# GANDHI MARG

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# Contents

## *Articles*

## *Book Reviews*

Gandhi Marg Quarterly
44(4): 389-390

http://gandhimargjournal.org/
ISSN 0016—4437

# Editorial

A VIBRANT DEMOCRACY NEEDS an independent media. Even though it is acknowledged that there will always be journalism that serves partisan interests or is pro-establishment in orientation, the presence of at least a threshold level of independent journalism in a country can prevent the emergence of a monologue. This crucial section offers room for variety, differing viewpoints, and disagreement. Even leftists, when given the opportunity to do so, have no qualms about stifling accurate but unpopular news, as evidenced by the police raid on Kerala's Asianet TV. The government is trying more and more to force its definition of journalism on the populace. As demonstrated by the corporate acquisition of NDTV, corporate forces, who frequently collaborate with the government and are known as crony capitalists, are increasingly involved in such takeovers. India ranked 132 out of 180 nations in Reporters Without Borders' 2012 press freedom index. It has decreased further to 150 after ten years. The freedom of speech and expression is recognised as a basic right in Article 19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution. This privilege, which was fought for and gained from a fiercely repressive and censorious British Raj, needs to be zealously defended. The Constitution does not specifically refer to press freedom, but the Supreme Court of India has interpreted the text to include it in Article 19 through judicial interpretation.

As the COVID-19 pandemic's second wave swept through India, the government consistently denied the health catastrophe, directed media outlets to ensure positive news coverage, and resorted to a crackdown on social media's ability to publish posts about the situation on the ground.

The government is the largest single advertiser and, along with its allies in business, has the ability to influence media companies' income. The Press Council of India has warned that "paid news" has spread and become highly planned and organised.

Ninety journalists or media persons died in India between 1992

and 2023. A scared journalist is responsible for a dead citizenry. Gandhi said in his autobiography that "The sole aim of journalism should be service. The newspaper is a great power, but just as an unchained torrent of water submerges whole countryside and devastates crops, even so an uncontrolled pen serves but to destroy. If the control is from without, it proves more poisonous than want of control".

For Gandhi, editorial independence, adherence to truth and self-restraint were the three overriding considerations for journalism. In his message to the editor of the newspaper *The Independence* on January 30, 1919, he wrote: "In wishing you success in your new enterprise, I would like to say how I hope your writings would be worthy of the title you have chosen for your journal; and may I further hope that to a robust of independence you will add an equal measure of self-restraint and the strictest adherence to truth?", In other words, he called for a sort of media swaraj.

This issue of the journal has six papers and a book review. The first article by Ananta Kumar Giri provides a critique of the economy and society from a political economy perspective. The second by Sudhi Mandloi examines the views of Gandhi and Tilak on Hinduism, caste and untouchability from a comparative perspective. The third by Moumita Sil (Ray) is on the importance of Brahmacharya for constituting the satayagrahi self. The next paper by Ekta Shaikh explores deliberative democracy from a Gandhian lens. The fifth paper by Adrita Gogoi traces the postmodern elements in Gandhi's thought by looking closely at his views on khadi and village industries. In the final article, Tina Mazumdar and Sib Sankar Majumder examine Gandhi's political writings to reconstruct the unknown aspects of the national movement. We hope the articles will provide the readers enough material for incisive reflection.

**JOHN S MOOLAKKATTU**
**Chief Editor**

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# Political Economy, Moral Economy, Moral Sociology, Spiritual Ecology, and Beyond[1]

*Ananta Kumar Giri*

ABSTRACT

*Political economy has been an important tradition of critical thought about economy, self, and society. The essay explores different aspects of the contemporary condition such as rising social and economic inequality and precarious lives. It argues how the current regime of neo-liberal capitalism in many parts of the world calls for a renewal of political economy critiques of the economy and society. The essay then explores some of the limitations of conventional modes of political economy such as its statism. It then links critiques of political economy with critiques of moral economy. The essay strives to cultivate integral visions and practices of critique, creativity, and transformation of economy, self, society, and ecology by bringing political economy, moral economy, moral sociology, and spiritual ecology together. It argues that in this way we can move beyond the trappings of the present condition of exploitation and alienation and move towards alternative presents and futures at the levels of self, society, and the planet.*

Keywords: Critiques of political economy, Attac (Association for Taxation of Financial Transactions and Citizen Actions), Global Keynesianism, Consciousness Work and Trans-civilizational Dialogues, Social and Ecological *Bodhichitta*

## Introduction and Invitation

WE ARE FACING RISING inequality—economic, social, and political— all over the world which points to the limits of dominant economic models such as the reigning neo-liberal global capitalism.

With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, access to health care and the prospects of living or dying is also closely dependent on one's economic and social position while the dismantling of public healthcare systems in many countries has added to the precariousness of lives on the part of the many[2]. This heightens the need for bringing a political economy and moral economy critique to our contemporary condition[3]. But we also need to make fresh contributions to contemporary critiques of political economy and link it to other linked concerns, themes, and domains such as moral economy, moral sociology, and spiritual ecology. This essay tries to offer an integral critique and transformation of the contemporary condition by bringing critiques, creativity, and transformations in political economy, moral economy, moral sociology, and spiritual ecology together. It also explores pathways of transformations and alternative planetary futures emerging from such border-crossing critiques.

**Contemporary Contributions to Critiques of Political Economy**

Critiques of political economy or political economy critiques of economy, society, and polity have played an important role in modern critical thinking as well as movements for social and political transformations in our multiplex modern worlds. Critiques of political economy as in the hands of Karl Marx[4] had played an important role in critiques of capitalism and in realizing our potential individually, collectively as well as in our species-wide situation. Today we need urgently the transformation of capitalism and other existing modes of economic organizations such as state-controlled economies and socialism. With rising inequality and devastation caused by rampant neo-liberal global capitalism, we need to bring a political economy critique to our contemporary global human condition. But here some of the frames and assumptions of political economy such as its uncritical statism and state-centeredness need to be transformed which does not mean supporting the neo-liberal move of abandonment and destruction of the State. Though Marx had challenged us to realize the limits of the state and move towards building a stateless society, political economy as a critique of economy and society is still predominantly statist[5] . This is evident in the work of Thomas Piketty (2014) who challenges us to realize the need for a perspective of political economy to understand and transform our contemporary condition of capitalism. But Piketty is still too statist in his analysis and prescription[6] though in his latest book, *A Brief History of Equality*, Piketty himself writes: "Only powerful social mobilizations, supported by collective movements and organizations, will allow us to define common objectives and transform power relationships"[7]. Piketty

advocates global taxation as an important solution to our contemporary crises but does it need a global state? How do we realize this? Picketty does not even mention movements of global taxation such as Attac (Association for Taxation of Financial Transactions and Citizen Actions) which were active in his homeland of France and of which he is a member [8].

Participants in Attac and other global justice movements look at their involvement in Attac as an aspect of their own personal care and commitment to global justice and responsibility. Realizing global justice is thus neither just statist nor institutional urging us to transcend what Amartya Sen calls "transcendental institutionalism" [9]It is a work of caring and concerned self as well as appropriate institutions. Realizing global justice calls for multi-dimensional movements of care, responsibility, and co-responsibility as well as building transformative institutions including transformative States and other inter-state and trans-state organizations at local, regional, national, transnational, and planetary levels. It also calls for realizing transnational justice as "non-domination" where all concerned overcome existing political and economic domination and contribute to the constitution of a just, creative, and good society[10]. The creative human future today builds upon the critical spirit of political economy but there is a need here to transform the statist assumptions, frames, and binding of political economy which also permeates the discourse of the welfare state and make it part of multi-dimensional movements of border-crossing and transformations. But transcending Statism does not mean a relapse into the free market, neo-liberal and conservative destruction, and abandonment of the State[11]. It means calling for building a transformative state. It also means the ethical, moral, and spiritual transformation of the State as suggested by Kierkegaard, Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, and Martin Luther King, Jr, among others.

Critiques of political economy also call for new initiatives in restructuring our world economy and world politics animated by new modes of production, consumption, distribution, resource sharing, and ecological responsibility. In this context, Heikki Patomaki[12] (2017) calls for the formation of political parties at the world level. Patomaki also calls for Global Keynesianism to implement a progressive policy of welfare and well-being at the world scale. But here again, there is a need to transform global Keynesianism as a Statist project with related multi-dimensional movements in state, market, civil society, and self. The challenge here is to cultivate new visions, movements, and practices of what Patomaki (2017) calls "ethical and political" learning and "heteroreflexivity" to which we can also add aesthetic and spiritual co-learning. It also calls for experimental

creativity in the building of creative self and institutions in social, economic, and political spheres to overcome existing structures and discourses of domination and disrespect[13]. Building upon the Brandt Commission Report, Patomaki links political economy critique of the present to developing a new world civilization and building a new "international economic system"[14]. Traditions of critiques of political economy such as the Marxian have been primarily Euro-American in their civilizational moorings and assumptions and for developing a new world civilization, we need to acknowledge such initial locational bindings and the need for overcoming these with manifold visions and pathways of cross-civilizational and trans-civilizational dialogues. For example, around issues of production and consumption and their limits, it is fruitful to cultivate cross-civilizational and trans-civilizational dialogues with Marx and Gandhi. While Marxian critique of political economy is still predominantly within an industrial productive paradigm, Gandhi[15] offers foundational critiques of it including a critique of the foundations of modern civilization.

The civilizational dimension of the present crises and movements for renewal are also highlighted in the work of Jeffrey Sachs (2012) who titles his reflections on the current crises *The Price of Civilization*. The present financial crisis is part of a crisis of civilization, of Western Civilization of modernity in particular Eisenstadt[16] coined the term civilization of modernity, and Gandhi (1909) challenged us to realize some of the foundational ills of this civilization of modernity). But to sustain civilization Sachs says that we need appropriate taxation. The rise of the political Right in the Euro-American world has cut down taxes on the rich and the super-rich which led to the production of bare life and barbarism in terms of social suffering and dismantling of services[17]. Appropriate taxation is not confined only to the national level and it should be thought of at the global level too. Forty years ago, the Brandt Report had argued for global taxation, the revenue from which "would be used in efforts to eradicate poverty and to promote economic development of the global South"[18]. Picketty (2014) also emphasizes appropriate taxation not only at the national level but also at the global level so that humanity does not descend into the barbarism of unsustainable inequality and consequent violence and destruction of life.[19] For this Piketty calls for the rise of a new social state based upon the impulse of political economy which is interested in the redistribution of income and capital and strives for the realization of widespread social well-being. But in a spirit of cross-civilizational dialogue, we need to realize that to sustain our existing civilizations as well as to create new ones, we need not only appropriate taxation but also appropriate virtues, character, modalities

of mindfulness, ethics, aesthetics, politics, spirituality, and *dharma* (right conduct as it is suggested in Indic civilizations). Thus it is helpful that in his book *The Price of Civilization*, Sachs[20] reiterates the need for some of these, for example developing mindfulness in our economic and social relationships.

