushmita Pati contends that monumental structures including statues had to undergo the problematic of rearranging Delhi's landscape in the colonial-postcolonial transition phase, imposing a new visual order on the old one often by replacing a colonial icon

with a national one.[20] Static, monolithic statues of religious and political significance made of cement located amidst urban landscape, alongside national highways and recreational parks like 'Standing Shiva' (80 feet, 1989) by Maturam Varma on National Highway 4 between Delhi and Gurgaon; 'Seated Shiva' (123 feet, 1995) by Kashinath at Murudeshwara, Karnataka; the bronze statue of Gandhi (72 feet, 2013) by Ram V Sutar at Gandhi Maidan, Patna—are all examples of statues occupying the *sârvajanik*.[21] The physical immobility of statues is transcended by the incumbency of their gigantic frame allowing for a panoramic topographical advantage, negating the possibility of the public voluntarily or involuntarily missing out on the ocular dispersion of aura. Adding an edge to this system of aural dispersion is the geographical connectedness to arterial road transport, constituting another dynamic circuitry composed of automobiles that push itinerants to experience art by second, which is a consequence of rapid acceleration of modernity in the post-liberalisation phase of 1990s onwards.[22] Being part of that system allows the static statue to assume the quality of having some indirect mobility, travelling within the minds and memories of itinerants who sight these objects of art. Such an intricately complex network of aural dispersion temporally bypasses preceding systems of circuitry like stamps and currency in its scope, speed and impact too. As the modus operandi of currency notes, postage stamps, and statues in aural dispersion becomes clear, an exploration of the significance of the dispersed image of Gandhi for the citizens of India through and for whom the aural dissemination occurs seems a befitting venture to undertake.

Paul Connerton in his book *How Societies Remember*, explores how both 'personal memory' and 'social memory' within the performance of a ritual transform the rite into a magical act that makes the abstract concrete; the fictional real.[23] Connerton uses the term 'personal memory' to denote those memories of an individual where the individual occupies the cynosure; he calls 'social memory' as those memories of an individual that are commonly shared by members of a large community. Suppose an individual from a primitive community remembers eating an ice-cream on a hot day, it would be his personal memory. However, if he is recounting how ice-cream was introduced to his village for the first time ever (such memories are often transmitted orally in primitive societies), it would be his social memory since many members of that particular community share that memory with him. Therefore, if a nation is indeed an "imagined community" as suggested by Benedict Anderson, it is after this process of rendering the fictional real and the abstract concrete, that a nation ensures its continued existence geographically and psychologically.[24] This

phenomenon of rendering the fictional real and the abstract concrete is carried out on an annual and daily basis through celebration of rituals like the Republic Day and the Independence Day (both annually observed) as well as commemoration of Gandhi through his statues (day-to-day), in the context of India. The idea of commemoration particularly through collective remembrance of Gandhi and his legacy contributes immensely to combat separatist tendencies that challenge the process of national integration, which shall be explored soon. Connerton's research therefore would undoubtedly be of paramount importance in understanding the complex processes by which Gandhi statues aid the national integration project, since it also makes use of the manifestations of 'personal memory' and 'social memory'.[25]

While the entry points to the debate of aural dissemination of the symbolic Gandhi are exhaustive, a pragmatic recourse could be found in relocating the exploration to the site of aural dispersion where the common effect it garners in intelligent cognitive encounters each time is revealing—that of memory and remembrance, even if recollection is not immediate. Paul Connerton's meditations on personal memory and social memory, provide a paradigm for understanding the two-fold impact of aura on the personal and social at the instance of the gaze —"personal memory claims may be expressed in the form: I did such and such, at such and such a time, in such and such a place where the 'I' owns a centripetal significance" whereas "concerning social memory in particular, we may note that images of the past commonly legitimate a present order; it is an implicit rule that participants in any social order must presuppose a shared memory".[26] The act of gaze works on two levels. First impact is that the image of Gandhi mediated through personal memory exhorts the self to extend itself to its maximum potential through the visionary's philosophical concepts of "spirituality, perfect chastity, adoption of poverty, pursuit of truth, *ahimsa* and cultivation of fearlessness", although individuals have the freedom of choice.[27] Another possible impact through the paradigm of social memory is that the individual upon apprehending the Gandhi image is coaxed to relive elements of shared memory, including but not limited to the Partition, the Freedom Struggle, and Indian Independence, binding the individual to similar others through their individual yet common instantiations of collective remembrance. The combined effects of personal memory and social memory constitute the national integration project. So when Rachel Buchanan writes about the bronze Gandhi statue at Wellington Railway Station in New Zealand—"For at least three decades, the small, Indian non-violent global superstar has been invoked to encourage readers to elevate—or merely acknowledge—the teachings and actions of 'our

own Gandhi's'", she is referring to how Gandhi statuary, through the medium of personal memory, contributes to the national integration project, though within the context of New Zealand.[28] The two-fold impact of aura lends an important clue—that strengthening the society through each individual at the personal level while binding them as a collective through common instantiations of remembrance of social memory could be the paramount purpose of dispersing the symbolic Gandhi in the schema of national integration.

Capitalist and Political challenges

Since it has been made amply clear as to how the symbolic Gandhi dispersed through the medium of art unites a nation, it remains to be seen whether new challenges to national integration have emerged, apart from the ones that come under the larger domain of post-colonialism. To contextually place Gandhi's image in relation to political developments from the 1950s onwards, a look at some of the corresponding parliamentary debates would be fruitful. Sushmita Pati traces the historical origin and development of some of these debates pertaining to the question of statues in the Nehruvian era and particularly underscores Mani Ram Bagra's eagerness to assimilate Gandhi into the "sacred religious lore of India".[29] Although Nehru's detached nonchalance to this debate somewhat deterred the religious apotheosis of Gandhi for political manoeuvring, the rules of the game have altered in the post-liberalisation era. Several disruptive forces that malign the Gandhi image and, by extension, the national integration project, exist to serve vested interests.

William Mazarrella is one critic who exposes these very forces at play astutely. His research framework adopts a macroscopic lens through which economic, political, and commercial miscreants are discussed to analyse the impact of these forces on the image and cult value of Gandhi. It is important to bear in mind that the image and the symbolic value of Gandhi have pressing implications for the national integration project. He, in his essay "Branding the Mahatma: The Untimely Provocation of Gandhian Publicity" identifies some such miscreants disrupting the symbolic Gandhi— Bal Thackeray's (founder, Shiv Sena) attack on Gandhi's 'unmanliness' in *ahimsa* to garner a hyper-masculine image for his political cause; Tushar Gandhi's (great-grandson of Mahatma Gandhi) sale of rights to his ancestral home to CMG Worldwide in 2002 to profiteer from a legacy that wasn't his alone to sell; Indian consumer goods companies like Amul, Raymond, and Tata using the image of Gandhi in their capitalist advertisements, are some such appropriations of the Gandhi image, to name a few.[30] Exploring these ideas will not only aid in the identification of political

and commercial miscreants but also reveal a recurring pattern of political abuses that need to be stopped if the national integration project is to survive.

First, let us look at the impact of commercial appropriations on the symbolic Gandhi. Ritu Gairola Khanduri, in her essay "Some things about Gandhi," astutely manages to underscore Gandhi's very own reaction to commercial appropriation of his image, in addition to tracing other such appropriations by commercial agents. Gandhi writes in *Young India*:

> Of all the abuses to which my name has been put, I know nothing so humiliating to me as the deliberate association of my name with cigarettes. A friend has sent me a label purporting to bear my portrait. The cigarettes are called 'Mahatma Gandhi' Cigarettes. Now, I have a horror of smoking as I have of wines. Smoking I consider to be a vice. It deadens one's conscience and is often worse than drink in that it acts imperceptibly. It is a habit which is difficult to get rid of when once it seizes hold of a person. It is an expensive vice. It fouls the breath, discolours the teeth and sometimes even causes cancer. It is an unclean habit. No man has received my permission to associate my name with cigarettes. I should feel thankful if the unknown firm were to withdraw the labels from the market or if the public would refuse to buy packets bearing such labels.[31]

It is evident that Gandhi was strongly against smoking, yet this particular commercial agent was quick to devise a strategy for profiteering by transforming Gandhi into a brand image for their cigarettes, even without his permission. This is not an isolated case. Even after Gandhi's death, several such appropriations of the Gandhi image have happened, of which Ritu Gairola Khanduri takes note.

An important case in point is the luxury pen manufacturing company Montblanc's launch of the special edition Gandhi pens in September 2009, a week before Gandhi's 140th birthday.[32] To put this event into context, one needs to know Gandhi's position with regard to good/bad handwriting and ink pens. According to Gandhi, "Bad handwriting is of course a form of discourtesy. Discourtesy in every form is violence, but bad handwriting is direct violence too…As far as possible, they (inmates of the Ashram) should write to no one in pencil".[33] Montblanc capitalised on Gandhi's opinion on writing with pencils to their advantage and marketed these special edition pens as a means to non-violence, since writing with these pens meant not writing with pencils, which according to Gandhi was a direct form of violence.[34]

It can be asserted that the relocated Gandhi image (from the moral plane to the market place) drastically modifies the symbolism of the

Gandhi image. Ritu Gairola Khanduri points out that "Contemporary cultural analysts, Gandhi himself and his followers noted the contradiction between Gandhi brand commodities and the principles of *satyagraha*, thereby critiquing the idea of Gandhi as a 'freeloading concept'".[35] In the case of cigarette branding, Gandhi's philosophy with respect to smoking was antithetical to what was being advocated by the brand. Contrastingly, in the case of Montblanc's Gandhi special edition pens, Montblanc leveraged Gandhi's philosophy to their advantage for commercial purposes.

As the commercial agents attach to themselves Gandhian values through advertisements (as seen in the case of the luxury pen Montblanc, which is associating Gandhi and the principle of non-violence to it), commercial values irredeemably get attached to the Gandhi image since the company caters to an elite customer base. This directly goes against the very grain of an aspect of Gandhian thought like poverty. The ability of the market place to reproduce and disperse the Gandhi image on a large scale via advertisements, hoardings, and cartoons interferes with the systems of circuitry involving statuary and has irrevocable consequences for the national integration project. If the national integration project aims to impart Gandhian moral values at the individual level through statuary, the remodelled propagation of commercial values in advertisements through the Gandhi image prod, if not coerce, consumer-citizens to be influenced by commercial values instead of Gandhian values.

Secondly, politically motivated performances for electoral and divisive agenda by different political agents too have tainted representations of Gandhi and by extension, the dispersed image too. While Gandhi's legacy has rightfully been contested from many angles, for its misogyny, casteism, and rejection of science and technology (Feminists, Ambedkarites and Nehruvians respectively), a paradoxical process of owning and disowning this very legacy to one's convenience can be observed in the case of the political 'Right'[36] Pragya Thakur alias Sadhvi Pragya (Member of the Hindu Mahasabha) shocked netizens on the occasion of Gandhi's 71st death anniversary by shooting an effigy of Gandhi, enacting Nathuram Godse's assassination of Gandhi.[37] In this particular instance, disowning of Gandhi's legacy is seen whereas ironically, a celebration of Gandhi's legacy can be observed at the national level, championed by the 'Right'.

Another such ungainly political performance happened when Firoz Khan (Samajwadi Party Leader) cried in a comical fashion on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti in front of a Gandhi statue in Sambhal saying "Desh ko azaad karake, hamein chodke anaath, chale gaye aap….Bapu tum kahan chale gaye" in false hysteria as a publicity stunt.[38]

Such spectacles involving the desecration of the Gandhi image are carefully performed to publicly disown Gandhi's idea of a non-violent nation so as to reconfigure that idea into a nation believing in principles of brute force and religious homogeneity, often dubbed as the philosophy of *Hindutva*.[39] As Benedict Anderson points out, a nation is an imagined political community imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign, through a common national language, to project a homogenous character.[40] Under the re-ordering envisaged by the miscreants discussed above, an attempt to forcefully impose a homogeneity to a social order where it is inherently lacking results in the marginalisation of communities and sectarianism, undoing the constructive work statuary does towards national integration.

Conclusion

This article has described several phenomena associated with systems of circuitry that disperse the Gandhi image for the purpose of national integration, and enumerated various forces that counteract that process, including the likes of commercial and political agents. However, it has come short of suggesting measures that will overcome these impediments and steadfastly streamline the dispersion of the symbolic Gandhi for national integration. Such a shortcoming exists even after apprehending the irony that the causal agent of these impediments is, in fact, a boon and a bane—the ability to proliferate the Gandhi image far and wide with the aid of modernity, be it the untainted image, the maligned image, the contested image or any other image of Gandhi for that matter. This article is aware of its deficiency in asking the pertinent question whether Gandhi's image be celebrated in the first place (the contestations attest to this), but observes that all these disparate identities that rightfully contest such a legacy have benefitted from the very same legacy that they contest, while functioning within their common identity as an Indian entity. In fact, this article would go on to assert that such a level playing field for contestations and questioning was made possible through this legacy, which came into being during the fight against the British Empire—who were notorious for stifling opinion, freedom of speech, and dissent. An acknowledgement of the truth that Gandhi himself was a man of many ironies, as pointed out by Sarojini Naidu, his contemporary— "It costs a lot of money to keep Gandhi in poverty" —might obviate an attempt to recalibrate an excessively positive Gandhi image.[41] This article still chooses to celebrate Gandhi's image while being fully conscious of the shortcomings of such a position, taking recourse to the realisation that greatness is not always synonymous with perfection, but the pursuit of greatness itself is big

enough, as an attempt.