The civilizational dimension of the critique of the political economy calls for new civilizational works as well as consciousness works. Piketty could term these civilizational and consciousness works as ideological works, understanding ideology broadly. In his recent work, *Capital and Ideology*[21], Piketty tells us that economic inequality is not just dependent upon the economic system but is produced by ideological structures which justify inequality and if we can create new ideological movements for equality then we can transform contemporary conditions of political, economic and social inequality and create conditions and movements of equality. Piketty here mainly talks about creating social federalism, participatory socialism, and "a Universalist Sovereignism" which goes beyond nationalist closure and the contemporary rising xenophobia.[22] For Piketty, "social federalism" is a view that if you want to keep globalization going and you want to avoid this retreat to nationalism and the frontier of the nation-state that we see in several countries, you need to organize globalization more socially. If you want to have international treaties between European countries and Canada and the U.S. and Latin America and Africa, these treaties cannot simply be about free trade and free capital flow. They need to set some targets in terms of equitable growth and equitable development[23]. About participatory socialism, Piketty writes the following:

> Participatory socialism is the general objective of more "access" to education. Educational justice is very important in terms of access to higher education. Today there's a lot of hyper criticism, not only in the U.S., but also in France and in Europe, that we don't set quantifiable and verifiable targets in terms of how children [from] lower [income] groups [gain] access to higher education, what kind of funding [they] have for higher education. The other big dimension is circulation of property, so I talk about "inheritance for all." The idea is to use a progressive tax on wealth in order to finance [a] capital transfer to every young adult at the age of 25 [24].

Creating participatory socialism along the lines of transformation of existing property relations and access to more equitable and dignified access to health and education calls for new ideological works which also can be realized as new consciousness works where we work on changing existing consciousness of self, society, and economy

and create a new consciousness of our intertwined and interlinked existence. Consciousness works here do not have only a political and economic dimension but a spiritual dimension where we also relate our work on equality to the integral equality of spirit and lives which again heightens the need for deeper cross-civilizational dialogues on consciousness, self, economy, and society. Such a consciousness work becomes part of a contemporary critique of political economy but here the challenge is to go beyond a reductive understanding of consciousness. This calls for developing "heteroreflexivity" and "ethical and political learning" as discussed by Heikki Patomaki and as suggested in the works of Jurgen Habermas (1990). This challenges us to revisit and reconstitute the theme and work of consciousness with Marx and beyond. In his *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx (1859) tells us: "The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness." But even while writing this, as evident in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Marx is not putting forward a totally determined view of history and much water has flown in varieties of Marxist and non-Marxist thinking on this subject. We now realize that consciousness is not totally determined by societies and histories though it is shaped by these, and has the power to shape and transform societies and histories. For a contemporary critique of political economy, we need to understand and cultivate the autonomous and interlinked work of consciousness in the dynamics of self, culture, societies, and histories and for this, we can build upon multiple traditions of critical and transformative thinking in politics, spirituality, and consciousness studies. For example, Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo as well as the multiple traditions of Vedanta challenge us to realize the creative power of consciousness and bring this to work for a critique of contemporary orders of bondage and domination. For transforming contemporary conditions of bondage we need to engage ourselves in consciousness work for freedom and transformation. Here we can build on works such as Paulo Friere's (1970) *Cultural Action for Freedom* and cultivate new cross-civlizational dialogues between Marx and Gandhi, Marx and Sri Aurobindo, among others about manifold relationships between consciousness and economy, consciousness and history, and consciousness and society[25].

**Political Economy and Moral Economy**

Creative human futures today depends upon linking critiques of political economy with other visions, practices, and movements such

as the moral economy. Moral economy calls for the development of moral consciousness on the part of self and society which is not just an extension of the existing logic of justification but the capacity to strive for beauty, dignity, and dialogues with and beyond existing conventions and norms[26]. Moral consciousness includes ethics, aesthetics, and responsibility[27]. It challenges us to create an economy as fields, circles, and spirals of the flourishing of life. Moral economy helps us develop as moral selves while being in the economy and in political transactions. The moral economy has a long genealogy in multiple traditions and religions of the world and builds upon classic works of Gandhi, Mauss, and Shalins, among others and in recent years sociologist Andrew Sayer (2000) has been cultivating this as a creative and critical approach to self, economy, and society[28]. At the core of moral economy are the vision, practice, and policy of care and responsibility. For Sayer (2015), "moral economy is primarily a subject that analyses and assesses the fairness and justifications of actually existing economic relations and practices." Furthermore, "'Moral economy' reinstates ethical approach to economy". It offers both a political and ethical critique and reconstruction of the economy as Sayer writes: "Politics without ethics is directionless, while ethics without politics is ineffectual. Moral economy seeks to combine them". It is engaged in a normative critique of the economy where "normativity is not reducible to 'normalizing' or telling others what they should do [..]"[29]but involves critically looking at the nature of our self and institutions and their contributions to our well-being and ill-being.[30] Linking his vision and critique of the moral economy to the contemporary political and economic conditions of inequality and exploitation and movements such as de-growth for alternative economic visions and organizations, Sayer writes: "We need not only draw attention to what's problematic about the crisis we are in, but also to think normatively about what a good life after growth would be like, and the kind of economic organization that could support it"[31]. In his reflections on building sustainable social economies which is not just addicted to conventional notions of economic growth, Sayer (2018) tells us that such economies should help us realize meaningful relations among people as well as with nature as part of a broad frame of provisioning of needs and flourishing of lives. Some aspects of our contemporary economic order such as the primacy of the financial sector where from a condition of being a servant it has become a master, calls for new coordination and regulation. For Sayer, financial products "need to be socially beneficial, in much the same way as new drugs have to be approved before being released onto the market"[32]. For Sayer, "[..] it will also be necessary to create publicly-

accountable regional, national and sectoral investment banks that undertake real investment in projects that benefit the environment and society"[33].

Works on the moral economy become linked to the creation of good life and a good society. As Sayer's collaborators Hartmut Rosa and Chris Henning write: "The function of the economy and of democratic politics should be to allow for a good life for people, to better, not to worsen their situation. If economic growth is no longer functional in this respect, we have to conceive of forms of a good life that no longer rely on an enforced regime of economic growth, and which oppose the belief in ever higher rates of production, consumption, waste and destruction, just for the sake of further enriching the material cosmos of the wealthy"[34]. Hartmut Rosa here argues that for realization of the good life, economy and society should help us realize our resonance with self, each other, and Nature rather than just be in perpetual competition with each other and alienated from each other and Nature[35].

The moral economy is not opposed to the political economy. Both can supplement and challenge each other in the direction of mutual transformations. For example, critique and creativity in the moral economy are not just anti-state and anti-market rather it challenges us to build market and state as moral institutions enabling individuals and societies to realize their multi-dimensional reality and potential rather than just being slaves of existing logic of profit-maximization of the machinery of control and violence.

But the moral economy does not only have ethical and political dimensions but also has aesthetic and spiritual dimensions as the succeeding themes of moral sociology and spiritual ecology also have these. The aesthetic dimensions challenge us to relate to and realize economies as works of art and make our own lives works of art[36]. It invites us to realize new relationships between aesthetics and economics and aesthetics[37]. The spiritual dimension of moral economy challenges us to understand the inescapable spiritual dimension of value and worth of our lives which cannot be exchanged for money and market but a dignified relationship can be created among them[38].

**Moral Sociology**

The moral economy is linked to multi-dimensional movements of moral sociology and moral anthropology [39]which challenge us to create institutions of society as spaces for the development of moral consciousness and ethically awakened communicative actions. Moral sociology has been at the heart of critical and creative sociology from the beginning—from Saint Simon to Marx and Weber and Durkheim.

In recent years, sociologists and political theorists such as Robert Bellah[40], Roberto Unger [41](2004), Jurgen Habermas (1990), Andre Beteille (2008), Veena Das (2007; 2011; 2020) and Manoranjan Mohanty[42] (1998) have in their own ways brought new depth and height to it. In their works, we find moral sociology related to institutional constraints as well as the vision and challenges of new imaginations in self and society.

To understand this pluriverse of moral sociology, we can begin with the works of Robert Bellah and his collaborators *The Good Society*[43]. For Bellah et al., our contemporary problems of economy, self, and society are significantly institutional, in as much as they spring from the irrelevance of existing institutions and lack of availability of new institutions to guide our private lives and the public spheres. These institutional dilemmas in the economy, for example, between competition and cooperation are primarily "moral dilemmas" [44]which call for a new moral language to think about our institutions as they are now ridden with "unprecedented problems"[45]. For instance, reflecting on contemporary American society Bellah et al. argue that in the face of the challenge of the present and the dislocations of the post-industrial transition, there is an urgency to think of "democracy as an ongoing moral quest," not simply as a political process - "as an end state"[46]. They are emphatic in their proposition that we currently need a new "moral ecology" to think creatively about institutions - and their predicament and possibility since "the decisions that are made about our economy, our schools, our government, of our national position in the world cannot be separated from the way we live in practical terms, *the moral life we lead as a people*"[47]. In *The Good Society* Bellah et al. tell us that contemporary American form of life minimizes seeking of any "larger moral meaning" and Americans have pushed the "logic of exploitation as far as it can go"[48]. Furthermore, "[..] the main line churches have done a lousy job in naming the suffering of middle class existence"—they do not say that it is the competition-driven existence which is a "form of human suffering"[49]. In this context, they plead for a new paradigm for the actors and the institutions of the United States what they call the "pattern of cultivation." This paradigm of cultivation refers to the habit of paying attention to the needs of one another and building communities. Attention is described here normatively which refers to pursuing goals, and relationships which give us meaning, and is different from 'distraction' and 'obsession'"[50]. For Bellah et al. (1991: 273): "Attending means to concern ourselves with the larger meanings of things in the longer run, rather than with short-term pay offs. The pursuit of immediate pleasure, or the immediate pleasure is the essence of

dislocation. A good society is one in which attention takes precedence over distraction."[51] Moral sociology here becomes a sociology of paying attention to each other and building appropriate self and social institutions for this which also resonates with the works of Jeffrey Sachs (2013) on building economies as fields of attentiveness rather than a distraction. Moral sociology and moral ecology are important parts of contemporary critiques of both political economy and moral economy.

The multiverse of moral sociology also builds upon the seminal works of Jurgen Habermas. Habermas (1990) argues that the task of human emancipation today requires a moral approach along with the familiar models of political action. Consider, for instance, the persistent question of poverty and disadvantage in advanced industrial societies. For Habermas, while in the classical phase of capitalism capital and labour could threaten each other for pursuing their interests, today "this is no longer the case"[52]. Now the underprivileged can make their predicament known only through a "protest vote" but "without the electoral support of a majority of citizens...problems of this nature do not even have enough driving force to be adopted as a topic of broad and effective public debate"[53]. In this situation, for Habermas, a moral consciousness diffusing the entire public sphere is crucial for tackling the problems of poverty, disadvantage and income inequality. As Habermas argues: "a dynamic self-correction cannot be set in motion without introducing morals into the debate, without universalizing interests from a normative point of view"[54]. The same imperative also confronts us in addressing contemporary global problems such as environmental disasters, world poverty, and the North-South divide. For Habermas, in addressing these problems we also need a moral perspective, as he [55]writes: "these problems can only be brought to a head by rethinking topics morally, by universalizing interests in a more or less discursive form [..] The moral or ethical point of view makes us quicker to perceive the more far-reaching, and simultaneously less insistent and more fragile, ties that bind the fate of an individual to that of every other, making even the most alien person a member of one's community." Moral sociology helps us in this as it also helps us asking whether the world views and institutions we have taken for granted are "instances of problematic justice"[56]. Moral sociology helps us morally argue about the nature of our self and institutional conditions and not only reproduces conventions of injustice and wasted lives but also embodies post-conventional development of self and society[57]. Habermasian contribution to the moral economy and moral sociology builds upon his critique of political economy where "the categories of critiques of

political economy breakdown"[58]. For Habermas, "a critical theory of society can no longer be constituted in the form of a critique of political economy"[59].

The project of moral sociology also draws upon the many-sided works of Roberto M. Unger[60] (2004) where morality finds an expression in cultivating creativity in self, polity, and institutions and in cultivating anti-necessitarian theory and consciousness. Manoranjan Mohanty brings the challenge of building a creative society to the pluriverse of moral sociology. For Mohanty[61], "Creative society embodies a methodology of viewing society in terms of liberation from multiple dominations—class, caste, race, ethnicity, gender and many more yet to be discovered sources of domination—and it points at processes already active or yet to be articulated, seeking to reconstitute society. [..]." Such an understanding of creative society as overcoming domination can be linked to contemporary formulations of just society as a society of non-domination as suggested by thinkers such as Rainer Forst (2017) and Phillip Pettit[62] which also resonates with contemporary critiques of political economy as critiques of domination and subordination[63].

To this pluriverse of moral sociology, Andre Beteille (2008) brings the challenge of constitutional morality where morality involves following constitutional principles and practice building upon the seminal work of B.R. Ambedkar into it. But Beteille's constitutional morality seems to be more institutional and does not question constitutions and institutions themselves or realize them as documents of social and personal hope and not just as texts of application.[64] The former seems to be arising in the works of Roberto Unger, Jurgen Habermas, Manorajan Mohanty, and others. But Beteille emphasizes the trust or fiduciary dimension of institutions and moral sociology which is significant [65]for a critique of political economy[66]. Here we can also build upon the works of Veena Das (2011) where moral sociology includes moral and spiritual strivings where the concern is "how do we cultivate morality as a dimension of everyday life" which also involves border-crossing co-existence between social groups such as Hindus and Muslims and themes such as moral / ethical and economic / political aspects of our lives. Moral sociology here is linked to a project of "ordinary ethics" where we live ethically in our everyday lives acknowledging our vulnerability and, at the same time, realizing our capacity to resist degradation and create new possibilities[67].The pluriverse of moral sociology with appropriate institutions, self, and movements of consciousness are helpful in critiques and transformations of political economy and relating it to the moral economy in creative ways.

**Social and Spiritual Ecology**

Critiques of political economy have from the beginning been confronted with the challenges of finding a creative balance between economics and ecology that has inspired Marxist and Marx-sympathetic scholars such as David Harvey[68] and Barbara Harriss-White[69] to realize the concerns of ecology, restitution, and regeneration of our biological and other realms in Marx. Here is what Barbara Harriss-White writes deserves our careful consideration:

> Marx envisaged an alternative dialectical process, one that was impossible under capitalist production and relations. He envisioned the systematic application of science to govern the 'human metabolism with nature in a rational way—with the least expenditure of energy—and the re-use of waste—under collective (social control)—as associated producers.' These are the social and ecological conditions in which fully emancipated individual human development' unfolds and in which science is to be used neither to dominate nature not to assume nature is inexhaustible. [..]

Understanding Marx's concept of human development as implying the relation to nature which he called 'restitution' [as different from 'restoration' though this is how Marx's original restitution in German has been translated into in English which for Barbara Hariss-White has a status quo and going back to Nature dimension] helps to appreciate why he thought this was something which only a socialist society could achieve. "Societies are not owners of the earth, they are simply its possessors, its beneficiaries, and have to bequeath it in an improved state to succeeding generations as *bene patres familial*. Our full, fee and rich development requires we improve the earth [70].

Marx's reference to associated producers in the above passage brings us to the social dimension of ecology which we find in some of the critical and creative ecological and socio-political movements of our times. Prafulla Samantara is an activist based in Odisha and has been involved with many political and ecological movements such as the movement of Kondhs in Niyamgiri not allowing the Vedanta mining project to work there. It may be noted that it is a historic achievement of the Kondhs that in their community meetings despite many pressures and violence they decided not to allow the Vedanta mining company to strip their hills. In his reflection on ecology and sustainable development, Samantara writes: "Sustainable development is dependent on and therefore should promote service-based commons like food production and consumption, common school education and health. Developing physical natural commons together with reform

social organizations and structure of communities is a prerequisite"[71].

Another example here is the work of Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP). KSSP started its work by popularizing science and creating a people's science movement in Kerala. It had struggled to save the Silent Valley in Kerala, a storehouse of biodiversity, which was to be destroyed by the building of a large dam in the area. KSSP had protested against this and Dr. M.S Swaminathan, the noted agricultural scientist whose work we will discuss shortly, was the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture of the Government of India. From within the Government, Dr. Swaminathan lent crucial support to the struggle of KSSP and as a result, the Government decided not to build the big dam and the Silent Valley was saved. Recently KSSP has been focusing on sustainable development and organic agriculture and it has initiated processes such as *sangha swapna* or collective dreaming exercises to realize these[72].

The above pathways towards sustainable development emerged out of a project of collective dreaming in KSSP which reiterates the significance of new collective imagination which now finds resonance in such efforts as making Meenangadi Village Panchayat in Wayanad district of Kerala carbon neutral. But this new imagination calls for the transformation of existing systems of production, consumption, economy, and polity[73]. These proposals resonate with the thoughts of both Marx and Gandhi as well as Gandhian economists such as J.C. Kumarappa who had challenged us to create an economy of permanence[74]. These proposals also resonate with contemporary articulations for transformations coming from many quarters. Nadia Johanisova and Stephan Wolf argue for instance for the co-operative organization of economy and economic democracy is crucial to realizing "sustainable development"[75] as crucial to developing a sustainable way of dealing with economics and ecology. They also challenge us to realize the need to nurture diversity of scales and the plurality of production modes. They also reiterate the significance of ecological tax reform: "Ecological tax reform (which entails higher taxation of material and energy capital consumption and lower taxation of work) could help internalize the environmental externalities of large corporations as well as consumer behavour". The proposal for ecological tax reforms here can be critically related to movements for tax justice in critiques of contemporary political economy offered by global justice movements such as Attac and interlocutors such as Thomas Picketty and Heikki Patomaki.

Marx's reference to our generational responsibility in our relationship with Nature resonates with ecological movements across the spectrum, especially in the contemporary movement of young

people inspired by Greta Thunberg who "concretises a politics of generational responsibility"[76]. But this generational responsibility is and can be accompanied by generosity. A contemporary critique of political economy as it moves transformationally with both economics and ecology needs to combine acts of generating or generativity, generations with generational responsibility and generosity together. Generosity, generativity, and generational responsibility constitute a new trigonometry of critique, creativity, and transformations now.

Ecology is a multi-dimensional vision, reality, and movement of being and becoming and has social, political, and spiritual dimensions. In our prevalent discourses and practices, while some attention has been given to social and political dimensions of ecology leading to social and political ecology, its interlinked spiritual dimension now needs creative restitution and unfoldment[77]. Generosity in our earlier trigonometry of generativity, generosity, and generational responsibility points to the integral spiritual dimension of ecology. M.S Swaminathan is a noted agricultural scientist of India and the world. In the mid-60s of the last century, Swaminathan helped in India's green revolution but from the beginning, Swaminathan had warned against the ecological dangers of overuse of chemical fertilizers and other dangers including the dangers of soil erosion. For the last quarter century, Swaminathan has been working for the green revolution with simultaneous attention to ecology, economy, and agriculture and has been pleading for a climate care movement[78]. In the climate care movement, it is both ecology as well as spiritual ecology. Swaminathan challenges us to realize both the practical and spiritual dimensions of ecology. Spiritual ecology becomes practical spirituality in which we all take part in our daily lives taking care of ourselves, society, nature, and Mother Earth but also taking "courageous steps of abandonment and new creation in a spirit of evolutionary flourishing"[79].