Acknowledgements

Notes and References

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2. These examples will be explored in detail in the latter sections of this article.
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13. Devyani Gupta, "Postal Relations between Princely States and British India: Military Lines, Communication Networks and the Residency System, 1750-1850." in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 71, p. 569. www.jstor.org/stable/44147524 accessed on 20 March 2021.
14. Devyani Gupta, "Postal Relations", p. 569. *Dak* is a Hindi word used to denote 'postal'.
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16. Pulapre Balakrishnan, "The Recovery of India: Economic Growth in the Nehru Era" *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 42, No. 45/46 (November 2007), p. 56.

17. Ibid., p.58.

18. Kajri Jain, "Gods in the time of Automobility." *Current Anthropology*, vol. 58 supplement 15, 2017,14-17. www.journal.uchicago.edu/full/10.1086/68896? mobileUi=0+%3F& accessed on 18 March 2021. The word '*Sârvajanik*' has been used to refer to a certain sense of the 'public'(sarva[all], jana[people]).'Public' (both as a noun and an adjective) has a political dimension when used in relation to power structures. *Sârvajanik* on the other hand is a neutral conceptualisation, used to refer to the public sphere, not necessarily in a political context, though it progressively gains a political meaning as Kajri Jain argues.

19. To get a visual sense of these sculptures, see Kajri Jain, "Gods in the time of Automobility." p. 14.

20. Sushmita Pati, "A Nation Set in Stone." *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 47, No. 30, pp. 232-234. www.jstor.org/stable/23251775. accessed on 25 March 2021.

21. Kajri Jain, "Gods in the time of Automobility." 15. Photographs of the first two statues are embedded within Jain's article for the reader's perusal.

22. Ibid.

23. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 1-3.

24. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983), p.6.

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26. Ibid.

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32. Ritu Gairola Khanduri, "Some things about Gandhi", p. 317.

33. Ibid. p.318.

35. Sushmita Pati, "A Nation Set in Stone." p. 234.

35. William Mazarrella, "Branding the Mahatma: The Untimely Provocation of Gandhian Publicity." *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 1-39 www.jstor.org/stable/25619812 accessed on 23 March 2021. Shiv Sena is a political party based in Maharashtra that draws upon an ultranationalist ideology.

36. The 'Right' denotes a group of political parties that believe in conservative values, led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the national level.

37. "Hindu Mahasabha 'recreates' Mahatma Gandhi's Assassination in UP." YouTube video, 00:13-00:16, posted by "NDTV," 30 Jan. 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=TdZagkGLhcA accessed on 25 March 2021. The Hindu Mahasabha (Hindu Grand Assembly) is a Hindu nationalist political party, which had Mahatma Gandhi's assassin Nathuram Godse as its member while the assassination happened. It is also a political ally of the BJP.

38. "SP Leader Firoz Khan Cries in Front of Mahatma Gandhi's Statue." YouTube video, 00:19-00:50, posted by "ABN Telugu," 3 Oct. 2019, www.youtube.com/ watch?v=67vKb_1w-oo accessed on 5 August 2022. Samajwadi Party is a social democratic party based in Uttar Pradesh, with significant presence in other states as well. Gandhi Jayanti is an event celebrated on 2 October each year, to commemorate Gandhi's birthday. Finally, a rough translation of this Hindi statement would be— After liberating India, you went away leaving us helpless….. Bapu, where have you gone?

39. While it remains politically expedient for the 'Right' to exalt the legacy of Gandhi in the domain of culture, the same legacy is directly in conflict with their philosophy of *Hindutva*.

40. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities.* pp. 6-7.

41. Catherine Ingram, *In the Footsteps of Gandhi: Conversations with Spiritual Social Activists*, (New Delhi: Rupa & Co, 1997), p. 247.

AKHIL SANIL is an Assistant Professor on contract in the Department of English, St. George's College, Aruvithura, Kottayam, Kerala.
Email: akhilsanil12@gmail.com

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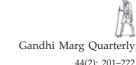
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Swaraj Through Gandhian Rural Reconstruction in Colonial Bengal: A Narrative History of Abhay Ashram from 1910 to 1947

Kingshuk Bhattacharjee

ABSTRACT

This paper intends to narrate the history of Abhay Ashram and how a group of young Gandhians, led by Suresh Chandra Banerjee conducted a significant amount of constructive work in the eastern districts of colonial Bengal based on Khadi, National Education, and Health: the basic tenets of Gandhi's rural reconstruction programme. It focuses on a prolonged period, starting from 1910 to the independence in 1947, and the Bildungsroman of Abhay Ashram and its founder. It also lays emphasis on some of the remarkable achievements of the Ashram in championing Gandhi's cause.

Key words: Gandhi, Khadi, Swaraj, Reconstruction, Bengal.

Introduction

MAHATMA GANDHI'S NOTION of rural reconstruction is profound in its own terms, just like its creator. Since the day it embarked, the ideas revolving around this notion had magnanimous positive impacts upon the rural communities of Bengal, Bombay and Madras presidencies. Not just economically, it contributed largely to the then-ongoing nationalist movement gushing across India. The devastating blows of British economic policies since 1793 brought wrath upon the village economy, which, in turn, crippled the indigenous industries and those who were dependent on them. Gandhi

was not a classical economist like Smith or Keynes. His economic ideas are unconventional and yet remarkable. Gandhi's ardent followers around India, known as "*Gandhipanthi*", followed this unconventionality as well when they established several institutions to put Gandhi's economic doctrines behind rural reconstruction into practice. One such institution, the Abhay Ashram in East Bengal, held the utmost significance.

When discussing the modus operandi of this institution, we must take the liberty to differentiate Abhay Ashram with its contemporary institutions like Satya Ashram of Daulatpore and Diamond Harbour, Samya Ashram of Chittagong, Shanti Ashram of Chandpur, Khadi Pratisthan, Gandhi Seva Sadan, Sarvodaya Ashram, etc. to get the idea[1]. Khadi Pratishthan and Abhay Ashram were different from one another in terms of nature and operations. Abhay Ashram wanted to educate their young minds to attain "*Self-realisation through service to their motherland[2]*". This *Self* was the Upanishad's *atma* – Which, according to Suresh Chandra Banerjee, its founder, was unspeakable and could not be described. One can only follow its path through unstoppable struggle[3]. This path of an individual *sadhana* revolved around national service and independence. Khadi Pratisthan, founded by Satish Chandra Das Gupta followed Gandhi's preaching inviolably, became distant from luxury and comfort, and involved themselves in constructive agenda.

On the contrary, Abhay Ashram had a tint of Bengali *Bhadralok* culture and its member, specifically Suresh Chandra Banerjee and Prafulla Chandra Ghosh tried to assimilate Gandhi's ideas with their own synthesis[4]. It was not so different from Gokhale's Servants of India Society in Pune. However, it had a more virile and daring outlook toward life and politics[5]. The other ashrams above came up with different agendas, too, as some followed revolutionary programs, while others, such as Gandhi Seva Sadan and Sarvodaya Ashram, solely focused on constructive work through *Charkha* and *Khadi*. Abhay Ashram never restrained itself only to constructive work but also wanted to spread the idea of freedom and self-reliance.

In 1910, Anami Sangha was established in Calcutta, and the future leaders of Abhay Ashram, namely Suresh Chandra Banerjee, Yugal Kishor Adhya, Prafulla Chandra Ghosh, Dhires Chandra Chakraborty, Nripendra Nath Basu, Debendra Nath Sen, and Annada Prasad Chowdhury were its members[6]. They wanted the Ashram to be "*a synthesis between religion and nationalism*" wrote Subhash Chandra Bose[7]. According to the brief experience that he received as a member of this group, they followed the teachings of Ramakrishna Paramhansadev and Vivekananda, but made a few changes that best

suited their goals. For instance, the memorandum published by the Ashram in 1924 mentioned that they were not merely interested in building Hospitals or dispensaries like most followers of Vivekananda. Thus, Subash Chandra Bose found it appropriate to call this group a "*Neo Vivekananda Group*"[8].

Based on Bose's account, we can now be certain of the ideals flowing through this group, but it would be a gross mistake if we take Vivekananda's philosophy as the only dominant principle that this institution and its members followed. To excavate other ideological trends in this Ashram, we need to shift our focus onto the very life of Suresh Chandra Banerjee[9], its founder. Banerjee was born into a middle-class family in a village called Noria, situated in Faridpore district of present-day Bangladesh. He grew up under his uncle's care in Chandpur, a village not far from Noria. He remained in Chandpur until his departure to Cooch Behar for higher education[10]. During his days in Chandpur, he used to meet sadhus of Vaishnav orientation and got fond of them, particularly the hymns of Govinda Kirtaniya[11] . He attended *Kirtans* and *Padavalis* propagated by those *Vaishnav* monks. He fancied visiting Yatras, and the play called *Bilbamangal* affected him to such an extent that he prayed to Lord Krishna every day to take him to Brindavan[12]. Later, he followed *Sakta* orientation and learned *Nam-Jap* or the chants for Goddess Kali[13], without adopting its violent practices. As far as Christianity was concerned, Christian charity work and the selflessness of the priests inspired him more than the Bible itself[14]. During his college days in Cooch Behar, Gurudas Gupta injected the *mantra* of seva into him. The idea of service as the best spiritual discipline along the path of religion proposed by him impressed young Suresh[15]. Then he came to Calcutta to study medicine. There, the doctrines of Buddhism and Buddha's example of redemption from desire and detachment from the humane attributes of compassion and sympathy for suffering humanity. This influence of Buddhism led him to choose the path of Brahmacharya, in spite of his parents' disapproval. Moreover, these concepts suited well with Vivekananda's preaching of *sadhana* through individual spirituality and nation-building[16]. Politics, along with religious spirituality, played a pivotal role in developing his ideals. He started reading *Bhagavat Gita* and *Upanishads* and found shastric justifications for his ideals. When he was in Chandpur, events like Boer War and Buxar Rebellion unfolded the grotesque nature of British Imperialism in front of him[17]. Later, he started attending anti-imperialism campaigns, and picketing of excise stores. During the Bengal partition movement of 1905, he also participated in *Rakshabandhan*, introduced by Rabindra Nath Tagore, to unify the

Bengalis under one banner[18]. He attended *lathi khyala*, and other physical activities organised by Anushilan Samiti though he never joined them.[19] Therefore, Banerjee developed a synthesis by mixing certain elements of religions and politics, which, he thought, would eventually help him and his comrades attain *Swaraj* (self-determination). This synthesis, along with Gandhian ideals of constructive activity, became the *vade mecum* of his own *Brindavan*, i.e., the Abhay Ashram.

Suresh Banerjee and his comrades from Anami Sangha went to places with religious or historical importance from 1910 to 1917[20]. In 1913, he created Rikhiya Math, a predecessor to Abhay Ashram, in Deoghar. With this Math, he started to practice his synthesis and engaged in many relief campaigns along with his friends for the first time. They also aimed to determine the future course of India's destiny[21]. As mentioned earlier, politics and religious spirituality remained together in his synthesis, as well as action and asceticism[22]. He and his comrades from Math participated in various relief campaigns. In 1913, Banerjee and his colleagues went to the Damodar flood relief mission in Burdwan and a flood relief in Brahminbariya where they helped Namashudra community[23]. There, he met one of his most trusted lieutenants, Prafulla Chandra Ghosh, and developed a lifelong camaraderie, which lasted until Banerjee's death in 1962[24]. In 1913, Yogen Chattopadhay gave him a copy of *Chaitanya Charitamrita,* and he got easily moved away with the ideas of love and charity propagated by *Chaitanya*[25]. He, therefore, made some structural alterations in Math's day-to-day life, and *Kirtans* became frequent in math. The members of this math went to several relief missions, and established schools to give free education to children.

Banerjee himself went to Chandpur and started his medical practice. He often gave free medical assistance to poor villagers. Banerjee met Gandhi at Shantiniketan and informed him about the math[26]. Gandhi showed interest and approved the math project, but caveated him not to exceed ascetic fanaticism, on which Banerjee concurred. To him, such behaviour was a clear sign of *durbolota* or weakness[27], which was the opposite of heroism that he wanted to instil in his countrymen. According to Banerjee, the amalgamation of *Shanti* and *Karma* ought to be the ideal of a *Birpurush* or Hero. Untouchability and terrorism were things that they opposed, and they believed that India could never attain swaraj if the people clung to these ineffectual practices.

In his autobiography, he clearly mentioned that the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920 worked as a catalyst in establishing this Ashram. Suresh Banerjee and most sangha members found

common grounds for *seva* within Vivekananda's teachings and Gandhi's ideals. The Math project needed an expansion to fulfil its endeavours. These maths or ashrams became a target for the government, treating them as training camps for the young revolutionaries. Thus, to safeguard their Math from such tragedy, Banerjee joined the imperial army in 1917. He showed his allegiance to the British empire to acquire a guarantee from the government that the Math would never face harsh treatment from its officials and the police[28]. He served on the Afghan front for three years and earned respect and admiration from his senior British officers. While serving as a field medic, he also saw the gallantry and sacrifice of the Massouds, who, despite being ill-equipped and few in numbers, continued their struggle against the large British army. Their stories inspired him and became an integral part of Banerjee's speeches in following years, which he thought would help Indians gain courage for their own struggle[29].