Spiritual ecology as part of evolutionary flourishing challenges us to understand the challenge of evolution understood in a complex non-linear way and this is different from the current discourse of sustainable development which is mostly status-quo driven. It challenges us to design our mind, self, and society in a new way which Arturo Escobar calls designing a pluriverse. But this design is not just limited to the design of institutions but also is related to cultivating a new mind—both individual and collective. To come to terms with the challenges of evolutionary flourishing as part of contemporary critiques of political economy, moral economy, moral sociology, and spiritual ecology we need to create conditions of more social and ecological minds. Classic works of G.H Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*[80] , and Gregory Bateson's *Steps to An Ecology of Mind*[81] help

us here[82]. But in developing our mind as more ecological we can also develop it as more spiritual animated by what the 14th Dalai Lama calls *Bodichitta* or Budha mind[83]. *Bodichitta* helps us go beyond our ego and realize that we are part of Nature not as a dominator nor as a helpless straw but as a creative evolutionary co-participant. This helps us go beyond the prisms of modernistic individualism, anthropocentrism, and nation-state-centered rationality[84]. It is related to the creation of what Boaventura de Sousa Santos[85] calls "ecology of knowledges" going beyond modern epistemicide and what Martha Nussbaum [86](2006) calls "cross-species dignity." Spiritual ecology as part of an effort to create a new social, ecological, and spiritual mind going beyond the current neuropolitics of the division of the left and the right brain—rational and emotional—helps us in our contemporary contributions to critiques of political economy[87]. This is suggested in Patomaki's [88](2017) cultivation of "heteroreflexivity" but seems to be missing from valorized proponents of political economy such as Thomas Picketty but finds resonance in other important interlocutors of economic thinking today such as Jeffrey Sachs who talks about the need for developing an economy of attentiveness where we attend to each others' needs including the higher dimension of ourselves rather than an economy of distraction. Sach's economy of mindfulness resonates with Bellah's[89] approach to developing a society of attentiveness thus bringing alternative considerations of economy, society, and spirituality together. This draws inspiration from classic and perennial works such as J.C. Kumarappa *Economy of Permanence* and E.F. Schumachers' *Small is Beautiful*[90].

**Alternative Planetary Futures**

Our contemporary organization of economics and politics has brought us to the brink of collapse which is also heightened by the devastation caused by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. We need to critique our present, our present regimes of politics, economy, self, and society and cultivate alternative presents and futures which are not extensions or reproductions of the existing modes of thinking and collective organizations. Our alternative futures are part of planetary futures where we rethink and re-organize our modes of existence in our planet in new ways. We create new economies, polities, selves, and societies and realize ourselves as children of Mother Earth realizing our kinship with all creation. Future is not only a fact—a cultural fact but also a matter of values[91]. We are challenged to create pathways of beauty, dignity, and dialogues and alternative planetary futures which are not reproductions of existing dead and killing systems and ways of thinking. This calls for contemporary creative critiques of political

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# Tilak and Gandhi: Hinduism, Caste, and Untouchability

*Sudhi Mandloi*

ABSTRACT

*This article seeks to conduct an analogical study of the two great stalwarts of modern India: B.G Tilak and M.K Gandhi. It considers several strands of their ideas, particularly on Caste and Untouchability, by connecting their beliefs on Hinduism, a common factor between them. The underlying premise of this article is to propose affinities and forge analogies that shaped their socio-religious views and to highlight the similarities and differences that existed between their beliefs. Both praised Hinduism and its institutions. Gandhi's anti-untouchability campaign was deeply rooted in his desire to save Hinduism from extinction while achieving equal status for Untouchables. He elevated the issue to a nationalist level and inextricably linked it to the achievement of Swaraj. In Contrast, Tilak was motivated more by a desire to defend Hinduism and its institutions, which led him to oppose social reforms from above, prioritising political independence above all else.*

**Keywords**: Varnashrama, Caste, Hinduism, Untouchability, Social reform

## Introduction

THIS PAPER IS A modest attempt at presenting comparative perspectives of Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi on Hinduism and Untouchability. It is critical to analyse their socio-religious thought processes, which had left deep imprints on their psyches and contributed manifestly to their philosophies. I examine their socio-religious beliefs, mainly how they approached the crucial issues of caste and untouchability, by relating them with their beliefs on Hinduism, which were a common factor between them.

It is argued that Gandhi's stances on caste and untouchability were motivated primarily by his desire to save Hinduism from disintegration while obtaining equal status for untouchables vis-à-vis caste Hindus, whereas Tilak's position was motivated by his defence of Hinduism and its institutions to strengthen Hindu unity. Both held Hinduism in high regard, aspiring to preserve its pristine purity. The emphasis of the paper is on their perspectives on Hinduism, Varnashrama, and Caste and how they addressed the social reform agenda. Their ideas converged and diverged on many issues.

They were not political contemporaries; Gandhi was Tilak's successor in nationalist politics. When Tilak's era ended, the Gandhian era began. Aside from their family backgrounds, both were influenced by the ancient Vedic civilisation, Indian traditions, and culture rather than Western civilisation. Both praised Hinduism and its institutions and saw it as the most tolerant religion, necessary for the moral and spiritual well-being of the people. They believed that religion instilled a desire in an individual for inner development and consciousness as a precursor to outward change. They saw the Gita as their guide and saviour, which taught humankind how to carry out their responsibilities and actions and drew inspiration from it. Both had a vision and firm conviction to achieve their goal of Swaraj. I readily discerned Hinduism at the heart of their respective discourses while reading their writings and speeches. Both viewed politics from the prism of spiritualism to address the various issues they faced during their respective eras. Tilak witnessed the most crucial debate relating to social vis-a-vis political reform of the late nineteenth century. Gandhi inherited the debate in the early twentieth century, which he addressed entirely from a new angle. Although both these thinkers have been studied extensively by various scholars, no effort has been made thus far to intensively explore the analogical connections between their ingrained socio-religious views that contradict either the similarities or the dissimilarities. This paper comprises two sections—the first deals with their perception of social reforms regarding Caste and Untouchability. The second focuses on their divergent approaches to educating untouchables.

**Tilak and Gandhi on Social Reform: Varnashrama and Caste**

In the late nineteenth century, Tilak's era was known for Hindu religious revivalism, which had emerged as a reaction to British domination. Hindu revivalists attempted to regenerate Hindu culture to restore it to its former glory. By the late nineteenth century, nationalist politics had become associated with the Hindu revivalist movement to end British rule. Tilak attempted to assert Hindu

nationalism to facilitate the political mobilisation of the Hindu community to participate in nationalist politics by asserting Hindu unity, which Tilak supported vigorously because he felt religion was essential to develop a Hindu nationality. Tilak was a Brahmin by caste. He argued that Hindu Dharma was the cohesive factor that served as a unifying agent among Hindus from various regions. He believed that "the divergent sects of India could converge to form 'a mighty Hindu nation' if they would only follow the original principles of the Hindu tradition as outlined in such texts as the Ramayana and the Bhagwadgita. And this convergence should be the goal of all Hindus."[1] Like Gandhi, Tilak's socio-religious beliefs were based on the Bhagwadgita and the ancient Vedic religion. According to the Bhagwadgita, the Hindu social order has been divided into four varnas. "The Bhagwadgita expressly states that this division was made not by birth but by the quality of guna and the profession [karma] necessary to maintain the whole society in those days."[2] Tilak wrote a commentary on the Gita called *'Gitarahasya'* in which he compared Western philosophy to the Gita. He discovered that our religion and culture were not philosophically or spiritually inferior to Western culture. He also claimed that the Gita provided solutions to all ethical and spiritual problems. "He turned to Gita as the single most important text upon which a justification for activism could be based."[3] Tahmankar called "the Gitarahasya' a socio-political thesis based on the most sacred books of the Hindus."[4]

Tilak was not opposed to social reform but prioritised political rights and liberation from the alien colonisers. He opposed the imposition of social reforms from above and strongly condemned any state intervention because he believed it would interfere with the people's social customs and religious lives. He argued that reforms needed to be implemented from below through the initiative of the educated Indians. He gave priority to political independence over social reform when he said, "The nationalist's party does not ascribe as much importance to it as it ascribes to political movement. It does not say there should be no social progress of the nation, but it should be done in harmony with political progress and self-respect."[5] His entire focus was on achieving Swaraj, and he did not want to divert the nation's attention from achieving political independence to social reforms. Tilak's nationalist ideology fostered the promotion of Hindu consciousness and instilled a sense of respect and pride in their ancient Hindu culture, values, and traditions in the masses, wishing to restore its glory by preventing its degeneration. Tilak saw himself as a nationalist and defended Hindu nationality by linking it to revitalising Hindu religious institutions and culture. He was adamant that Hindu

culture and religious traditions must be preserved and contended that disrupting Hindu culture and religion would result in a loss of national identity. Charles Heimsath stated, "The leaders of the Hindu nationalist movement based on a revival of Hindu culture openly acknowledged their identification of nationalism with Hinduism."[6]

Tilak believed that varnashrama and caste were essential components of the Hindu religion, inextricably linked to Hindu identity, and, thus, could not be separated from one another. He stated, "Hindu religion meant *Sanatana Dharma* which was *Varnashrama Dharma.* He was in favour of preaching Sanatana Dharma throughout the nation. "*Varnashrama Dharma* was called the national religion, and arguments were put forward to oppose the reformers claim that the division of the community into castes was an important reason for the inability to defend themselves against foreign aggression."[7] *Mahratta* argued that "caste did not weaken the society as even Krishna has preached the doctrine of each one to his duty in the *Bhagwadgita.*"[8] Tilak believed that Hindu dharma was supreme and that performing caste duties and maintaining social conduct was considered one's dharma.

Tilak considered caste to be essential for maintaining social relations in society and vehemently opposed social reformers who attacked the varnashrama and the institution of caste, not seeing them as barriers to the path of nationalism. It declared that "the Hindu religion owed its existence to the caste system."[9] Tilak chastised those social reformers who upheld Western ideals while finding flaws in Hindu culture and institutions. He was proud of Hinduism and opposed all those social reformers, attempting to reform the Hindu religion and society, believing that it would destroy the sanctity of Hindu culture. He warned these social reformers against enacting social reforms based on Western ideas and values while supporting social reforms initiated within the framework of Hindu traditions and culture. He regarded "Lokhitwadi, Phule and Ranade as destroyers of Hindu religion, culture and society."[10] He argued that Indian nationalism would rise due to the revitalisation of Hindu culture and religion. Veer Savarkar actually propagated Hindu nationalism in the true sense, but Tilak could be considered a forerunner of Hindu nationalism.