The non-cooperation reached Calcutta like wildfire in the late 1920s, and he resigned from the service. His prime focus shifted to building the Ashram. P.C. Ghosh resigned from his lucrative job as the Deputy Assay Master and joined him[30]. The other members gathered in a rented apartment on Badur Bagan Lane and discussed the plans for the Ashram. They decided on the name of the Ashram to be Sabita Ashram and selected a plot in Faridpore. The seven principles of the Ashram were drafted based on Sabarmati ashram's principles. These principles were as follows:

1. *Abhay Pratigya* (Vow of fearlessness)
2. *Satya Pratigya* (Vow of Truth)
3. *Satya sangshuddhi Pratigya* (Vow of Purity)
4. *Asteya Pratigya* (Vow of Non-Stealing)
5. *Birya Pratigya* (Vow of Activity)
6. *Prem Pratigya* (Vow of Love)
7. *Swadeshi Pratigya* (Vow of Swadeshi)[31]

With everything set, Suresh Banerjee and some of his Sangha brothers met Gandhi in January, 1921. Gandhi was on a pan-India tour during the Non-Cooperation Movement and stopped in Calcutta for a few days. Banerjee and Prafulla Chandra Ghosh met him during a public audience in Chittaranjan Das' residence at Rosa Road[32]. Then Banerjee expressed his desire to establish an ashram for constructive work in villages to Gandhi and showed him the Ashram's principles and goals. Gandhi advised a few changes. For instance, Banerjee wanted to give the Ashram the name Sabita Ashram[33]. Banerjee chose the name *Sabita* or Sun in Bengali. Gandhi opposed it and said, "Your aim is to make the Ashram what is sun to the world. I am too humble

to have such an ambitious project"[34].

He then advised them to change the Ashram's name to *Abhay* or Fearlessness, as the root of every religion was fearlessness. He also reminded him how fearlessness and sacrifice were the nuclei of the revolutionary principles of young Bengali patriots, who sacrificed themselves and attained martyrdom for their motherland. Suresh Banerjee and others agreed with this point. As far as Ashram's motto was concerned, Gandhi advised them that the Ashram should not devote itself to entities like the universal spirit or even the nation but to the realization of truth as the real purpose of service and adopt non-violence as the practical expression of the ideal[35]. Therefore, he added the following portion to it:*Where by service of the motherland is meant service of god and truth and absence of injury to other lands*[36].

When Gandhi read the Vows, he smiled in objection and said, "*I see you have intentionally omitted non-violence*"[37]. Banerjee replied to this by giving two points that he found appropriate. The Vow of Love was taken from Chaitanya's philosophy, which Banerjee followed ardently and believed that love was something more significant than Non-Violence. Gandhi concurred with him theoretically but differed with him on practicalgrounds. Banerjee further stated that with love in someone's consciousness, they would never resort to the path of violence[38]. Banerjee also mentioned that Bengalis must consume fish to maintain a steady protein intake. He further stated that Biharis consumed *rotis* made with protein-enriched *atta*, which gave them 2000 cal/day. This was not suitable for Bengalis, who consumed rice. Moreover, Bengalis eat fish as it is the most prominent and easy-to-avail source of their protein. He further added that Bengalis could not survive without fish[39]. Bengalis were not hard-working like Biharis but were intelligent enough because of their phosphorous intake. Hence, Bengalis cannot practice non-violence. Gandhi did not differ from him on this point and accepted it. He advised them to use Charkha and to wait for Das's orders.

Banerjee and Ghosh contributed some money they received when they left their respective jobs to establish this Ashram. Banerjee received 6000 Rs. when he left the army, while Ghosh received Rs 200. Banerjee gave 1000 Rs. to his friend Yogen Saha so that he could take care of his family[40]. During this movement, a large number of students started boycotting colleges and universities in support. This helped Banerjee to enlist young volunteers who would devote themselves to rural reconstruction agendas. Initially, Faridpur was selected for the construction of the first Ashram, but Banerjee established the first Ashram in an apartment in Dhaka. The first goal of this Ashram and Suresh Banerjee's was to establish a Residential

School. However, they had to prepare themselves for Non-Cooperation, and the goal seemed unimportant for the time being. As directed by Gandhi earlier, they waited for C.R. Das's orders, but when Das visited the Ashram in 1921, he did not give any significant orders to them. Hence, they turned their attention to politics and joined the Congress Committee. Suresh Banerjee thought of politics as the first stepping stone to constructive work. After a few months, Banerjee and Ghosh became members of the Congress working committee, and Nripen Basu became one of the three presidents. Although, the Congress scene of Dhaka back then was dominated by Anushilan Samiti[41]. Most of Suresh Banerjee's colleagues, including Ghosh, were the members of Samitis like Anushilan and Yugantar. Therefore, they were aware of the frivolous methods that those samitis adopted to achieve Swaraj and tried to avoid them[42]. This clash between them proved fatal as far as getting support from Congress was concerned. Thus, Banerjee and his fellow ashramites shifted their focus to constructive agendas.

The senior members of the Ashram wanted their young segments to be mentally and physically fit and prepare a regimental routine. The ashram members had to spin Charkha for at least an hour per day, held prayers in the morning and evening, engaged themselves in various household chores, practised *lathi khyala*, yoga, meditation, and other physical activities, and read books in leisure time. Many posh residents and commoners of Dhaka provided monetary aid to the Ashram. After Banerjee's arrest in 1921, the Dhaka Ashram, Under Annada Prasad Chowdhury, faced grave financial challenges[43]. In April 1923, the members went to Kumilla Ashram, and Dhaka Ashram ceased to operate.

Suresh Banerjee and some of his colleagues toured villages of East Bengal like Doha, Malikanda, Nawabagunj, Narayangunj, Fursail, Gopalgunj, Chandpur, Noria, Goalanda from mid-1921 till Banerjee's arrest in Faridpore. Their goal was to gather funds for the Dhaka ashram and Tilak Swaraj Fund through donations, establish congress committees, help the region's oppressed people through relief work, and spread nationalist sentiment among the villagers amid Non-Cooperation Movement[44]. Suresh Banerjee mentioned that while he was in Malikanda, he tried to convince influential lawyers to join Congress, but they declined his propositions. When he told Gandhi about this incident, he advised: "I am feeling the pulse of India - Borolokder chere diye janagan er kache jao, jodi tara tomar katha shone, tabe phire esho."[45](Trans. Leave the rich and go to the commoners, if they listen to you, then come back).

Banerjee started communicating with the commoners through

meetings in *hats* and *bazars* instead, as they were the people he was concerned with rather than those who were influential. In Nawabgunj, the situation was different from that of Malikanda. There, the rich and influential *Sahas* had to be inspired. They remained distant from Congress because of police oppression. However, with his heavily manipulative speeches, Banerjee was able to make them join Congress[46]. While doing all this, he realized that the need to achieve independence varied from person to person, and each individual had different interests, especially economic interests. According to him, the negligence of economic self-sufficiency of Indians was responsible for their oppressed status[47]. He established ashram branches in Malikanda and Nawabgunj and gave charges of those ashrams to some of the members of the Dhaka ashram. In Nawabgunj ashram, a wealthy man donated a piece of land, and a national school was established. This school became the biggest national school in Bengal[48]. After Nawabgunj, Suresh Banerjee went to Narayangunj and then to Chandpur, where he participated in one of his most significant relief works[49].

Non-Cooperation Movement gave a boost to mass agitations within agrarian sectors. The workers, who the owners oppressed, started to reflect on their grievances. The downtrodden workers or the Coolies in Assam's Tea Gardens joined this movement to end the miserable plantation life[50]. They firmly believed in Gandhi and this movement and considered him their messiah. When they received Gandhi's orders to leave the plantations, they started migrating toward their homeland with their families, leaving everything behind[51]. When the migrating workers reached Chandpur via Karimgunj, a regiment of Gurkha Rifles ambushed them with their bayonets fixed while the workers were sleeping on a field near Chandpur Railway station. Many received injuries, and those who succumbed were thrown into the nearby river with stone blocks tied to them. Congress retaliated with a strike across Chandpur, initiating the Bengal Assam Railway strikes of 1921. Congress thought this could bring swaraj in East Bengal, which, according to some, was unlikely to happen. Banerjee and his comrades were luckily at Chandpur and rushed to the coolie relief. On top of this inhumane atrocity committed by the government, the coolies faced an outbreak of Cholera. The local dispensary was filled with injured coolies, and a large make-shift hospital was of utmost urgency. Banerjee, therefore, requested the local Congress committee to grant permission to use some of the big riverside storage depots owned by Amjad Akan, a prominent jute mill owner. His request was granted, and 3000 coolies were treated there[52]. Many young volunteers participated in this relief work, namely Kalikishor

Ghosh from Noakhali, Ashutosh Chakraborty from Chandpore, Jiten Sen from Palong, Nripendra Nath Basu from Abhay Ashram Dhaka[53]. Even Ashutosh Dasgupta of Anushilan Samiti joined these volunteers. The Bishop of Assam Mr. Walsh assisted them wholeheartedly and made arrangements for medicines required to treat cholera whenever asked while ensuring a steady flow of life-saving medicines[54]. His wife Mrs. Walsh gave moral support to the patients. After a few weeks, wounded and infected were ready to continue their journey back to their motherland. However, Banerjee was left with 13 orphan children. To help them, a temporary orphanage was created by him in Chandpur, under the supervision of Rev. Grove, a Christian missionary. However, as the political turmoil prevented him from engaging in non-political activities then, he had to abandon them. After a few months, 10 of those orphans were returned to Banerjee and 3 of them remained with Groves, who were converted to Christianity later[55].

After this relief mission, Banerjee went to Noria and Palong for donations and to meet other political commitments. He established strong contact with Maulana Tamizuddin, an influential Muslim leader from Palong. They went to Gopalgunj and heard about the proselytization of the untouchables. The Nama sudras in Gopalgunj and Orakandi were neglected by Congress, and the Christian missionaries assisted them in their hour of need. This forged very strong bonds between these two communities, and the latter took advantage of it. The Namasudras perceived Congress to be a political party for middle and upper-class Hindus. On top of this, the missionary influence prevented them from joining in Non-Cooperation. Banerjee, upon hearing this, decided to establish an ashram for Namasudras.[56] The support from the untouchables was substantial for the ongoing movement. He went to Calcutta and informed Gandhi about this ashram project. Gandhi gave the approval and promised monetary support as well. Gandhi told him:"You will have to bridge up the gulf between the two Communities by eating at the same time in the house of Brahmins and of the Namasudras."[57]

Had it been established, the Abhay Ashram of Gopalgunj would have worked for the emancipation of *Nama Shudras* or the Untouchables in that region along with Shanti Sena. Although, after a fiery speech in Faridpore town a few days later, he was arrested in 1921, with Pir Badshah Miah, an influential Muslim leader of Faridpore. With his arrest, the plans for the Gopalgunj Ashram died in vain. During his imprisonment in Alipore Jail, he helped the patients in the Prison hospital and helped the doctors arrive at correct diagnoses[58]. When Gandhi withdrew Non-Cooperation Movement after Chauri Chaura Incident in 1922, the Congress leaders inside the Alipore jail

divided themselves into two factions. The faction led by C.R. Das, including the Big Five, opposed Gandhi and decided to join the Legislative Council. The other faction, led by Shyamsundar Chakraborty, remained loyal to Gandhi and opposed joining the Legislative Council[59]. Since Banerjee supported the latter, this watershed event closed the last chance of getting support from Congress and the Ashram, Hence, he had no option left but to focus on constructive work, without any assistance[60].

In 1922, Banerjee returned to Dhaka from Alipore Jail, only to be greeted with the news that they were on the verge of closing the Ashram in Dhaka. Since 1921, the Dhaka Ashram has been moribund due to deteriorated khadi sales, scarcity of donations, and the lack of strong leadership. Dhaka Ashram in 1922 had 20 members and had to run the Ashram with Rs. 160 per day, which was insufficient[61]. Banerjee, therefore, started his donation campaigns again across East Bengal and Kolkata. On the other hand, during his stay in Alipore Jail, the other senior members of the Ashram selected a few plots in Faridpore, Kumilla, and Dhaka. While asking for donations, Banerjee decided to start from scratch by establishing a new Ashram. He, therefore, finalised the land on the side of the Pilgrims Road, Kumilla, and purchased it with Rs. 3300. Satish Das Gupta, along with wealthy local citizens and commoners of Kumilla donated the money[62]. The scenic beauty of this land, its surroundings, and the natural pond made this place perfect for establishing an Ashram. The buildings were constructed and the Ashram was ready to run by April 1923, but new challenges sprung up too. The Ashram had some volunteers but could not start relief work due to the lack of funds. The situation deteriorated to such an extent that they did not have enough money to buy daily food[63]. Alas, Suresh Banerjee and Nripendra Nath Basu had to start their medical practice. He went to Chandpur and continued his practice there, while Basu went to Kumilla town. Banerjee stopped practicing in 1924 when Ashram finally recovered from the monetary deficit[64].

Yet the Ashram Dispensary was not ready to run properly. Due to the lack of experience, Banerjee could not procure life-saving medicines. During those days, Cholera, Malaria, and Black Fever were common ailments, but the medicines required were hard to obtain. Mahesh Bhattacharjee of Kumilla came to their rescue in this dire situation. He offered the choice of Rs. 1500 or medicines equivalent to that amount. Ashram went with the latter option, but as mentioned earlier, they ignored medicines required for Malaria, Black fever, and Cholera due to their inexperience. Thus, in order to get those medicines, Banerjee had to ask for donations again. Here, the opportunity came

to him with open arms. In Bajapti, the outbreak of Malaria devastated village life. Banerjee and Basu established aid camps there with the help of local government officials. The Director of Health and the Municipal Hakim came to the relief camp one day for inspection. He became pleased with the relief work and donated 40 lbs. of Quinine[65]. The director also appealed to the district board of Tripura, and a large amount of medicines were donated to the relief camp. Suresh Banerjee received a donation of Rs. 600 from the Municipal Hakim to purchase medical equipment for the camp. Bajapti relief, which lasted from June to July 1923, became successful. Suresh Chandra Banerjee acquired permission from relief samitis to use the medical instruments and surplus medicines available in those aid camps for the Ashram dispensary. Hence, the deficit of medicines and equipment were addressed finally.[66]

In 1924, 4175 patients appeared 14659 times in the dispensary to seek treatment for their ailments[67]. Each year, approximately 75% of the patients received medicines for free. Only 25% of the patients were asked to pay for medicines, albeit in accordance with their financial capacity. Poor farmers, workers, weavers, sanitary workers, and backward classes were exempted from paying for the medicines. The dispensary also worked as a propaganda office. Each of those patients received the Ashram's message of *Deshseva* and was told to use Khadi. Those who were literate were told to recite the Ashram's vows written on the back of their prescriptions to get medicines[68]. Kumilla dispensary's popularity expanded so much that patients from different districts started coming. A surgical ward with a capacity of 20 beds was established in 1925.

Khadi department was under the management of Annada Prasad Chowdhury. However, after a few years, his post as the manager of the Khadi department was challenged by his peers. They accused him of being just a manager with little or no experience in weaving, which should have been the quintessential part of his skill set[69]. Although, with his grit and determination, Chowdhury proved his critics wrong. Under his leadership, the production in Kumilla Ashram increased from 21,013 lbs. in 1924 to 80,000 lbs. in 1925. The sales also increased from 21,822 Rs. in 1924 to 74,620 Rs. in 1925[70]. During 1924-1925, Abhay Ashram, Kumilla served 10,000 spinners and 150 weavers, and about 20 groups of villages[71]. In 1924, they established Khadi centres in nearby villages such as Barkamta and Feni[72]. People preferred the mill-woven Khadi more than the hand-woven version because of its cost efficiency and sturdiness. This created gargantuan difficulties for Khadi industries as well as the Khadi movement in East Bengal. Abhay Ashram reduced the cost and made a record. A pair of Dhoties

(8×44") which cost Rs. 7-8-0 in 1921, cost Rs. 6 in 1922, Rs. 5 in 1925, and Rs. 3-12-0 in January 1926. This price reduction left the Bengal Laxmi Cotton Mills far behind in Khadi race[73]. Agents from Malikanda (under Bikrampore Division) branch of Abhay Ashram supplied Charkha to the women of Majpara and surrounding villages[74]. They also paid these women for their Khadi produce. All India Spinners' Association invested Rs. 35,000 in the Ashram's Khadi department. After Ghosh's return from Khadi Pratisthan in 1926, he associated himself with three departments and helped in their improvement. He applied new and better dyeing techniques that he learned in pratisthan to improve the quality of the Ashram's Khadi, without increasing the costs[75]. In 1929, the Ashram had 63 dedicated members in their Khadi Department[76]. In 1930, the Ashram sold khadi worth Rs. 1,86,000[77]. In a letter to Gandhi, P.C. Ghosh wrote how Charkha helped them in flood relief in Tripura. He mentioned how the donations for introducing Charkha to flood-affected areas from various organisations and individuals such as Seth Ramanlal and Harivallabh C. Shah from the Servants of India Society relief fund helped them. He gave a brief report of the entire relief work, which included giving rice doles and securing work permits for the villagers. He maintained that the rains impeded rice cultivation and how spinning helped them to sustain themselves in the midst of this gloom and despair. He maintained "…the production of yarns by the end of the month of July was only 57 lbs., but in August, it rose to 375 lbs. and 227 spinners earned Rs. 193-11-9, and in September it came up to 1,034 lbs. and 414 spinners earned Rs. 588-6-0". It also attracted further investments. In addition to all this, Ashram also helped sell rice at cost price, which helped the downtrodden villagers from the opportunistic local merchants selling rice at higher prices[78].

With the help of P.C. Ghosh's expertise in chemistry, farmers of surrounding villages could cultivate their lands three times a year. The Kumilla Ashram became successful in cultivating cabbage for the first time, which used to be imported from Dhaka. Soon the farmers started to use Ashram's techniques, and similar success was achieved in cultivating tomatoes. Cotton seeds were given to farmers from the Ashram, which had two positive outcomes. Ashrams would buy cotton from local farmers at a just rate, which would give them a fair price. The steady flow of cotton from nearby fields would help the Ashrams to improve their Khadi production drastically. The pool inside the Ashram helped in fish hatching. Cow rearing became an important part of ashram life as it helped them in agriculture work and dairy[79].

Since the Sangha days, Suresh Banerjee saw Santinikentan and Hridwar Gurukul University as ideal educational institutes and

wanted to establish something similar[80]. They thought that by spreading national education, they could easily touch the hearts of millions. Thus, a school was necessary, where they would train young Indians with the *mantra* of sacrifice and *seva* and install them as teachers in various regions across India[81]. In 1923, a school was established within the ashram premises to give young minds of Kumilla proper and fundamental education. This school was the first of its kind in Kumilla and became a prominent school in the district within a few years, with most of the pupils belonging to the Muslim community. In 1923, it started with 20 students; in 1925, the student's count crossed 150 marks. By the end of the 1920s, it had 31 lower sections or primary schools in Dhaka, Tripura, and Bankura districts and three upper sections at Kumilla, Malikanda, and Nawabgunj. The number of students during this period of review was 1,257[82]. The purpose of education among the youth should be the improvement of creative energy in all its dimensions, Banerjee thought. This education would form a certain breed of men who would show intellectual flair and succeed in their battlefields of life. Banerjee, like Gandhi, criticised the western type of education and wanted to uphold national education. This national education was essential, he thought, to bring forth man's divine nature and power flawlessly. Hence, they developed a complex syllabus for this Shikhayatan. In the four years of the lower or primary section, Bengali language, history, geometry, maths, drawing, music, acting, gardening and basic science were taught. In the four years of the upper section, Bengali literature, the first elements of English, Sanskrit, Hindi, History, Geometry, Drawing, Agriculture, *go seva*, or cow rearing, Political Science, Economics, and other subjects based on student's preferences were taught. The auxiliary subjects were carpentry, tailoring, agriculture, gardening, textile production and organization, bookbinding, and literature[83]. These subjects were part of their final sections. On top of these, the swadeshi spirit is self-consciously cultivated through adequate intellectual development. Boys (later girls) between 8 to 12 were given admission to this school. While in the hostel, they used to share their chores like cooking, gardening, cleaning, and maintenance work with fellow students. They had to follow the ashrams routine, which included the spinning of Charkha. They could visit their parents and relatives yearly during the Durga puja festivities. The aim was to forge a common spirit and unity and make a pool of initiates, which would initially spread nationalist sentiment through teaching and then receive further lessons in discipline, character building, and swadeshi spirit[84].

Some of the members of this Ashram wrote books and taught in this school as well. They used Bengali as the language of instruction.

Among those books, P.C. Ghosh's "*Sadharon Gyan*" (Trans, General Knowledge) and "*Bigyaner Kotha*" (Trans, Writings on Science); Deben Sen's "*Golpe Itihash*" (Trans, History through Stories) and Dr. Nripen Basu's "*Shastya Bigyan*" (Trans, Health Science) were significant. Ghosh taught Chemistry in Ashram's school for some time. He used to make slide shows for students with Magic Lantern and gave them presentations on Sun, Earth, Planets, Stars, and Meteors[85]. With 2500 books, a library was established in Kumilla Ashram in 1924, which had 200 registered members. Many prominent newspapers, such as Ananda Bazar Patrika, Rangoon Mail, Prabudh Bharat, were available for members[86]. A separate school for untouchables was opened in 1924, which helped the children get rid of alcoholism and receive a quality education, which, according to Banerjee, would help them fight for their equality and rights. A night school was established as well, with ten students in 1924[87]. By the 1930s, the Ashram had four national secondary schools and forty primary schools with 1500 registered pupils. In November 1931, the *Abhay Ashram Kanya Shikhayatan* was established by Labnya Lata Chanda and Yamuna Ghosh, Prafulla Ghosh's sister, to promote education among women. Seth Jamnalal Bajaj along with Laxmibai Joshi of Bhagini Mandal of Akalna and Santaben of Mahila Ashram of Vile Parle paid a visit to the Ashram in 1931 and donated Rs. 5,500 for the Kanya Sikhayatan[88]. This was the only national institute for girls in Bengal. When Mahatma Gandhi launched the Kasturba Nidhi initiative to educate Indian women living in villages, this school became its first centre in Bengal. In 1931, a medical school, a dispensary, and a hospital were also established[89]. In 1946, Labanya Lata Chanda and Yamuna Ghosh established a school for fundamental education in Balarampore[90]. When Swami Vivekananda's brother Bhupendra Nath Dutta, a famous ethnographer, visited Kumilla Ashram in 1928, he showed felicity to P.C. Ghosh by saying "*Eito kaje Communism*"(This is communism at work)[91].

On Banerjee's invitation, Gandhi made a visit to Kumilla Ashram in 1925. Banerjee gave him a tour of the Ashram, and Gandhi liked its natural setting and its constructive agenda enormously[92]. He reminded Banerjee of the true essence of reconstruction, i.e., self-sufficiency. He suggested to him use of Charkha, which would make people self-reliant. He further added how production of Khadi could be decisive in Ashram's long run[93]. Banerjee accepted this advice with steadfastness and made a few changes to strengthen the Khadi department. Abhay Ashram and Khadi Pratisthan jointly sold khadi worth four and a half lakhs in 1926. Ashram also produced the requisite atmosphere by organising tours and spreading propaganda with magic lantern shows.[94] That year, the Ashram joined in Assam flood relief

work. In 1929, the Ashram and the district congress committee organized a relief mission when the Goomty embankment was breached and caused a flood in Kumilla[95].

After their engagements in Salt Satyagraha of the 1930s, Banerjee, Ghosh, and other members of Ashram were sentenced to 2 and a half years of imprisonment in Alipore Jail. Banerjee received an early release due to his deteriorated health caused by Spinal Tuberculosis. His fellow ashram members were released shortly after the Gandhi-Irwin pact[96]. Even though the government proscribed the Ashram, a *tour de force* by Nripen Basu stopped the government from confiscating Ashram properties. A few hours after the ordinance was issued, Basu donated the ashram properties to the All India Spinners' Association (A.I.S.A.). When the police arrived, they saw a plaque bearing AISA's name on the gates. Therefore, after inspecting the papers, they had to return empty-handed. However, this incident did not curb the entry of volunteers, as the number rose to 700 by the end of that year[97]. At that time, the Ashram had 100 workers and students in Kumilla. Thorugh its branches in Dhaka, Midnapore, and Bankura, with as many as 150 active workers, constructive work, a boycott of foreign clothes, and propaganda work were carried out. By the end of 1931, the primary objective of the Ashram was to develop a girl's school and a Mahila Ashram[98]. However, when the movement resumed in 1932, the government confiscated the ashram properties finally and the ban was imposed in 1933, which lasted till the enactment of a new constitution in 1937[99]. In 1935, Akhil Dutta, the deputy president of the assembly, recommended Governor-General-In-Council to lift the ban on Abhay Ashram but to no avail[100]. Suresh Banerjee came back to Kumilla Ashram in 1931 but remained under police surveillance[101]. The government forbade him from giving interviews or trying to make contact with anyone. He had permission to send letters, but every single one of them was censored. Moreover, the government seized Ashram's bank accounts and directed Union Bank of Kumilla to suspend the transactions pending in Ashram's name[102]. When asked, R.N. Ried, a member of the executive council, the Bengal Legislative Assembly, gave the following statement

> *The point was that the Ashram was declared an unlawful association under the Ordinance and steps were taken that amount may not be used thereon[103].*

Banerjee could cultivate the lands of the Ashram to cover the expenses. Although, he had to hand over the produce to the local District Magistrate, for which he received some compensation for his expenses.

The Ashram could not work properly till the late 1930s. Meanwhile, after the establishment of the CSP in 1934, Indian Politics faced a paradigm shift. Gandhi's most trusted allies were now against him. His political and economic ideas were seen to have become obsolete and vague. The Gandhians of Bengal were also on the receiving end of its impact. After the death of Jatindra Mohan Sen Gupta in 1932, the Gandhians in Bengal became weak[104]. Some were arrested due to suspicion, and some left the Gandhian way and found other paths to achieving Swaraj. As a result of this shift, the reconstruction work faced collateral damage. Banerjee also experienced a massive ideological shift, as he inclined himself toward socialism[105]. An intercepted letter to Jagadish Basu from Suresh escalated the suspicion further, where he wrote, "When I began my life, I was a devoted disciple of Vivekananda – then I became a disciple of Gandhi and now Lenin[106]". Suresh Banerjee formed the Bengal Labour Association in Calcutta in 1931, which had close ties with the Congress. In 1934, Banerjee joined Congress Socialist Party and later became the Bengal Provincial Trade Union Congress leader. From 1935 to 1937, he presided over the All-India Trade Union Congress. In 1937, he became the president of B.P.C.C. and was an elected member of the Bengal Legislative Council as a representative of labour. After his complete revival from spinal tuberculosis, he shifted his attention to organizing the labourers, which became his primary job for the later period[107]. During the Quit India movement, he successfully made contact with the labourers, who became the primary source of donations [108]. The other instances of his shift could be seen throughout the end of the 1930s.

Suresh Banerjee described that Abhay Ashram as a communist state and represented a structure for a new state. According to him, the rural community engaging themselves for the upliftment of their neighbouring villages could bring a social transformation. Banerjee championed the idea of a centralized state, which was something Gandhi never prescribed. However, Banerjee never deviated from the Gandhian way. Socialism was something that a lot of people considered to be a way to defend the poor and the downtrodden from the oppression of capitalists. In that way, it was similar to Gandhi's ideas of service and decentralization, which was why many constructive workers accepted socialism. Banerjee was one of them, a Gandhian Socialist, like Ram Manohar Lahia himself. Although, the Indian situation was different, and thus socialism never found footing. Here, Gandhi played a crucial role in bridging the rift between the Indian situation and socialism. He pointed out the practical way to transform a cultural idea into the organisation of national resources.