Tilak believed in the varna order but was well aware of the flaws of the caste system, which he wished to correct. He desired to transform it following the teachings of the Bhagwadgita. "Caste distinctions were originally planned on the principle of division of labour. They were meant for a better organisation. It is true that there are defects in the system, and we must try to remove them. But until they are removed, they must be minimised."[11] Tilak considered the

caste system a non-negotiable aspect of the Hindu religion.[12] He stated that "There is no more tolerant religion than Hinduism in the world. [Therefore,] there should be no superiority- inferiority feelings among Hindus."[13] Tilak hoped to bring about social changes when the time was ripe, not wanting to initiate political and social reforms simultaneously. He was opposed to adopting any issue of social reform through the platform of the Indian National Congress without the consent of the people. He urged the Congress leaders to avoid social reform at all costs and to take a critical stance towards all the social reformers because he was concerned about Hindus deviating from the nationalist movement**.** B.G Tilak insisted that "only the defender of the caste system could be a nationalist."[14] He launched a powerful campaign in his newspapers, *Kesari* and *Maharata,* against social reformers who were adamant on abolishing caste or reconstructing the Hindu social order, believing that the abolition of caste would facilitate nation-building. "Lokhitwadi and Phule, who advocated the abolition of caste-based inequalities, were called "as traitors to the nation-Rashtra by Chiplunkar and Tilak, who claimed that they represented the real Hindus."[15] His opposition to Vithalbhai Patel's Inter-caste Marriage Bill' was based on the premise that it would lead to the loss of distinctive national identity.[16] "Tilak condemned reformers like M G Ranade for advocating a liberal, egalitarian society free from caste and religious prejudices and a single Indian nationality based on citizenship."[17] "The reformers, declared Tilak, are 'killing the caste and with it, killing the vitality of the nation."[18] Tilak argued that with religious reforms and persuading the reformers, feelings of inferiority or superiority could be removed eventually and that abolition of caste was unnecessary. He stated in Maharatta, "the institution of caste was upheld as a proud possession of the nineteenth century Hinduism. Caste was declared as an "absolute necessity" so that "different communities could live in peace."[19]

Tilak's editorial titled 'The Caste and Caste Alone has Power' stated, "caste is a social combination of the members who were united by birth and not by enrolment. This is the real genius of the institution. The reformers are trying to substitute enrolment for birth and in doing so they are importing a glittering western principle a substitution for the sound, safe and prudent eastern one."[20] Although he did not desire to abolish caste when asked on several public occasions about untouchability, he condemned it and favoured its abolition. He expressed his view about the problem at the All India Depressed Classes Conference in Bombay on 24 March 1918:

> The Hindu Dharamshatras do not support the notion of treating any

> class of human beings as untouchable. Whatever may be the genesis of untouchability, the sinful nature of the notion (of untouchability) is beyond doubt. Untouchability must go. For the sake of the progress of the nation, and social reform, the notion (or stigma) of untouchability must go. Mistakes committed by the Brahmanas (or the Brahmana bureaucracy) of old times must be rectified.[21]

Addressing the first conference of the depressed class in Bombay, he said that all Indians were the children of the same motherland; there could be no spiritual and moral defence of untouchability. He stated: "If God were to tolerate Untouchability, I would not recognise him, God, at all." Soon thereafter, Tilak disappointed the leaders of the conference by refusing to sign a memorandum for the removal of the untouchability."[22] "Tilak attended the second All India Depressed Classes Mission Conference at Bombay, which was presided over by the Maharaja of Baroda and declared that both untouchability and the stigma attached to untouchability should go."[23] Tilak's approach to the issue of untouchability exhibited a dichotomy. He agreed on removing untouchability at these conferences but did not sign the resolution because he did not want to annoy the orthodox sections. This indicates his being influenced by the Brahminical orthodoxy, which opposed the upliftment of lower castes. Tilak took several steps to mitigate untouchability while encouraging the lower castes to participate in Ganpati festivals. However, he could not attract the majority of the lower caste communities to these festivals because he was unrelenting in his criticism of reformers, working to remove caste restrictions. He wanted to adhere to the core principles of varnashrama. Tilak saw attempts of non-Brahmins to challenge the caste hierarchy as a threat to Hinduism. Tilak claimed that caste had maintained social order through the ages, and any attempt to abolish it would exacerbate animosity between Brahmins and non-Brahmins. He rejected the argument of the social reformers that caste posed a hindrance to the development of nationalistic feelings among the people. He wanted the reformers to defend the Hindu religion, wherein caste occupied a vital place. Tilak's commitment to the consolidation of Hindu nationality enraged many sections of society, particularly the lower castes, which refused to integrate with the Brahmin communities because he upheld the sanctity of varnashrama dharma and caste hierarchy. Brahminical orthodoxy advocated a caste-based Hindu social order which was challenged by Jyotirao Phule, a lower-caste reformer.

In contrast, Gandhi considered religion an essential part of his life and was a firm believer in Hinduism, which promoted tolerance for all living creatures. "Hinduism believes in the oneness not only of

merely of all human life but in the oneness of all other lives."[24] He considered Hinduism the most pervasive and tolerant religion, referring to the Bhagwadgita as his spiritual dictionary, which left an indelible mark on his philosophy. He opined in his Autobiography: "The book struck me as one of priceless worth. The impression has ever since been growing on me that with the result, I regard it today as the book par excellence for the knowledge of truth."[25]His Hinduism was founded on the Vedas, Upanishads, and the teachings of the Gita, all of which aided in developing his socio-religious philosophy and spiritual consciousness. Gandhi said:

> When doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and when I see not one ray of light on the horizon, I turn to the Bhagavad Gita and find a verse comfort me. My life has been full of tragedies, and if they have not left any visible effect on me, I owe it to the teachings of the BhagwadGita."[26]

Gandhi's faith in Hinduism intensified as he learned more about the 'Bhagwadgita', a basic text of Hinduism. Gandhi contended in Young India that the reason "Hinduism had survived till then was because of its spiritual development rather than material progress."[27] Gandhi did not accept every principle of Hinduism, following only those which his conscience allowed, and maintained that his salvation lay in Hinduism. "His definition of being a Hindu was one who believes in God, immortality and transmigration of the soul, karma and moksha, who tries to practice truth and non-violence and acts according to varnashrama, the division of society into distinct groups with their own roles."[28] Gandhi stated "there are two aspects of Hinduism. On the one hand, there is historical Hinduism with its untouchability, superstitious worship of stocks and stones, animal sacrifice. On the other hand, we have the Hinduism of the Gita, the Upanishads and Patanjali's Yogasutras, the acme of Ahimsa and oneness of all creation, pure worship of one immanent, formless, imperishable God."[29]

As a devout Hindu, Gandhi desired to eliminate all flaws associated with Hinduism to preserve its purity. His approach to social reform differed from Tilak's, having no qualms about concurrently initiating social and political reforms. Gandhi argued that the movement for Swaraj and social reform were necessarily complementary to each other. He believed that many of the social evils were hampering the path of Swaraj and attempted to strike a balance by effectively combining the two issues. Unlike Tilak, Gandhi did not want to put social reform on hold until Swaraj was achieved.

"To postpone social reform till after the attainment of swaraj, "he said, "its not to know the meaning of swaraj"[30] By the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, the abolition of untouchability had become one of the most burning issues. However, in 1920, Gandhi brought this issue into the fold of nationalist politics as directed by the Indian National Congress and expressed concern about its abolition. Gandhi's perspectives on caste, varnashrama, and untouchability differed from one another. He genuinely believed in the varnashrama and supported the division of society into four varnas as fundamental and necessary for society's functioning. Varnashrama, in Gandhi's opinion, represented the performance of traditional hereditary duties to the community to maintain a harmonious social order and livelihoods, each duty being of equal value, with no distinction of high or low ranking. Varnashrama was an important institution, but the concept of supremacy of one section over another was repugnant to him. Gandhi was distressed to see that varnashrama had lost its original form and degenerated into a travesty that needed rectification. He stated:

> I have often shown the distinction between Varnashrama and Untouchability. I have defended the one as a rational, scientific fact and condemned the other as an excrescence, an unmitigated evil. But I do regard varnashrama as a healthy division of work based on birth. The present ideas of caste are a perversion of the original. There is no question with me of superiority or inferiority. It is purely a question of duty. I have indeed stated that varna is based on birth.[31]

Gandhi saw the caste system as a social institution essential to Hinduism and believed that abolishing it would cause chaos. He did not see caste as sinful or as impeding people's spirituality. Gandhi contended that all of the flaws associated with caste would fade away with time. He said:

> …the difference, therefore, between the caste system and untouchability is not one of degree, but of kind. There is one thing more to be remembered about the caste system. For me, it is not the same as Varnashrama Dharma. While the caste system is an answer to the social need, varnashrama is based upon the Hindu scriptures. Not so the caste system. I am a firm believer in varnashrama. I have not hesitated before now to consider it as a gift of Hinduism to mankind.[32]

Gandhi claimed that innumerable castes and sub-castes had been an outgrowth of the varna system, but he did not want to destroy it. He also argued that caste had given birth to many restrictions on

having marriages and following occupations and instilled a sense of highness and lowness among caste Hindus which had not been there in the original form of varnashrama. This could, he felt, be remedied by initiating reforms among caste Hindus by persuading them to abandon feelings of superiority and treating the lower castes as equals. According to Gandhiji, "the caste system is scientific. You cannot condemn it by argument. It controls society socially and ethically I see no reason to end it. To end casteism is to finish the Hindu religion. It has its limitation and disadvantages. Even then, there is nothing to be hated in this system."[33] Although Gandhi saw varna and caste as necessary institutions to save Hinduism, he also believed in the equality of all human beings.

Gandhi did not see inter-dining as an essential reform to eliminate caste disparities, believing it was a personal choice that could not be regulated socially and religiously. He opined that inter-dining and inter-caste marriage had never been prohibited in Hinduism, despite slowing its growth. Gandhi did not regard untouchability as a by-product of caste but of the distinction of highness and lowness that had become part of Hinduism, corrupting it slowly and imperceptibly. Instead of a crusade against caste, Gandhi launched a crusade against untouchability which was gnawing at the vitals of society. Gandhi said, "The moment untouchability goes, the caste system itself will be purified; that is to say, according to my dream, it will resolve itself into the true Varna-dharma, the four divisions of society, each complementary of the other and none inferior or superior to any other, each as necessary for the whole body of Hinduism as any other."[34] He argued that caste was not the impediment; instead, untouchability was a grievous crime and that if Hindus did not eradicate it, along with all other complexes of superiority over others, Hinduism would perish. "Bikhu Parekh states that Gandhi took a long time to acknowledge that the roots of untouchability lay deep within the caste system and 'he could only argue that the untouchables should become the touchable' without ending 'their lowest social and moral status."[35] Gandhi's thoughts on caste changed in the 1940s, and his perception of it differed from its earlier views. Gandhi claimed that 'caste must go if we want to root out Untouchability."[36] Gandhi reversed himself to urge that the "classless society is ideal, not merely to be aimed at but to be worked for"[37] In his later years, he also promoted inter-caste marriages. The removal of untouchability became a core concern in Gandhi's consciousness. For him, untouchability was a mark of contempt against Hinduism. Gandhi said:

> Untouchability is a phenomenon which is peculiar to Hinduism only,

> and it has got no warrant either in reason or in shastras and what little I have studied of the shastras and what I have been told by people who have made a deeper study of them shows that there is no warrant for Untouchability by birth in Hinduism.[38]