Therefore, in the change to Banerjee's thought, Vivekananda and Gandhi made it possible to draw a continuous line between Chaitanya and Lenin[109].

By the 1940s, The Abhay Ashram in Kumilla and its other branches in Dhaka, Nawabgunj, Malikanda, Samsabad, and Galimpore were moribund[110]. During the famine in Bengal in 1943, its relief work was nowhere to be seen. After serving for over fifteen years, their practised skill was unavailable, and the nationalists were imprisoned during the Quit India movement from 1942 till 1947[111]. Since January 1947 till the partition, they remained occupied in relief and rehabilitation of communal riot victims. The relief work progressed under the Nripendra Nath Basu and Annada Prasad Chowdhury. When Gandhi paid a visit to the Ashram in January, 1947 during his tour to Noakhali, the Ashram gave him one lakh rupees for the relief work[112]. Abhay Ashram Kanya Sikhayatan became the home of 30 girls and women for a year and, later, 100 more. Labanya Prabha Dutta and Yamuna Ghosh took care of them. The Ashram also became the residence of university students who had been seriously affected by the riots in those areas. The Ashram helped them to remain there for the time being and assisted them in getting past their exams[113]. After the partition in 1947, Abhay Ashram's properties in East Pakistan were seized by the Pakistani Government. The Ashram's headquarter was transferred to West Bengal. The Abhay Ashram centres in Birati, Balarampur (in Midnapore district) continued to work, but on a relatively small scale. Balarampore ashram had departments of textile, food industry, animal husbandry and agriculture[114]. The last surviving branch of Abhay Ashram was at Birati, which closed, and a two-storeyed textile factory was established on its carcass[115]

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KINGSHUK BHATTACHARJEE is a Postgraduate Student of the Department of South and South East Asian Studies, University of Calcutta. Address: 121, Surya Sen Street, Dabgram 1, Siliguri, Darjeeling, P.O. Rabindra Sarani, PIN: 734006, West Bengal, India. Email: kingshukb0@gmail.com. Cell: 9932673650

Kasturbai: Transformation of an Innocent Girl to a *Dharmic* Woman

Prof *Anupma Kaushik*

ABSTRACT

Kasturbai's life reflects the journey of an innocent Sanatani girl from girlhood to womanhood. It is journey of a girl who learns that this life is not just about pleasure but about Dharma i.e. duty. It is journey of a girl who gets married to a normal boy who becomes extraordinary and Kastur had to cope with it while coping with other things that normal girls and women face like motherhood. On this extraordinary journey Kastur learns to shift from self interest to self abnegation. It was not an easy journey. As Emma Tarlo says we do not get to know about her first hand, so we have to depend upon others account to know her.[1]

Key words: Kasturbai, mother, teacher, wife, dharmic

Biography

KASTURBAI WAS BORN as Kasturbai Gokuldas Kapadia on 11th April 1869 at Porbandar to Gokuladas Kapadia and Vraj Kunwar. Her name *Kastur* means musk which is an aromatic substance which comes from the musk deer. Probably her parents wanted her aroma to be spread and it did. She and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi got engaged when she was seven years old and got married in 1882 when both were 13 years old. The two families were friends and Kasturbai was elder to Mohandas by few months. Kasturbai had not received schooling prior to her marriage and Mohandas taught her basic writing and reading skills. She lost her own parents and her husband's parents soon. She lived with her in laws in early years of her married life while her husband was mostly away.[2]

Later she also got involved in public causes and national movement following her husband's footsteps and encouraged by him. They became parents of four sons and grandparents in due course and shared life for almost 62 years till she died in 1944 in a prison with her head in her husband's lap at the age of 75. During this time she went through happiness, disappointments, health issues, conflict of ideas and like any other woman she learnt to cope with them. What was special about her life was that she was the wife of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and she had to learn to keep pace with him.[3]

KASTURBAI AS WIFE

Kasturbai was a little girl when she got married and went to live with her new family in 1882. Girls in India at that time were taught and trained to obey their husbands and in-laws. However every human being has some individuality and hence every new relationship goes through some conflicts and adjustments. Kasturbai and Mohandas also went through their share of conflicts and adjustments. Mohandas tried to control Kasturbai in the early years of their married life which she resisted if she found them unreasonable. Mohandas studied, travelled, had new experiences, changed and imbibed new ideas from people and books. Kasturbai stayed back initially and worried about problems such as her sons growing up without their father. When they were together she had to deal with his changing ideas, habits and practices which he wanted Kasturbai and their sons to imbibe. She resisted things she thought were unreasonable or unjust but accepted ultimately due to her husband's persuasion, her circumstances, upbringing and *Dharma*. Her life was not ordinary because her husband was not ordinary. He cared for her but was also strict. As she herself said, "He never pulls me up without a valid reason, though he always tells me if I am any time at fault or short sighted or not very thoughtful. He respects me. If I am held in high esteem among my friends it is because of him.."[4] Gandhi also took care of Kasturbai whenever she was unwell. In South Africa when she was ill he served her by massaging and nursing her.[5] He would enquire about her health when she was ill and away from him. He would also write loving letters to her. She would read them again and again and they would help in her recovery.[6] He also took care of her on her deathbed in Aga Khan Palace prison, where he would sit with her to comfort her and he also insisted on washing her dirty kerchiefs.[7] However some believe she was not treated properly by Gandhi. As Dubey claims she had to give up her privacy

and normal life; her own and her son's needs and desires; accept strangers in her house and ashram; took rudeness and neglect from her husband; his friendships and commitment to a greater cause; and she had to accept ashram and prison as her home.[8] Similarly, B M Bhalla says that Mohandas took his wife for granted and did not grant her any autonomy. This rattled and confused Kasturbai. At times Gandhi was indifferent, critical and dismissive of her. Their differences surfaced whenever Kasturbai asserted her own individuality and resisted his arbitrary decisions. Kasturbai was capable of sizing up the situation pragmatically. She stopped putting demands on her husband, which ultimately convinced Gandhi of her strength, power and love. Erikson remarks that Kasturba's strength of renunciation was more consistent than Gandhi's.[9] In fact she asserted herself at times and let go at others. She asserted herself in 1938-39 summers when there was outbreak of cholera but she refused to take anti- cholera inoculation and Gandhi could not force her to take it.[10] When Gandhi took the vow of celibacy they both were around 37 years of age. Kasturbai agreed without protest. He acknowledged that "If anything she stood above me. But for her unfailing co-operation I might have been in the abyss. She helped me to keep wide awake and true to my vows. She stood by me in all my political fights and never hesitated to take the plunge."[11] He also accepted, "in my life Ba was woven like warp and woof. So without her I do feel indeed, very lonely."[12] In fact other women admired her for her devotion and loyalty to Gandhi and her readiness to face any amount of sacrifice and suffering for his sake. In their eyes Ba ranked with Sita and Savitri.[13]

BA (THE MOTHER)

With time Karturbai became *Ba* (mother) and then grandmother not only for her children but for a lot of other people as well. She was a loving mother and grandmother not only to her children and grand children but also to those who lived with her in the ashram. Sushila Nayar recounted her mother's experience of spending one day with Ba in ashram and how it changed her mind. She said how Ba listened to her mother sympathetically as her mother unburdened herself on Ba. In fact Sushila Nayar says her mother simply fell in love with Ba and could talk to her as only two women can. With Gandhi her mother felt rarefied because of his talks of renunciation but with Ba she witnessed renunciation. Ba touched her heart and she saw Sita and Savitri in Ba and was assured that her children have a mother in Ba. She also found Ba

cheerful and soothing in the prison too. Gandhi though that Kasturba's popularity was because of the fact that she was his wife but Sushila Nayar's account tells that Kasturba's sweet nature was also very important. However Gandhi was correct that self sacrifice was Kasturba's strength and *Sanatani Bharat* respected that in her. Not only her mother, Sushila Nayar herself found Ba very agile, neat, sweet, loving, and motherly and her motherliness pervaded the atmosphere around her. She was the only one in the Ashram with whom Sushila Nayar felt at ease and who looked after her needs. She recounted that she felt at ease with Ba. Sushila Nayar also found that Ba kept a watchful eye on Gandhi's needs. She also found her very knowledgeable and unaffected by money and royal glamour. She also found how patiently Ba dealt with nervous breakdown of her son Devdas Gandhi and how she nursed him back to normal. Ba also visited her sons and others in prisons and consoled them.[14] She loved her children and grand children and felt better when they were around her. But she loved all children including those of animals.[15] Her grandchild Kahana stayed with her and she looked after him with vigilance and enthusiasm of a young mother. She knew a good deal of child psychology and hence the little boy never missed his mother. The grandmother was everything to him.[16] He missed her when she went to Rajkot to take part in a *satyagraha*. Gandhi could not manage the child without her and had to send him to his mother in absence of Ba.[17]

KASTURBAI AS TEACHER AND PUPIL

Mohandas learnt the technique of non violent non cooperation from Kasturbai. As Kasturbai would not cooperate with Mohandas when she thought what he was asking her to do was not reasonable. Gandhi acknowledged that as young bride she was strong willed and that enabled her to become his teacher in the art and practice of non-violent non-co-operation. He said that he learnt that technique from her. The practice began with his own family. Later he introduced it in 1906 in the political field it came to be known by the name of *Satyagraha* and Kasturbai was among the *satyagrahi* in South Africa.[18] Mohandas changed with time and successfully persuaded his wife to adapt to the changes. In South Africa first he coaxed Kasturbai to take to socks and boots and later dissuaded her from using them.[19] Later in South Africa he also persuaded Kasturba to live a simple life by living a simple life himself. Kasturbai herself said that although her husband gave her gold ornaments she could not wear them as Gandhi was living a life of

self abnegation.[20] Gandhi himself acknowledged that in South Africa he regarded himself as her teacher and he harassed her as he blindly loved her. One such incident was of removing the dirty chamber-pot.[21] In another incident which he himself tells about is how he extorted her consent for returning ornaments gifted to them in South Africa as token of thanks.[22] In South Africa in 1913 when he wanted to include women in protest against law outlawing non Christian marriages, he asked Kasturbai how she will protest against this law which is against her self-respect and legitimate status. He suggested that she along with other women can court arrest and go to jail to protest along with men just as Devi Sita followed Shri Ram. And Kasturbai went to prison.[23] In South Africa when Gandhi wanted Kasturbai to give up salt and pulses he himself gave them up for a year to give her moral support.[24] In Satyagraha Ashram he explained to her why she cannot prepare special food for her sons even occasionally as every *satyagrahi* should be treated equally as the world expected that from them.[25] Similarly when Gandhi adopted Khadi and wanted women to wear it women including Kasturbai objected saying it's too heavy to wear and wash. But Gandhi convinced her saying that you can carry a child's weight for nine months but cannot wear heavy sari for the sake of the country and to protect honour of the poor women. Finally Kasturbai adopted Khadi for her habitual wear.[26] So much so that once when she had hurt her toes she was given soft bandage but she refused to use it saying she will only use Khadi bandage even if it is extremely rough.[27] Once Gandhi wanted Kasturbai to vacate her room for Harijan agitators, she told him to offer his room to them as they are his sons. Gandhi persuaded her by saying that if they are his sons than they must be her sons too and she gave them her room.[28]

She regretted not paying attention to studies in young age and tried to learn later on. She tried to learn both Guajarati and Hindi. Hindi she learnt from Mirabehn and Geography and History from Bapu even in her last days. She learnt making napkins from prisoners just before her death.[29] She also learnt to play carom and loved to watch others play badminton.[30] She also shared her knowledge with others, be it fellow prisoners or jail officials.[31] She also kept a diary.[32] She also tried to learn English in 1930 when she was nearly 60 years old because she wanted to pick up letters addressed to her and to be able to write address herself.[33] When Mahadev Desai died in Aga Khan Palace prison Gandhi started teaching Kasturbai the Gita, Gujarati, Geography and History.[34]

BRAVE WOMAN

In South Africa she suffered from excessive bleeding and needed to be operated upon however she could not be given chloroform due to weakness. She went through the operation without chloroform. Gandhi remembered that her face showed how much she was suffering but not even once she made any sound of pain. He also acknowledged that anyone else would have made a lot of hue and cry but she showed exemplary calm and courage.[35] She also refused to take beef tea to strengthen her although doctor treating her insisted she should take it. She was ready to die rather than take beef tea as medicine. She told Gandhi that she would rather die than pollute her body with beef tea. In that condition she left doctors place travelled by train and reached the ashram in a hammock. She not only kept calm but also comforted Gandhi saying "nothing will happen to me. Don't worry."[36] She was a brave woman and Gandhi knew she was very brave.[37] On a visit to Kausani she came to know that a lion's cub went round Gandhi's cot, as he was sleeping in the open. Next night Kasturbai carried her cot outside and slept near Gandhi.[38]

Her bravery was inspiring. It inspired the likes of mother of Pyarelal Nayyar. His mother wanted Pyarelal to be a government servant and went to meet Gandhi to ask him to free her son but meeting Ba and learning of her sacrifices and hardship in following Gandhi she had a change of heart.[39] Kasturbai always worried but understood the reason behind long fasts undertaken by Gandhi. When Gandhi went for a fast for 21 days in Aga Khan Palace she understood that it was necessary although she worried about his health. However as per her duty as wife she herself also went on a diet of milk and fruits whenever he went on a fast.[40]

She had taken vow of poverty and limited herself to clothes which were absolutely necessary. She had cultivated the spirit of non attachment, non possession and non abnegation.[41] So much so that she slept in the verandah with her grandson in the *Sevagram* leaving her room to others.[42]

After Mahadev's death in Aga Khan Palace she had a premonition that she will be the next. She told Sushila Nayar and others clearly that this is final goodbye, meaning that she will not get out of prison alive [43] and she was right in having that premonition.