He not only devoted his energies to the cause of the eradication of untouchability but also ignited a nationalist spark to abolish it. He claimed that by undergoing self-purification, savarna Hindus could effect a remarkable sea change in the overall growth of the untouchables. Gandhi's goal was to bring about a total transformation in the mindset of the caste Hindus to facilitate the social, economic, and political development of untouchables. He claimed that self-purification would alleviate inequality and deeply ingrained thoughts of inferiority and superiority in the mind of the caste Hindus, which had corrupted the very essence of the Hindu religion. Gandhi said: "Indeed if we approached this question with a political motive, we should fail to serve the Harijans and damage Hinduism."[39] "The only motive, therefore, that guides me in working for the Harijan cause is to see Hinduism purified of the curse of untouchability."[40] He wished to transcend all barriers and disparities between the caste Hindus and the untouchables to promote brotherhood between them, being quite passionate about the constructive programme he had devised. Gandhi wished to grant untouchables the same civic, social, and religious rights as caste Hindus. Abolition of untouchability was a burning desire for him, and he maintained that Swaraj would be impossible to achieve unless untouchability was abolished. He said that:

> I talk of the extreme form of untouchability. But the evil is so widespread that in some form or other, it runs through the whole Hindu social system and corrupts it. The distinction of high and low is at the bottom of untouchability. If the extreme form goes, the rest is bound to go. If it does not, our movement will be a mere camouflage. So long as the idea of high and low is not abolished, untouchability cannot be said to have been abolished.[41]

Gandhi believed that religion was necessary for the advancement of nations and followed Hinduism implicitly, but was dissatisfied that caste Hindus had contaminated Hinduism by enforcing social taboos of impurity against specifically oppressed communities. He stated:

> To me even to *think* that it is pollution to touch any creation of God is sinful. To me it is the height of irreligion to look upon every custom as part and parcel of religion. Customs may be good or bad. I think it to be

> a bad custom not to touch the *Antyajas.* But to regard any of God's creatures as untouchable appears to me to be a sin.[42]

Gandhi started a temple entry programme because he considered temples essential facets of Hinduism. For Gandhi, Harijans gaining entry into Hindu temples was a critical prerequisite for abolishing untouchability and barring untouchables from entering temples based on their caste was a disgrace to humanity. According to him, one of the ways of becoming equal to savarnas was through temple entry. He worked tirelessly to seek entry for the untouchables across the nation, believing this would instil a sense of social justice in caste Hindus to treat untouchables with dignity and respect.

On the one hand, Gandhi saw temple entry necessary for the untouchables to give them all of the privileges the caste Hindus enjoyed. On the other hand, he thought it was a form of penance for caste Hindus to alleviate the injustice done down the ages to the untouchables. Gandhi contended that this campaign would benefit caste Hindus spiritually by purging them of the sins they committed against untouchables. He had to deal with a backlash from sanatanis Hindus, who claimed he was destroying Hinduism. They often attempted to obstruct Gandhi's plan to open temples to untouchables. Gandhi said, "Temple-entry is the one spiritual act that would constitute the message of freedom to the untouchables and assure them that they are not outcastes before God."[43] He wanted to arouse public consciousness regarding lifting a ban on temple entry. He asserted that it was the duty of every caste Hindu to ensure that every temple remained open for all the untouchables. He, in fact, dissuaded caste Hindus from visiting temples where the Harijans had been barred entry to demonstrate their commitment to the cause. He regarded the temple entry campaign as a purely religious and moral endeavour that was in no way linked to politics. When Gandhi launched the temple entry campaign, he was obdurate at opening them to the untouchables on similar grounds, believing that separate temples would not give them equal status. He aimed to end the segregation that caste Hindus supported in the name of separate schools, temples and localities. Gandhi argued that such segregation would leave indelible impressions on their minds, precluding their ever-becoming part of Hindu society.

Later, due to the opposition of sanatanis he brought about a shift in his stance by agreeing to endorse separate temples for untouchables. He stated that the majority would support the untouchables to enter temples as sanatanis, who were prohibiting their entries, were in the minority. He accepted the compromise of having separate temples

and wells for untouchables because he knew that caste Hindus would take time to undergo a "change of heart" to concede equal status wholeheartedly to the untouchables. When Gandhi was asked once whether separate schools and temples for untouchables would lead to segregation of the untouchables from the caste Hindus. Gandhi said he accepted this because it would help in mitigating discrimination. "As long as the Antyajas cannot use common temples, etc., it is better to have separate institutions by which they may benefit, rather than totally deprive them of the amenity."[44] He was adamant on eradicating untouchability but had sometimes made compromises because he did not want to coerce or impose his views, preferring instead to effect a change of heart. Harold coward argues that "Gandhi acted more as a fighter to preserve Hinduism and less as a reformer for these reasons."[45]

Gandhi argued that simply granting untouchables access to temples and establishing separate wells and schools would not fulfil the responsibility of caste Hindus. Instead, they needed to assimilate them by bridging all the disparities between savarnas and Harijans. He stated, "If we gave them all these and still kept them untouchables, it would only mean replacing iron chains with golden ones; but the slave would still be a slave… The purification we strive for is not complete until we have purged our hearts of this distinction. You and I may not be satisfied with anything less."[46] He also urged all untouchables to facilitate this movement by improving their hygiene habits, which he claimed were the primary cause of their social ostracism by caste Hindus. He was aware that caste Hindus had oppressed their fellow brothers and sisters and attempted to persuade them to change their attitudes to right the wrongs done to them. "Thus, the movement is one of repentance and reparation. Hence it is confined, on the one hand, to constructive work among Harijans and, on the other, to the conversion of savarnas by persuasion, arguments and, above all, by correct conduct on the part of the reformers."[47] He believed that centuries of slavery against untouchables had impacted their self-esteem and that they needed their self-confidence to be boosted to recover from the mental trauma.

For Gandhi, the campaign against untouchability was essentially a socio-religious movement to purge Hinduism of all its ills. He strongly advocated that if untouchability was removed, norms relating to high and low, superiority and inferiority would vanish from society. Gandhi refuted the charge that this campaign was a political movement and that it was neither a movement for their economic upliftment nor social rejuvenation, his primary goal being to abolish it. He said, untouchability is a blot upon Hinduism and must be removed at any

cost. "Untouchability is a poison that will destroy Hinduism if we do not get rid of it in time."[48] Gandhi sincerely believed that untouchability had never been a part of Hinduism and that caste Hindus had practised it due to their ignorance. Gandhi stated that untouchables would eventually benefit from social, economic, and political advancement if persistent efforts to end the practice of untouchability were continued. "We must approach Harijans as penitents or debtors, not as their patrons or creditors extending generosity to the undeserving."[49] In his writings in Harijan, Gandhi stated that he had not seen the parallel of untouchability in any religion worldwide. He argued that treating any human being as an outcaste based on their birth was a curse for the Hindu religion. By ill-treating untouchables, caste Hindus had themselves significantly suffered spiritually and materially. He stated: "Two of the strongest desires that keep me in flesh and bone are the emancipation of the untouchables and the protection of the cow. When these two desires are fulfilled, there is swaraj, and therein lies my own Moksha. May God give you the strength to work out your salvation."[50]

Eleanor Zelliot said that "Gandhi is said to have spoken and written more on untouchability than on any other subject."[51]Gandhi asserted that it was the duty of the savarnas to accept the untouchables on an equal footing by eradicating all the social disabilities imposed upon them.

**Tilak and Gandhi: Untouchability and Education**

This section discusses Tilak and Gandhi's perspectives on educating untouchables, as both had opposing viewpoints. Tilak was highly critical of the efforts of reformers to educate the lower castes and women and castigated the government's assistance in educating lower castes, due to which reformers were becoming increasingly conscious about the abolition of caste. He attributed the decline of Hindu nationality to giving education to women and lower castes. He chastised the reformers because he opposed mass education and wanted it to be limited to the elite to reduce caste conflicts. Tilak argued that "by supporting the extension of 'liberal education for the masses, the reformers were committing a grave error' as 'English education encouraged the people to defy the caste restrictions and the spread of English education among the natives will bring down their caste system."[52] Tilak anticipated that education would become a powerful weapon for non-Brahmins to use against Brahmins to consolidate their claims for jobs offered by the British. Jyotirao Phule was the first to emphasise the value of education for non-Brahmins and wished to use education as a tool to empower lower castes and

women. He proposed that lower caste students be given scholarships to pursue higher education. In Mahratta, Tilak argued that "education was to be kept away from the masses and various arguments were put forward to avoid compulsory primary education."[53] Our system of Education- A defect and a cure Mass education proposed by the reformers and Phule was criticised:

> You take away a farmer's boy from the plough. the blacksmith's boy from the bellows and the Cobbler's boy from his awl with the object of giving him liberal education... and the boy learns to condemn the profession of his father, not to speak of the loss to which the latter is put by being deprived of the son's assistance at the old trade. Having done this the boy looks up to the government to give him a job... Mass education removed the youth from a sphere where he would have been contented happy and useful to those who depend upon him and teach him to be discontented with his lot and with the government.[54]

Tilak was critical of the effort of the colonial government in bringing education to the villages and encouraging the children of peasants to take up education. Tilak contended that instead of teaching ornamental subjects, the *Kunbi* children were to be taught these subjects which would be necessary for their living. He suggested to the government to open technical schools at the villages or a group of villages to teach the "most ordinary trades" like those of "a carpenter, blacksmith, mason, tailor, etc."[55]Teaching the "*Kunbi* children, reading, writing and rudiments of history, geography and mathematics" was likely to do "more harm than good to them."[56] "By allowing women and non-Brahmins to educate themselves, the reformers had destroyed the 'Hindu nationality."[57] Tilak claimed that social reformers fostered caste rivalry and animosity toward the Congress-led nationalist movement. He contended that it would lead to conflicts between Brahmins and non-Brahmins in obtaining education, which was a prerequisite for taking advantage of the opportunities provided by colonial modernity. "The colonial government's support to such an endeavour was, according to Tilak, 'against the spirit of Queen's proclamation, which guaranteed that the government would abstain from all interference with religious beliefs."[58] English education was unsuitable for India because it failed to provide moral and religious instruction and Western science.[59] He believed that colonial education based on Western knowledge produced a well-educated class that was mentally colonised, posing a threat to Hindu nationality.

He contended that the spread of education among the lower castes would not benefit them but would, instead embolden them to fight for the cause of caste abolition. He believed that the curricula of

government schools and colleges were not designed to meet the needs of Hindu society because they were devoid of Hindu cultural traditions and religious instruction. It would encourage women and lower castes to question Hinduism. He was not opposed to Western education per se but criticised education based solely on Western ideas, which lacked spiritual and religious teachings, prompting him to advocate national education. Tilak suggested that "the entire syllabi of schools should consist of 'the history of the Sanatan Dharma and a little attention also paid to the comparative study of religion … to prove the greatness of Hinduism."[60] He claimed that religious education would help shape the character of students and instil a sense of patriotism in them. He argued that politics and industrial education should be incorporated into national education curricula, giving a new direction to their careers.

"Tilak warned that until the national education was introduced, incidents like, 'few hundred illiterate low castes protesting against the Congress' would continue."[61] "The nationalists in Maharashtra considered the education of non-Brahmins and women would result in the loss of distinct Indian nationality."[62] "Tilak opposed the admission of *Mahars and Mangs* to the schools where the upper-class children studied."[63] **"**He objected reformers endeavour to encourage lower castes boys to seek admission into government schools because it was causing inconvenience to the caste Hindus."[64] Tilak vehemently opposed missionaries working amongst the lower caste boys, believing that these were aimed at evangelising them under the guise of educating them and because he believed they were instigating lower-caste students to make demands for admission to government schools. He was critical of the university curriculum and desired it to be changed to one that would instil a sense of responsibility to society and orientation to politics in students, which would aid in the attainment of nationhood.

Much unlike Tilak, Gandhi did not oppose the education of untouchables, working tirelessly instead to ensure that children of untouchables could attend school. He faced the opposition of orthodox Hindus, who strongly opposed his efforts in this regard. Gandhi devised a constructive programme for the abolition of untouchability, one of its key components being the provision of education to untouchables. Initially, he attempted to persuade the orthodox sections of society who opposed admitting untouchables to schools. However, he realised that the change had to be inconspicuous and discreet, leading him to agree to open separate schools for untouchable children. He stated, "It was slowly and calmly engaged in providing separate schools for them, though Mahatma Gandhi regarded these schools as

a "matter of shame for us."[65] "According to the Belgaum resolution (1924), no school could be called "national" where untouchables were refused admission."[66]But he soon adopted a "practical" approach to "start a large number of schools, especially for Antayaj children."[67] "Gandhi said that many schools were for suppressed classes children run in several provinces under the Congress aegis and with Congress funds."[68] Under Gandhi's leadership, Congress volunteers, wished to open national schools for untouchables, but they could not succeed. "In some schools, however, where this appeal was 'enforced' many caste Hindus either withdrew their children from such schools or opposed to the Untouchables who tried to get admission in such schools."[69]

Gandhi stated:

> National schools must be the most potent means of educating the 'untouchables' and abolishing the curse of untouchability from the schools. Parents who do not like their children to mix with 'untouchable' children might, if they choose, withdraw them. I have no hesitation in advising that teachers should run the risk of closing down their schools if the condition of running them requires the exclusion of 'untouchables.'[70]

Caste Hindus continued to oppose Untouchables using public wells and sending their children to public schools, making Gandhi realise this would be a long-drawn-out battle that would require patience to win. Gandhi founded the Harijan Seva Sangh to carry out his constructive programme. One of the primary responsibilities assigned to this organisation was the establishment of separate Harijan schools and providing opportunities by giving scholarships to untouchable students to pursue primary and higher education. They also maintained hostel facilities for untouchable children. He desired to open new national schools to give untouchables access to education and did not want to wait until public consciousness of caste Hindus in this regard arose.[71] Gandhi recognised that the lack of cleanliness and hygiene of untouchable children was one of the reasons for opposition to their admission to schools. Seth Ghanshyamdas Birla, President of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, writes:

> During the period of this education, the boys should be taught useful handicrafts chosen for their educative value. Besides the university course and craft, special attention will be given to increasing the general knowledge and hygiene. Music, games, exercises, riding, swimming, etc., should be taught. Religious or moral training should not be neglected. Equal respect for all religions should be inculcated, along

> with a good grounding in the principles of Hinduism and the peculiar beauties of our own culture. I plump for his scheme. I wish him all success. The sooner it is launched, the better for Harijans and the better for India.[72]

He believed that by preparing them in Harijan schools and teaching them good behaviour, speech, and cleanliness, he could minimise the objections of caste Hindus. He was also in favour of giving them technical training to earn a living. Gandhi saw Harijan schools as an avenue of improving the conditions of the untouchables. Dr Ambedkar challenged him vigorously, who saw his measures regarding untouchables as more of philanthropic gestures than attempts at empowering them. He claimed that by upholding caste, varnashrama, and untouchability, Hinduism fosters division and inequality.

**Conclusion**

This paper examined Tilak's and Gandhi's comparative perspectives on caste and untouchability, public debates about the primacy of politics over social reforms having occurred mainly in this discourse. Both approached the issues of caste and untouchability from a socio-religious standpoint. Both emphasised the attainment of Swaraj as the only solution to all the problems. Their political beliefs and religious convictions were in mutual sync and were inseparable. Their lives were intertwined with Hindu culture and religious traditions. Both saw untouchability as an act of perversion of humanity, but their approaches were quite divergent. Gandhi made abolition of untouchability one of the most crucial nationalist questions. Tilak did not link untouchability with nationalist politics; instead, he defended the caste system and Sanatana Dharma to strengthen Hindu nationality. Tilak contended that every social group had a well-defined place in the social order according to varnashrama and that destroying such order would jeopardise the existence of Hinduism. Likewise, Gandhi believed in the varna order but wished to achieve equality of all varnas without distinction of highness and lowness between castes. Tilak preferred the higher classes over the lower classes regarding access to education and jobs, whereas Gandhi did not favour one class or caste over another. They had opposing viewpoints on the education of untouchables. Both, however, were opposed to providing education based solely on Western ideas and advocated national education that included moral, religious, political, technical and industrial instruction. Tilak strongly opposed educating the lower castes, whereas Gandhi strongly supported it.

The late nineteenth century witnessed critical debates among Congress leaders regarding the primacy of social over political reforms and vice versa. Tilak played a pivotal role in shaping public opinion on critical societal issues and wrote extensively on religion, politics, caste, and gender, the central axes of public debate during the colonial era. Various reformers challenged Tilak's Hindu nationalist discourse in the public sphere through newspapers. He faced stiff opposition from a reformist group led by Ranade and an anti-caste activist group led by Phule, both of whom criticised Tilak's stance on social reforms, particularly caste and gender issues, causing him great anguish. He attempted to quell the growing anti-caste sentiments among reformers, believing that their criticism of Hinduism and its institutions would be detrimental to Hindu unity. Gandhi's fight against untouchability and his stance on caste was chastised by sanatanis and Dalit leaders, particularly Dr Ambedkar, who harshly criticised Gandhi's stance. Ambedkar refused to approach this issue from a socio-religious standpoint, preferring to resolve it politically by gaining political safeguards for untouchables, which Gandhi saw as detrimental.

Tilak fought a verbal battle against untouchability but did not address the issue in depth because he promoted Hindu Sanatana Dharma which was supported by Brahminical orthodoxy. Gandhi's action brought the issue of untouchability to the forefront of nationalist debate, making it one of the most pressing issues that needed to be addressed with urgency. He attempted to assimilate untouchables into Hindu society by awakening the conscience of caste Hindus to repent for their atrocities against untouchables. Contrarily, Tilak was opposed to untouchability, but his rigid stance on caste failed to foster fraternity between Brahmins and the lower castes; instead, it alienated them. Both did not want to disrupt the structure of Hinduism. Tilak focused solely on political reforms for achieving Swaraj, whereas Gandhi saw moral progress and social reform as being essential for the attainment of Swaraj. It is imperative to emphasise that their stance on these issues aligned with their desire to protect Hinduism from extinction. Tilak defended caste to save Hinduism, whereas Gandhi wanted to remove a blot from Hinduism by abolishing untouchability because he was convinced that Hinduism would never be fully reformed unless untouchability was abolished. Tilak used religious symbols and Sanatana Dharma to encourage Hindus to rise and demonstrate political unity to achieve Swaraj. Gandhi wished to instil spiritual consciousness in the people, representing a synthesis of all creeds. Gandhi was more zealous than Tilak in his approach to abolishing untouchability and getting equal status for untouchables, integrating them within the fold of Hinduism.

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# Ethicising Brahmacharya: Gandhi's Tryst with the Satyagrahi Self

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ABSTRACT

*Mahatma Gandhi felt that the character building of the satyagrahis is an essential pre-condition for the moral reconstruction of the society/nation. He believed that will power, the only weapon of a satyagrahi to face the violent world, comes from the restrained life of a brahmachari or celibate. The first part of this article deals with Gandhi's understanding of brahmacharya as a great vow which trains to control the organs of sense in thought, word, and deed. And the second part focuses on how the traditional concept of brahmacharya acquired a new connotation in the context of the satyagrahi as a sexless brahmachari in course of his search for truth.*

**Key Words**: Gandhi, *brahmacharya*, satyagrahi, *brahmachari*, self-restraint

## Introduction

THE INTRODUCTION OF moral ideals into politics gave a new meaning to the Indian national movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi believed that the sickness of our 'satanic' civilization is closely connected with the 'soullessness' of present-day politics. He was convinced that just as power seeks to create its own normative rules for individualistic living, moral values, on the other hand, strive to unlock individual potential for collective survival. Gandhi felt that the ideal of rigorous moral discipline was as much a personal imperative for him as it was essential for the success of his programme for the application of moral force in solving public issues. Therefore, the character-building of the satyagrahis, who would lead the nation in such a moral political movement, became an essential

part of Gandhi's experiments in this field. And he realized that self-restraint, especially in the field of sensual desire, is an essential pre-condition for constructing the self of a satyagrahi, for seeing God 'face to face'. An aspirant who wanted to serve society must live the life of a celibate or *brahmachari* because the capacity to work for the larger society was the result of the psychic power gained through celibacy. The following sections would like to read Gandhi's understanding of the idea of *brahmacharya;* its reorientation and its significance in constructing satyagrahi selfhood, essential for the creation of a moral/alternative society.