PATRIOT AND IDEAL WORKER

From a young woman interested in good clothes and jewelry she now became a mature woman interested in greater causes

concerned with social, economic and political betterment of masses. The process started in 1904 when she helped Mohandas establish a cooperative village near Durban called Phoenix Settlement. In 1913 in South Africa she participated in a protest against the treatment of Indian immigrants and was sentenced to three months in prison. She continued to take part in civil action, protests and management of ashrams in South Africa and India despite deterioration in her health. In 1917 she helped women farmers of Champaran, while in 1922 she participated in a nonviolent civil disobedience (*satyagraha*) movement in Borsad, Gujarat. She joined in a number of civil disobedience campaigns in the early 1930s and was arrested and jailed several times. In early 1939 she participated in nonviolent protests against the British in Rajkot, after the women in the city appealed directly to her. She was arrested and kept in solitary confinement for a month near the city, during which time her health further deteriorated. In 1942 she was arrested again, for participating in the Quit India movement, and was imprisoned again.[44] In fact she died in Aga Khan Palace prison in 1944.

Kasturbai loved to do work and if someone asked her not to take trouble she would continue to help saying "the more the merrier and quicker the work".[45] Once she went to the dairy and asked for work and started helping immediately, by preparing fodder while laughing. Once Goshibehn visited the Ashram but hesitated to clean her utensils so Kasturbai picked up her plate saying she will do it.[46] She believed to be busy all the time even when she was old and often Gandhi would remonstrate her for straining herself unnecessarily.[47]

DHARMIC WOMAN

Dharma has two meaning- religion and duty. Kasturbai followed both. She was very religious and used to read religious books like *Bhagwad Puran*, *Bhagwad Gita* and Ramayan everyday or asked someone to read them for her. She loved visiting temples, singing *bhajan* and doing *pooja* and *Tulsi poo*ja. She observed fast on Monday, *Ekadashi, Purnima, Amavasya, Janmashtami, Shivratri, Sankranti*, Quit India Day, etc. Even in prison during her last days she insisted on distributing *til ka laddu* to prisoners on *Makar Sankranti*. She revered Brahmins. Sushila Nayar concludes that Ba had a mature wisdom and she was an ideal Hindu wife who placed her duty towards her husband above everything else. Before her marriage to Mohandas they played with each other as friends; later she tried to keep pace with changing ideas of Mohandas as she believed

that that was her *Dharma* (duty).[48] The idea of watching movie based on Ramayana thrilled her.[49] She was very fond of *bhajan-ShriRam bhajo dukhme sukhme.* She had special respect for Brahamins and would offer them fruits and milk from her own share in Aga Khan Palace prison.[50] When Mahadev Desai, who was a *brahamin* died she would pray at his *Samadhi* as well.[51] Few days before her death in Aga Khan Palace prison she would pray to Bal Gopal Krishna.[52] Immediately before her death only God's name gave her some respite from suffering. She would say, 'O God, like an animal all my life I have only filled my stomach. Now I need only love for, and devotion to, thee."[53] During last hours she refused everything except *Gangajal* with *Tulsi* leaves and would chant Rama, He Rama and Gangaji. A drink of *Gangajal* gave her peace of mind.[54] As a *Sanatani Hindu* wife she wanted to die in her husband's lap and that she did.[55] In *Sanatan Hindu* religion the basic belief is that every human being goes through reincarnation till they achieve *Moksha* and their *Atma* gets integrated to *Param Brahm.* This integration is very difficult to achieve and till than reincarnation or rebirth keeps happening and the next birth of a person depends upon his/her *Karma* in this life time and also what that person did at her last moments i.e. moment of death. In her case she led a life of self sacrifice, helping others and in her last moments she had *Bhagwan Ram's* name on her lips, which indicates her future to be very good if it results in rebirth or may be its *Moksha* or something near that- as per *shasta*.

CONCLUSION: SANE SIMPLE *DHARMIC* PERSON

Gandhi acknowledged that more people have greater love for and faith in Ba than in him. Ghanashyamdas Birla was of the opinion that only Ba and Durgabehn are good and wise. He was of the opinion that all others including Gandhi in Sevagram were "off in head".[56] Vallabhbhai Patel said "I have not seen any other woman like her. She is so humble, natural and easy in her ways."[57] If she ever thought that she committed a mistake she would acknowledge that and ask for forgiveness immediately. Gandhi admitted that Kasturbai had a childlike simplicity in admitting her mistake.[58] Gandhi said after her death, "Ba was unique and in a class by herself."[59]

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ANUPMA KAUSHIK is Professor, Dept of Political Science and Public Administration, Dr Harisingh Gour University, Sagar, MP E-mail: kaushikanupma@gmail.com, Mobile: 9575456935

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Contributors: **Ravindra Varma ● Jorgen Johansen ● G Vijayam ● John Moolakkattu ● M.P. Mathai ● Usha Thakkar ● Sundarlal Bahuguna ● P.V. Rajgopal ● Sanat Mehta ● Sulak Sivaraksa ● Thubten Samphel ● S.M. Nurul Alam ● A.T. Ariyaratne ● Grazina Miniotate ● Elena Aleinikova ● Chris Walker ● Medha Patkar**

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Notes & Comments

Gandhian Syncretism: The Quintessence of Theosophy

Sahadeb Patro

Swati Samantaray

Introduction

GANDHI WAS A philosophical anarchist and is admired around the world as the legendary mystical leader, a fakir, a Mahatma, an exalted moralist, and a spiritualist. His sense of optimism was not only far above pessimism but a soaring spiral up into spiritualism, furthering it into the realm of Realism. His treatment of humanity at large bears testimony to the fact that man is the spiritual equinox of all creation, for God manifests as self-consciousness in humans. Multitudes of people incarnate the soul, but Gandhi spiritualized his body. Cosmos, as against chaos, implies order, an essential system of discipline; Gandhi, a mystic, considered the Universe to be an expression of Order. The interconnectedness of existence helps us develop love and reverence toward all creation. Gandhi's sense of nonviolence was of a higher order. Though his socio-political, socio-economic, and academic ideas have the highest élan, he firmly believed that ideas, however lofty, should be subject to perpetual examination and rectification. His Civil Disobedience Campaign was stimulation for the freedom fighters and an indefatigable challenge to the

opponents. He felt that workers should understand that their labour is a kind of capital, and capitalists should acknowledge that capital is a form of labour. Wealth will never be able to generate virtue. If poverty is the sorrow of the pauper, richness is the misery of the wealthy. Gandhi, like Henry David Thoreau, believed that citizens are humans first and subjects afterward. He presented to the unbelieving world all that is noblest in the spirit of humans. He found an echo of his conviction in John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, which asserted that there is no wealth but life, and distinguished cost and value; cost is the quantity of labour required for production and value is the life-giving power of anything – its emphasis being on the dignity of labour.

This paper focuses on Gandhian syncretism. The paper seeks to identify the universal traits between Gandhian ideology and Theosophical philosophy and bring forth the contemporary relevance of Gandhian way of life.

Gandhi's Theosophical Connections

Theosophy is an all-encompassing brotherhood by some esoteric process of spiritual osmosis. Theosophy staunchly believes in the vibration of life in every atom, embracing the oneness of love and shining of every creature in the light of wisdom. The Theosophical Society, of which Gandhi was a member in London, was a religious body founded by Madam Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Col. Henry Steel Olcott in 1875 whose doctrines include belief in *Karma*, *Reincarnation*, and spiritual evolution. It's three declared objectives are:

- to form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, caste, colour, or gender
- to encourage the study of Comparative Religion, Philosophy, and Science
- to investigate the unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in humankind

Theosophy, as ancient wisdom, is better understood in the sense of a pure philosophia perennis. It can still better be comprehended as synonymous with esotericism or mysticism. The word has been derived from Greek *Theosophos*, which means knowledge of things Divine. The word 'syncretism', not so often and commonly used term, connotes eclecticism or heterogeneity. For Gandhi, brotherhood is an ordeal of true spirituality. The fatherhood of God ensures the brotherhood of humankind. Gandhi's general restraint in thought,

feeling, conduct, and self-control are rationally in line with the Theosophical philosophy of Annie Besant's *Why I Became a Theosophist* (1889), HP Blavatsky's *Key to Theosophy* (1889), and Sir Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia* (1879). Theosophical influence in England and South Africa added strength to his religious sense, the literature of which is replete with Hindu influence.[1] The *Bhagavad Gita* that he considers his spiritual dictionary was a supreme guide to conduct. Krishna of the *Gita* is the right knowledge and perfection personified and apotheosis.

Austere living, supplication, and worship are the means of purifying the heart of passion as well as desire. Gandhi's *Autobiography* is the genesis of his philosophical doctrines for a way of life and conduct with spiritual, social, and political implications. He was undoubtedly a moral genius; genius is an evolutionary spirit much in line with the spirit of Theosophy. In the book *Gandhism After Gandhi* [2], the author, while discussing Gandhi, says that Satyagraha is a relentless search for Truth, a silent quest; it is an attribute of the spirit. Spiritual laws, like Nature's laws, need no enacting; they are self-enacting. "Nature is a perpetual circulatory worker, generating fluids out of solids, fixed things out of volatile, and volatile out of fixed, subtle out of gross, gross out of subtle"[3], said Blavatsky. His political thinking was ahead of the times. The philosophy of nonviolence is a profound and powerful expression of compassion, of altruism. Satyagraha is energy generated by the power of Truth to change the heart of the oppressor. As humanity plunges into various crises, the way of Gandhi can provide new hope.

"Brotherhood is just now a distant aspiration,"[4] says Gandhi. To him, it is a test of true spirituality. All prayers, worship, rituals, and religious observances are set at naught if we fail to feel a live kinship with all animates. His acquaintance with religions in England was through Theosophy. In November 1889, he visited the Blavatsky Lodge in London and was introduced to HP Blavatsky and Annie Besant. Gandhi stated that there are as many religions as humans. However, in reality, religion is one. "The avaricious, the lustful, the wrathful and the drunkard are among the ten types of persons reckoned by Vidura as having no regard for religion."[5] Gandhi solicits us to reminisce about the common man's uncommon traits and attributes for a future India.

Pragmatism of Nonviolence

Gandhi was born Indian, but he belongs to the world. No wonder the UNO has adopted his birthday as International Nonviolence Day. What does it mean when Gandhi said, 'My life is my message', when he concluded writing his Autobiography *Satya Sodhanam* in 1921?. It

means Truth, nonviolence, fearlessness, and Satyagraha are abstract concepts that require a reflecting surface, a resonating surface to come back to us with all their grace, glory, and piety; and Gandhi's life is that surface which reflects, resonates such eternal qualities of the human species. Human nature does require concrete faith. God has created so many men in order that they may arrive at a complete idea through cumulative thought. However, ideas should be subject to perpetual examination.

The philosophy of nonviolence is a profound and powerful expression of compassion. Satyagraha is energy generated by Truth's power to change the oppressor's heart. It implies a commitment to the Truth in all its dimensions. Gandhi's life was an open book, an extended essay on transparency, honesty, and courage. He recognized that unless the conditions of all Indians improve, India might get independence but could not be free. He drew on India's ancient tradition of pluralism and its long history of religious diversity and assimilation. The prayers and hymns at Gandhi's ashrams resonated with the sacred from across faiths. He truly represented the syncretic tradition of India and believed that ethics was the core of all religions –faith transcends reason; it is not opposed to it. True religion knows no territorial limits. Religion is the emotion of reverence that inspires, says Emerson.

Gandhi neatly converted a political movement into a moral war that his adversary just could not win; he removed fear from the minds of people that had hitherto experienced subjecthood, not citizenship. The epic struggle for independence was achieved without bloodshed, unique in history, fighting against the evil itself, not against the evil-doer; fighting against the British imperialism, not against the Britishers.

Religion and Humanism

He was the voice of the voiceless; the strength of the weak – a feeble person somewhat partly clad in scrimpy *dhoti* (loincloth), but entirely draped in the attire of Truth, was all-powerful as compared to battalions of armed men wearing full uniforms. Hundreds of books, treatises, biographies, and criticisms remain insufficient to understand Gandhi because of the sheer intensity, profundity, magnitude and magnanimity of "Gandhiana"[6], which is vast. His is the religion of humanity. However, there is a Gandhi in each one of us; we need to discover him. As humanity plunges into various crises, the way of Gandhi can overcome them.

One of history's amazing paradoxes was how a soldier fought with the weapons of a saint. His life was his lesson, an open book, an

unwritten autobiography. His "experiments in community living at Tolstoy Farm contained typical blends of freedom and regulation".[7] His words were deeds, and they built a movement of a nation. Gandhi provided a quantum jump in raising the consciousness of Indians and the world. Morality is the foundation of his life, and Truth is the base of morality. US Secretary of State General George C. Marshall hailed him "as the spokesman for the conscience of all mankind".[8] According to Gokhale, Gandhi had the spiritual power to turn ordinary men and women into leonine heroes and martyrs. Such were the tributes to the Mahatma from across the world. He died with 'Hey Ram' on his lips – the final cry of an anguished soul anxious to discover the final Truth.[9]

Gandhi: An 'Operative Myth'

Gandhi was the lion of loin clothes. The *charkha* (spinning wheel) symbolizes communal peace and signifies simple living and high thinking. He regarded spinning superior to the practice of denominational religion, which kept all negative thoughts at bay. *Khadi* is not just a fabric or cloth but a spiritual, political, and historical symbol; spiritual because he saw weaving as a method of self-realisation and sacrifice; political because it created a new Indian identity; and historical because until today the National Flag is unexceptionally made out of *khadi*, and its global message is for a just and exploitation-free new world order.

The Upanishadic adage of 'renounce and enjoy' was epitomized in Gandhi's life. Unleashing the extraordinary strength of ordinary people was his '*Purno Swaraj*'. *The Voice of the Silence* (1889) by Blavatsky is rightly called the Theosophists' Bible, Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* (written in ten days while travelling from London to South Africa in November 1909), one of the most important scholarly works, is rightly called the common man's Bible. Right from Hind Swaraj to Dominion Status, to self-governance, to independence, is a long march in the historic struggle against British imperialism. Right from the Indian cause he took up in Natal in 1893 to January 1948 was his 55-year-long march, out of which he spent about five years and ten months in prison. The fateful train journey in South Africa on June 7 1893 transformed Gandhi's life. As early as 1921, Rev. John Haynes Holmes said that Gandhi was comparably the greatest man living on earth. Gandhi could and did err; he could not and would not lie.[10]

At his death, Pearl S Buck called it another crucifixion. His celibacy since 1906, the vow of *Brahmacharya* since the days of the Boer war, was epoch-making and worth pondering for any worldly man. He advised the people that they should "live simply so that others may

simply live".[11] This carries a subtle reference and relevance to what Socrates said long ago, "I love to go there and discover how many things I am perfectly happy without".[12] He mastered voluntary simplicity from Tolstoy; passive resistance, and Civil Disobedience from Henry D Thoreau. If Rajchandra brought morality into business, Gandhi brought morality into politics. Gandhi was inspired by Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia* (1879), Ruskin's *Unto This Lost* (1862), Thomas Carlyle's *On Heroes, Hero-worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841), where the greatest hero is the prophet who exemplifies by austere living. His thoughts and ideas carry the genesis of the whole civilization, his political thinking was ahead of his times. Gandhi said:

> The *New Testament* produced a different impression especially the *Sermon on the Mount* which went straight to my heart. I compared it with the *Gita*...my young mind tried to unify the teachings of the *Gita, The Light of Asia,* and *the Sermon on the Mount*.[13]

According to C F Andrews, the more we study Gandhi, the more we shall discover humanity, humility, universality, and spirituality in him, the four pillars on which we live and thrive. Gandhi is an 'operative myth' that still lives on in contemporary consciousness. The present system of education has made our intellect the blotting sheets of modern civilization, Gandhi told Utkal Gaurav Madhusudan Das.[14] The Prophet of Ahimsa, Gandhi found the ancient doctrine of turning the other cheek as it is found in the realization that 'unearned suffering is redemption'. Nonviolence and love go inseparably together. Paraphrasing the words of Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. said: "We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering with our capacity to endure suffering. We shall meet your physical force with soul force".[15] King Jr. has emphatically said that to all other countries, he was a traveller, but to India, he was a pilgrim because it is the birthplace of Gandhi. In early life, Gandhi's impression of 'God is Truth' ultimately culminated in his revision that 'Truth is God', nonviolence is like radium in its action, according to him.[16] Nonviolence is a positive state of love of doing good even to the evil-doer. Gandhi's favourite hymn (*Vaishnava jan to, Tene Kahiye Je, Peed paraaye jaane re* …) is being played in 124 countries. Prayer is not aspiring for something but the quest of the soul and regular acknowledgement of one's faults and foibles. It is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without a heart. When we look at all these religions as so many leaves of the same tree, they seem so different, but at the trunk, they are one. Gandhi acknowledged *The Bhagavad Gita* as his spiritual dictionary, an evolutionary scientist that he was, and yet a mystic, a

practical mystic. For him Krishna of the *Gita* is the embodiment of perfection and personification of right knowledge - an apotheosis. All his work, in essence, is an appeal from the 'seen' to the unseen. Gandhi's philosophy is oceanic in content, his speeches and writings cover over 100 volumes as *Collected Works*. He was the one who spoke as he thought and acted as he spoke, in whom no shadow fell between word and deed.[17]

Gandhi's initial dietary habits, introspection, and vocal reticence are symptoms of his tenor towards common restraint in thought, feeling, word and conduct. These forms of self-management became primary modes of the renunciation he later practiced, which agreed with the Theosophical tenets. He studied *Why I Became a Theosophist* (1890) H.P Blavatsky's, *Key to Theosophy* (1889) and Sir Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia* (1879). Like the *Gita*, Gandhi regarded these texts as his supreme guide to conduct, and warned us against the danger of making a sect out of his thought. He weaned himself from any denominational religion. By fitting the freedom struggle, the epic war of independence, into the schema of philosophy of justice and fairness, he accomplished for India a stature un-paralled in the annals of human history and civilization. True nonviolence is complete innocence[18]. Violence is self-destructive. Ahimsa is the all-encompassing code of all values. Posit ahimsa, all the values are posited; negate ahimsa, all the values are negated. Truth is what the voice within tells. Violence, even in answer to grave provocation, was a bad augury.

Peace is the greatest social good. Tranquility and peace-loving means are the methods of nature. Gandhi exemplifies the magnitude of the time-honored approach that 'love' is superior to 'hatred'. On that fatal Friday, January 30, 1948, the perverse assassin of Gandhi, who had known no enemy in life, inflicted a deep wound in the heart of humanity. Pt. Nehru cried in agony: "The light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere".[19] Like all men of genius, Gandhi was an enigma; to the Indians, he was Bapuji, Mahatma, a saint long before his martyrdom. A careful and considerate historian like Arnold Toynbee wrote, "It can already be forecast with some confidence that Gandhi's effect on human history is going to be greater and more lasting than either Stalin's or Hitler's".[20] What Toynbee deduced was that Gandhi was not just an Indian phenomenon. When Gandhi picked on salt taxes as a symbol, he converted a simple act of minor civil disobedience into a powerful weapon of protest against an empire. The India Gandhi spent all his life making free is far from free.

Getting things done fast is not a sign of impatience. Do not block inevitable change and progress in the name of antique Indian policies,

culture, and values. Truth never damages a cause that is just, said Gandhi. Truth is always the strongest argument, says Sophocles. The quest for Truth is the *summum bonum* of life.[21] Truth is the sovereign principle; Satyagraha is a sovereign remedy; there is no other God than Truth.[22] God is pure consciousness. Innumerable are the names of God, but if a choice were to be made of one, it would be *Sat or Satya*. Hence, verily Truth is God.[23] Service without humility is selfishness and egotism to Gandhi. Einstein's remark is worth noting here: "Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth".[24]

Gandhi's appeal was to the conscience of the world. He "stressed the need for self-sufficiency in every sphere of life".[25] To Gandhi, suffering is a process of self-purification. He said that human nature shows itself at its best in moments of travail. His interest in vegetarianism, spirituality, and Indian affairs finds him a ready platform for bonding with niche groups ranging from the Esoteric Christian Union to the Theosophical Society and the vegetarian society. Gandhi was a Carlylian Hero who was not shaped by history but became a shaper of history both for India and humankind. The East India Company "destroyed that supplementary village industry, and the millions of spinners who had become famous through the cunning of their deft fingers for drawing the finest thread, such as have never been drawn by any modern machinery. It is a historical fact that before the advent of the East India Company these villagers were not idle"[26.] George Woodcock says that one of Gandhi's achievements was to show Britons the reality of their consciences and their practice as imperialists. It was Gandhi who roused the whole nation for the first time. He was a highly evolved and spiritual human being; as a visionary, he was far ahead of his time. Like Buddha, he sought salvation for all, transforming lives, not transcending them. He made India's independence movement an epoch-making marvel of history. Swaraj is essentially self-autonomy and self-control; self-revelation, self-perception, and self-realization. Nelson Mandela said, "You gave us Mohandas; we returned him to you as Mahatma Gandhi".[27] Gandhi was a Vedantin by conviction. Like Tolstoy, he realized the infinite possibilities of universal love. Like Socrates and Plato, Gandhi believed in the efficacy of reason. Gandhiana occupies a place in all publications on world religions, world prophets, and world philosophers. It is not our words, it is our life that affects people, said Annie Besant in keeping with the spirit of Theosophy and the philosophy of the life of the Mahatma - "Kill out desire of comfort".[28] Be wary of desires lest they be fulfilled. Desire is what J. Krishnamurti called 'future psychological time'. "Thou shalt not let thy senses make a playground of thy mind"[29],

cautioned Blavatsky.

Contemporary Relevance

Gandhi is beyond Time and Space; without him, the story of India remains incomplete and soulless. Conscientious people worldwide wistfully looked at Gandhi and wished him to have been alive today for so many of the unsolvable problems the world currently encounters, particularly over the Russian-Ukrainian War jeopardizing human life on earth. His greatest contribution to modern civilization is his life itself, and he made his life a lesson for all ages to come. He is still the common man's leader.

Conclusion

In fine, this paper offered the colours of Gandhian syncretism regarding Theosophy, the Divine Wisdom. Gandhi's example of 'spiritual secularism and secularized religion' is worth following in India and the world over today. He upheld the Truth in every religion yet deliberately stayed away from rituals, temples, mosques, churches, or deities, thus evolving a liberal equilibrium combining personal life with multi-faith public morality. Nevertheless, there is a bit of Gandhi in every one of us, which needs to be stirred to bring home a pragmatic, practical realisation of the unconditional Universal Brotherhood that Theosophy expounds.

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SAHADEB PATRO was formerly Reader in English and American Literature, Stewart Science College, Cuttack. Presently he is the President Utkal Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, Cuttack, and Utkal Theosophical Federation, Bhubaneswar. Prof. Patro is the author of *Infinity and Beyond* **(7 Volumes) and co-editor of** *Mysticism: A Literary Quest for Ultimate Reality***. E-mail: spatro61@rediffmail.com**

SWATI SAMANTARAY is currently working with KIIT Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar, as a Professor. Her field of interests are mysticism, existentialism, digital humanities, culture, and film studies. Her books include *The Mystic Flights of Tagore*, *Lord Jagannath*: *The Enigmatic Emblem of Cosmic Consciousness*, *Mysticism*: *A Literary Quest for Ultimate Reality*, **and** *Folklore*: *A Key to Cultural Understanding*. **E-mail: swati.sray@gmail.com**

Book Reviews

V.K.Kool and Rita Agrawal, *Gandhi's Wisdom: Insights from the Founding Father of Modern Psychology in the East*, **2022. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, pages 351.**
ISBN 978-3-030-87490-2.

Gandhi's Wisdom: Insights from the Founding Father of Modern Psychology in the East brings together a collection of articles in the search for what the editors refer to as the missing link between Gandhi's wisdom, the inspiration we can draw from to solve the problems of this century, and the practice of authentic wisdom. Although the nature of wisdom continues to be debated by psychologists, the editors point out that nonviolence as a subfield of psychology has received little attention. They argue that for almost every component of wisdom research in which psychologists are engaged today, such as context, uncertainty, self-control, monitoring, moral grounding etc., Gandhi stands out as an exemplar. In other words, the interdisciplinary research on the moral grounding of wisdom has been complemented by the practical steps advocated by Gandhi. There is hardly any subfield of psychology that has not been enriched by the application of Gandhi's conception of human behaviour. He learned, practiced, and demonstrated the efficacy of several psychological concepts in nuanced forms leading to the expansion of human cognition. They point out that in order to understand how Gandhi built his psychological capital, it is necessary to examine how he developed these nuanced forms of his own behaviour through vows, fasting, silence, and so on. Several chapters reflect on how Gandhi demonstrated his wisdom through such forms of behaviour that form the core psychological components of cognition, motivation, and emotion, major issues in the current research on wisdom in psychology.

Discussing the psychology and neuropsychology of silence, Kool and Agrawal point out that Gandhi's stance and practice of silence indicate the abundance of his wisdom. While Gandhi converted the

practice of silence into a routine coping mechanism for the purpose of navigating in and managing situations confronting our lives, the implications of this go much beyond the limited current neuropsychological discoveries that have only started to confirm the positive impact of silence in the neurogenesis of hippocampus and in fact the entire brain, besides replenishing mental resources.

Discussing the question of nonviolent self-efficacy for social transformation and health, Doug Oman examines the skills required for Gandhian nonviolence within the framework of the major contours of approaches to self-efficacy. He categorises these skills into three clusters – that for ahimsa as a way of life, for acting in satyagraha and for the Constructive Programme. These skills are further mapped for the perceived efficacy assessment of both individuals and groups. Oman argues that such an approach could support better integration of the teaching of nonviolent skills in mass education.

John S. Moolakkattu discusses the significance of Gandhi's fasts which he considered to be a method of satyagraha. Moolakkattu elaborates on the cultural context and power of Gandhi's fasting and its use as an infallible weapon of nonviolence. Fasts also provided Gandhi the opportunity to test the extent to which he had acquired self-control or swaraj. Moolakkattu contends that Gandhi was the first to make fasting both a spiritual as well as a political pursuit. The psychology of fasting being intimately linked with the psychology of the person undertaking it, the perceptions of the spectators, and the target groups, Gandhi was sensitive to the fact that his stature would provide his fasts a global reach. At the same time, fast as a method of bargaining, embarrassing or defeating those against whom they were targeted was anathematic to him. His fasts were intended for his self-purification and for atoning for his faults and those around him, forcing them to mend their ways.

Exploring the psychological process that underlies Gandhi's method of developing amicable relationships between members of groups that are involved in intractable conflicts, R.C.Tripathi and Alka Bajpai focus on the question of 'Self- and Other-Purification as Gandhi's Way of Un-othering'. Their emphasis is on the two sets of groups that were central concerns to Gandhi – Hindus and Muslims, and savarnas and avarnas. Gandhi felt that the basis of mutual othering that took place in Indian society lay in categorisations based on the concept of impurity. The authors argue that Gandhi's wisdom "turned the concept of impurity on its head. He used its antithetical concept, purity, for the un-othering of the two groups, but in a different way. The two methods that he used for this purpose were self-purification and other-purification. Gandhi used both of these synchronously for un-

othering of the other" and to build harmonious relationships (p.110).

Graeme Nuttall examines Gandhi's theory of trusteeship and its influence on Employee Ownership in the twenty-first century. He argues that although difficult, Gandhi's theory of trusteeship can be applied to a business model through a step-by-step approach. Gandhi's theory of trusteeship places a fundamental responsibility on workers to treat the business that employs them as their own. He contends that it encourages how employee ownership is defined so that employee-owned companies better meet the needs of society and the environment. He argues that such employee-owned companies can be seen as the long-sought way of peacefully realising Gandhi's theory of trusteeship.

Nachiketa Tripathi and Chayan Poddar attempt to illustrate the applicability of the Gandhian model to current management practices. They argue that financial stability is not the sole motivator of individuals working in organisations, and there is a need to identify processes, practices, work cultures, etc., within organisations that may help individuals to rise to their full potential. The authors discuss Gandhi's idea of sustainability in the organisational context, focusing on the concept of Calling Orientation. They argue that what has been recognised as Calling Orientation in Western research had been preached by Gandhi decades ago. While the chapter discusses the concept of Calling Orientation extensively, the same cannot be said of the organisational processes, practices, work culture or communities created by Gandhi, nor about his leadership which has received a certain amount of scholarship, and could have increased the contribution of the chapter to this volume.

Tej Prakash examines the question of whether there is a well-articulated and consistent framework of Gandhian economics and its relevance. Prakash argues that while Gandhian economics does not have all the answers to many of the technology-driven economic issues of the twenty-first century, Gandhi was a realist and his views evolved in response to events, even as his moral compass remained unchanged. His response to today's economic issues can be fairly assessed through his core beliefs of truth, nonviolence, and the welfare of all.

In the context of A.M. Turin's theory that with the inclusion of interactive features, machines could be perceived as another person with intelligence (which laid the foundation for the growth of Artificial Intelligence), Kool and Agrawal argue that for any machine or robot to pass the Turing Test, especially in the context of Gandhi's wisdom, several criteria need to be considered. These include – the relationship between cognition, biological evolution, and technological evolution, the philosophy behind the technology, its predictability, and

incorporeality. The authors argue that while digitising Gandhi is a welcome move and gaining ground and growing with the support of UNESCO, such efforts need to be rooted in a sound philosophy of technology.

Turowetz and Hollander take Stanley Milgram's social-psychological lab experiment on obedience to authority (where research participants delivered electric shocks to an unwilling peer at the behest of a scientist authority), as a case study of situated moral practice in social interaction that highlighted the interaction between moral action and power. In this context, they discuss its implications for research on Gandhi and civil disobedience. They argue that morality and power were central to the tension participants experienced between their moral obligations to the learner and their institutional obligations. Participants came to be classified as obedient or disobedient because of the many acts of resistance or compliance they performed in the course of the experiment. They contend that similar questions could be asked about civil disobedience and political resistance. Like Milgram's participants, Gandhi and his supporters would have found themselves choosing to renew their acts of disobedience or compliance time and again, with no guarantee that their actions would have the effects they desired or anticipated.

Although one of Gandhi's major legacies is the nonviolent resistance method, Todd Davies argues that if one understands violence and nonviolence in conventional ways, strict nonviolence is harder to argue for today than a more nuanced view. The contemporary notions of violence and nonviolence do not parallel Gandhi's himsa and ahimsa. He advocates replacing these words with ones that come closer to the meanings that Gandhi attached to them so that key insights in Gandhi's thinking could be recovered and applied to contemporary debates about social transformation. Davies proposes beneficence for ahimsa and maleficence for himsa, as they capture both the intent and their manifestation in action, which corresponds with Gandhi's understanding. Davies argues that we need new approaches – ones beyond what Gandhi himself provided – if we are to recover his wisdom and achieve the rightful measure of influence for his ideas that our times deserve.

Michael Nagler recounts his personal journey from his interpretation of the Bhagavad Gita to the establishment of the Metta Center for Nonviolence. Nagler points out that materialism has led to unheard-of progress by human beings; the need of the hour, however, is progress of the human being. In a similar mode, David Cortright writes of his journey to Gandhi, recounting his experiences from the time he was drafted into the US Army during the Vietnam

War, his anti-war activism, writers who influenced him, the civil rights movement and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Gene Sharp; and the different empirical confirmation of the effectiveness of nonviolent action. Cortright points out that Gandhi's wisdom and the Gandhian methods of nonviolent resistance are necessary for overcoming social injustice. George Paxton also discusses his personal route to Gandhi via the Quakers, Louis Fischer, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Amnesty International, and Gandhi Society. Providing an overview of Gandhi's life and his concepts of satya, ahimsa, satyagraha, and the crises he faced in life, Paxton highlights some of Gandhi's thoughts on a war-free world.

Kool and Agrawal, in their concluding chapter point out that according to Gandhi, wisdom is no wisdom if it does not seep into action. Gandhi's wisdom is rooted in one's ability to manage, monitor, and test self-control in the most arduous conditions imaginable. The authors argue that by focusing on self-control as a cardinal form of behaviour, Gandhi engaged the subtle threads of human cognition, emotion, and motivation for engineering and demonstrating wisdom. They also point out that Gandhi's wisdom, rooted in nonviolence, has a moral grounding and call upon readers to use the lens of nonviolence to visualise Gandhi's wisdom.

The editors, Kool and Agrawal, emphasize that psychology has ignored Erik Erikson's contention offered more than 50 years ago that Gandhi's work has great insights for the growth and development of modern psychology. They point out that psychology failed to latch on to the momentum of nonviolence and embrace its wisdom – it did not focus on the behaviour of Thoreau or Gandhi, but on Hitler. Psychology lost its wisdom by promoting Hitler's psychological profile and neglecting Gandhi. They point out that the book is an invitation to the psychology of wisdom to enlarge its compass in an interdisciplinary context framed through the life and work of Gandhi. They argue that "Gandhi helps us to bridge the gap between the domains of cognition, personality, motivation, emotion, and morality in order to obtain a more true to life perspective on how to solve complex problems at the personal, interpersonal and societal levels. A focus on Gandhi will enable psychologists to bring greater ecological validity into their laboratory-based findings" (p.22). The editors strongly argue that modern psychology needs Gandhi for its growth. Their argument that both William James and Mahatma Gandhi were thinkers of the human mind and deserve to be called the founding fathers of modern psychology, one in the West and the other in the East, and that Gandhi is undoubtedly the father of 'modern psychology in the East', may however be subject to contention. Furthermore, the

book does not seem to be able to stand testimony to the latter statement.

Notwithstanding the above persistence of the editors to refer to Gandhi as "the wisest man to step on earth", "an unquestionable father of modern psychology emerging in the Eastern part of the globe" which in itself would be a travesty of Gandhi's notion of the relativity of truth; together with the slightly overpowering number of self-citations, the book provides refreshing insights on Gandhi from uncommon viewpoints. It enables one to re-view Gandhi from a socio-psychological point of view. It is undoubtedly a must-read for those interested in understanding Gandhi and in rediscovering him from alternative perspectives.

TERESA JOSEPH
Professor of Political Science & Director
Centre for Gandhian Studies
Alphonsa College, Pala, Kottayam, Kerala.
Email: teresajoseph123@gmail.com

Appu Esthose Suresh & Priyanka Kotamraju, The Murderer, the Monarch and the Fakir, HarperCollins Publishers, Noida, 2021, ISBN: 978-93-5489-053-6, 240 pages, Rs 399.

The authors, Suresh and Kotamraju, both from media background, should be congratulated for the nerve they have shown in exposing a slew of machinations which happened before and after Gandhi's assassination. This is a book that uncovers many facts that were hitherto unavailable in the public domain. In the Acknowledgement, the authors write: *"This book has been eight years in the making. It is not a tome, but all the same, collecting evidence from record rooms, bureaus and archives, and piecing them together, was a long, arduous, at times confusing process. However, it was a thrilling process of discovery, especially to see some facts in a new light."* So, what is new that is in this book? Well, at the outset, let us look at the title: *The Murderer, the Monarch and the Fakir*. While a reader will correctly guess who the murderer is (Nathuram Godse), who the fakir is (M.K.Gandhi), they will not be able to speculate who the monarch is? Not that this information is hush-hush; rather, no one earlier had taken the effort and invested their time and energy to discover the hand of a head of an erstwhile Princely State of India. The authors have painstakingly revealed this.

It was the Maharaja of Alwar and his Prime Minster Dr Narayan Bhaskar Kharge who were in cahoots with the brains and the muscle behind the assassination, the authors state, with documentary evidence. However, neither the monarch, nor his strongman, was made party to the trial after the assassination. As if this piece of information is not enough to annoy the reader, the authors prove that the entire exercise of trying Godse and his companion Apte, was a kind of sham, in the sense that there were very important documentary evidences that were barred from seeing the light. For instance, according the authors: "The police case that was brought before the court mostly focused on recreating the events that led to Gandhi's assassination, from 10 January 1948 leading up to 30 January 1948. The police had the convenience of the killer confessing to his crime. They barely went into the possibility of a deeper conspiracy in the chargesheet. But to be sure, a lot more evidence and leads were unearthed by the investigation teams regarding the wider network of the conspiracy".

On reading this structured book, four areas would become clear:

- Nathuram Godse, as per his statement at the court, was not an individual obsessed with any particular doctrine. Rather, Godse was a kind of a string-puppet.

- The actual puppeteers either went scot-free after the Gandhi assassination trial, or were not even included in the accused list. This means the Godse trial was a farce.
- M.K. Gandhi was not an individual, but a viewpoint, a value system and a slant of thought. The murderer and the masterminds thought they were finishing off an individual, which was naïve.
- Godse's capital punishment re-kindled the cult of religious extremism in India. An anti-national desperado has metamorphosed into a national superman.

In the recent past, there have been a few good books on the roles of the Hindu Mahasabha, the RSS, and a few more provincial Hindu-Right organisations in Gandhi's assassination. These works are welcome, as they dig deeper into the psyche of Godse, his mates, and his gurus. Along these lines, this book too is definitely a worthy addition to the existing literature on the Gandhi-Godse linkages. Kudos to the authors for taking efforts to bring to the fore documents which were well-hidden or conveniently forgotten. In the end, the public is entitled to form opinions based on these startling pieces of evidence. More than the evidence, what bothers the authors is the very act of killing the person called Gandhi, whom a group of elite louts alleged was an anathema, an abomination and anti-national. How wrong could they be? Towards the end of book, Suresh and Kotamraju express this sentimentality in their own way: "…Godse and those whom he represented killed a Gandhi they completely misunderstood. Or perhaps they never had the ethical sensibility and the spiritual imagination that are necessary to understand him in the first place".

G NARASIMHA RAGHAVAN,
Associate Professor of Economics,
Jansons School of Business,
Coimbatore – 641 028. Tamil Nadu
Email: raghavangnarasimha@gmail.com

Obituary

Remembering Ela Ramesh Bhatt
(1933 – 2022)

John S. Moolakkattu

ELA BHATT PASSED AWAY on November 2nd, 2022, aged 89. She showed the strength of the poor women to organize themselves in a Gandhian spirit of self-reliance. Ela came from a family of freedom fighters dedicated to social concerns. SEWA, the organization she founded, is a prime example of Gandhian social entrepreneurship and cooperative values. She was a founding member of the Elders Group involving global figures like Nelson Mandela, and Bishop Desmond Tutu. and worked tirelessly to improve the lives of the poor and marginalized from its inception in 2007 until her voluntary retirement in 2016. A nonviolent activist inspired by Gandhi, she collaborated with other Elders to advance peace in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. She was one of the pioneers of the microfinance movement. Ela Bhatt dedicated her life to enhancing the conditions of India's poorest and most downtrodden female workers. She was a lawyer, a social worker, and a pioneer in grassroots development. More than 1.2 million people are currently SEWA members.

Ela Bhatt established the Cooperative Bank of SEWA in 1972. The bank puts into effect the Gandhian ideals of self-reliance and group action while assisting women in achieving financial independence and

improving their standing in their families and communities. She is also a founding member of Women's World Banking (WWB) and chaired the body from 1984 to 1988. During1986 to 1989, she was a nominated member of the Rajya Sabha. The All India Association of Micro Finance Institutions in India (Sa-Dhan), the Indian School of Micro-finance for Women, the International Alliance of Home-based Workers (HomeNet), and Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing, Organizing (WIEGO) are just a few of the organizations Ela Bhatt founded or inspired.

Ela received numerous honours for her efforts such as the George Meany-Lane Kirkland Human Rights Award, the Ramon Magsaysay Award, the Right Livelihood Award and the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace. Harvard, Yale, and the University of Natal awarded her honorary doctorate degrees.

Ela's political views were influenced by the liberation movement, her legal education, her membership in the Textile Labour Association, her time spent living in slums, and her late husband Ramesh, an economist. SEWA was created from the Textile Labor Association (TLA), which Anasuya Sarabhai and Mahatma Gandhi founded in 1920, but it was unable to become a trade union until 1972 because its members had no "employer" and were therefore not considered employees. The network of SEWA spans 18 Indian states, other South Asian nations, South Africa, and Latin America. Successes of SEWA's fight include the Unorganized Workers Social Security Act (2008), the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (2011), and the Street Vendors Act (2014). The SEWA microfinance approach is thought to have served as a model for the PM Street Vendors Atmanirbhar Nidhi (PM-SVANidhi) programme., She is undoubtedly a great inspiration for all Gandhians and like-minded individuals who may not identify themselves as such.

JOHN S MOOLAKKATTU is the Chief Editor of Gandhi Marg

Volume 44 Number 2

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