**To rein over the senses**

It was during the Zulu rebellion (1906) in South Africa, where Gandhi joined the English army with a small corps of stretcher bearers, he came to the realization that self-restraint is rudimentary for the service to society. He recalled, "While I was working with the Corps, two ideas which had long been floating in my mind became firmly fixed. First, an aspirant after a life exclusively devoted to service must lead a life of celibacy. Secondly, he must accept poverty as a constant companion through life."[1] He believed that service to society would be meaningless unless one could realize himself. And the primary duty of a social worker is to cultivate the virtue of self-restraint to realize the self. The Tolstoy Farm in South Africa, the training ground of the satyagrahis, actually, provided him the opportunity for experimenting rigorous self-discipline, especially regarding sex and food, in both his personal and public life. It became his conviction that procreation and the consequent care of children were inconsistent with public service. However, it did not mean that family would act as a bar before one's aspiration of becoming a social activist rather the discipline of *brahmacharya* bridged the gap between the two. "Without the observance of brahmacharya service of the family would be inconsistent with the service of the community. With brahmacharya they would be perfectly consistent".[2] Hence only at the age of thirty seven (1906) he took the vow to observe *brahmacharya* for life to serve his larger family.

Although, Gandhi began to observe *brahmacharya* in 1906, his previous experiments on the subject failed due to the lack of deep-rooted conviction behind it. During his student days in London he protested against the artificial birth control propaganda and stood for the advocacy of internal effort or self-control in the Vegetarian Society. Accordingly, he began to practice self-control, to avoid more children, by various methods like sleeping in a separate bed from Kasturba at night, retiring to bed only after complete exhaustion, etc.

All these efforts, however, did not bear much fruit since his aversion was not to the cause but to the effect only. Again, influenced by the teaching of one of his moral guides Raychandbhai, a young jeweller but more interested in the Hindu thoughts and scriptures, especially in *moksha*, Gandhi once began to think of observing *brahmacharya*. The central theme of their discussions was the relationship of sexuality to salvation or *moksha* which is the transformation of sexual potency into psychic and spiritual power, one of the core issues of Hindu metaphysics and practice.[3] However, his lustful mind acted as an obstacle. In the *Autobiography,* he confessed the fact: "To be fair to my wife, I must say that she was never the temptress. It was therefore the easiest thing for me to take the vow of brahmacharya, if only I willed it. It was my weak will or lustful attachment that was the obstacle."[4] His love lust, however, got a serious blow, for the first time, when his father died. He was involved in such carnal desire when the message of his father's demise reached him. A few days after the passing of his father his newborn first child also passed away. These two successive incidents collectively left a permanent mark on Gandhi's mind and finally led to a paradigm shift in his attitude to sex. In this context, Nirmal Kumar Bose opines that: "We may be permitted to assume that the repression of sexual instinct was not only a means to a lofty end, but it was also the penance which Gandhiji voluntarily imposed upon himself for having proved untrue to his father during the last moments of his life."[5] So, we may say that all these previous incidents have prepared the backdrop for his final resolve to the vow. Moreover, Kasturba was then suffering from some serious gynecological problems which might also have motivated him to take the decision.

*Brahmacharya* means the mode of life adapted to the search for *Brahma*, i.e., Truth. *Ahimsa* or non-violence is the manifest part of Truth. Truth, *ahimsa* or love, *brahmacharya* or chastity, non-stealing and non-possession or poverty are considered as *Mahavrata*, the great observances, not only in Hindu scriptures but also in Jainism and Buddhism. Many other religions have also accepted, to a varying degree, the necessity for these observances. To attain the *Brahma*/ Truth, according to Gandhi, one should lead a life of pure detachment, not only in terms of sex but the simultaneous control of all the organs of mind, body, and speech. A *brahmachari* is one who controls his organs of sense in thought, word, and deed.[6] In his words:

> The full and correct meaning of brahmacharya is search for the brahman. As the brahman is immanent in everyone, it can be known through contemplation and the inner illumination resulting from it. This

> illumination is not possible without complete control over the senses. Hence, brahmacharya means control in thought, speech and action of all senses, at all places and at all times.
> The man or woman who observes such perfect brahmacharya is totally free from disease and, therefore, he or she lives ever in the presence of God, is like God. I have no doubt that complete observance of such brahmacharya in thought, speech and action is possible.[7]

Thus, *brahmacharya* was not complete until such a state was reached that no unwanted thought could arise in the striver's mind. Gandhi's principal argument for *brahmacharya* was that "The man, who is wedded to Truth and worships Truth alone, proves unfaithful to her, if he applies his talents to anything else."[8] Thus it is necessary to focus all one's energies in fulfilling larger objectives. For satyagrahis it was necessary to renounce all other desires and remain faithful to only one objective, i.e., Swaraj. Gandhi also suggested that "Those who would achieve an easy conquest of animal passion must give up all unnecessary things which stimulate it. They must control their palate and cease to read suggestive literature and to enjoy all luxuries. I have not the shadow of doubt that they will find brahmacharya easy enough after such renunciation."[9] He argued that it is impossible to control one organ when all other senses are followed a free play. *Brahmacharya* is, actually, an attempt to rein in all the senses. "If we practice simultaneous self-control in all directions, the attempt will be scientific and possible of success."[10] The means for the attainment of *brahmacharya*, to Gandhi, were as such: "The first is the realization of its necessity. The next is the gradual control of the senses… The third step is to have clean companions—clean friends and clean books. The last and not the least is prayer. Let him repeat Ramanama with all his heart regularly every day, and ask for divine grace."[11]

The traditional interpretation of *brahmacharya* said for the complete separation of men and women and laid down certain rules for a *brahmachari*, like, he would not live among women, animals, and eunuchs; he would not teach a woman alone or even in a group; he would not sit on the same mat with a woman; etc. On the contrary, Gandhi believed that avoiding associations with women or the opposite sex to observe brahmacharya was for him a sign of weakness. He illustrated this ideal to various persons at different times. In a letter to an adolescent ashramite, he wrote:

> … your chief contention is this, that the sight and company of women are found in experience to be inimical to self-control and must, therefore, be avoided. This reasoning seems wrong to me. That is not true self-control or brahmacharya which can be preserved only by avoiding even such

> association with women as may occur in the ordinary course and is necessitated by our work of service. It is only outward renunciation uninspired by genuine desirelessness. The suppressed craving is bound to break through when it gets a suitable opportunity. Scripture tells us that our pleasure in sense-objects does not disappear completely till we have had a vision of the Supreme. But the converse is equally true. Till our pleasure in sense-objects has disappeared completely, we cannot see the Supreme. In other words, our progress in regard to both is simultaneous… After the vision of the Supreme, there can be no cravings whatsoever. That means that such a man loses the consciousness of sex and becomes sexless. That is to say he ceases to be a figure and becomes a cipher, in other words, loses his self in God… If in this discussion we substitute the word 'Truth' wherever the word 'Supreme', 'God', 'Brahman', 'Parabrahman', etc., occur, the argument will be clear and it will also be easy to understand the meaning of realization.[12]

Such understanding of *brahamacharya* finds resemblance with the *Bhagavata Purana*, a preeminent text of Krishna devotion in Vaishnava theology, where *gopis* or cowherdesses showed no embarrassment or sex-consciousness in appearing before the Lord in rapt devotion. Gandhi shared this story in his public speeches to make his countrymen realize the importance of 'selflessness' in the search of Truth.[13]

Gandhi advocated for free interactions between men and women with a changed outlook. To a male satyagrahi every woman was either a mother or sister, and a man was represented as son or brother to female satyagrahis. In other words, such a *brahmachari*

> …does not flee from the company of women… For him the distinction between men and women almost disappears…His conception of beauty alters. He will not look at the external form. He or she whose character is beautiful will be beautiful in his eyes…Even his sexual organs will begin to look different. (They will remain as a mere symbol of his sex). He does not become impotent but… (internal) secretions in his case are sublimated into a vital force pervading his whole being. It is said that an impotent man is not free from the sexual desire…But the cultivated impotency of the man, whose sexual desire has been burnt up and whose sexual secretions are being converted into vital force is wholly different.[14]

*Brahmacharya* that could not stand examination, when the occasion demands it, is no *brahmacharya*. Even the sight of a nude woman would not affect a perfect *brahmachari*. In the case of a perfect *brahmachari*, there would be childlike innocence in spite of his full knowledge of sex.[15]

The satyagrahis in the Tolstoy Farm were trained under such concept of *brahmacharya*, though there was separate accommodation

for men and women because of Gandhi's belief that some restrictions might be needed at the initial stage of the training and these would wither away with time. However, he allowed the free mixing of boys and girls, on the Farm, under his care, since carnal desire had not been awakened in them. The boys and young girls went to bathe in the same spot at the same time; they slept together in an open verandah surrounding him. Since his bold experiment was not free from risk, the responsibility for any unwanted event was borne by him as the trainer. Similarly, Gandhi did not introduce any prohibition in the meeting of men and women in the ashram as a necessary step for the practice of *brahmacharya*. The ideal is that one ashramite should have the same freedom in meeting another as is enjoyed by a son in meeting his mother or by a brother in meeting his sister. Thus, the restrictions that are generally imposed for the protection of *brahmacharya* were lifted in the Satyagraha Ashram on the ground that *brahmacharya* which requires such prohibition for its success is no *brahmacharya* at all. Though he admitted that restrictions may be necessary at first, but must wither away in time.[16] A *brahmachari* or a worshiper of Truth is always guided by his heart, not by any external imposition.

Therefore, though the observance of *brahmacharya* was mandatory for all the members of the ashram, young as well as old, married as well as unmarried, no one was bound to observe it against their will. Moreover, whoever felt that he was unable to put forth the requisite effort had the right to marry. What he opposed most was representing the institution as a medium to satisfy sexual desire. Sexual intercourse for carnal satisfaction was a reversion to animality and it should be man's endeavour to rise above it. "Those only really marry who marry in order to experience the purity and sanctity of the marriage tie and thereby realize the divinity within."[17] Gandhi refused to regard marriage as a 'fall from grace' in any sense of the term, or the instinct to see oneself perpetuated through one's descendants to be 'unlawful'. He did hold that sexual act for mere pleasure's sake was not compatible with the highest spiritual development. "Sex urge is fine and noble thing. There is nothing to be ashamed of in it. But it is meant only for the act of creation. Any other use of it is a sin against God and humanity."[18] And interestingly, when an ashramite made the request for marriage, the ashram usually helped him/her in finding out a suitable partner for life. The reason behind the acceptance of marriage within the purview of the ashram was explained by Gandhi at a marriage ceremony in the Sabarmati Ashram:

> The ideal of this Ashram is the practice of brahmacharya even by married couples, and some of us do follow this ideal. The children are also given

> instruction in brahmacharya. And yet a marriage takes place at the Ashram and under its auspices. Why? Well we were faced with a moral dilemma and this is what we did. Those who follow ahimsa use force against no one. Those among the ashram inmates who cannot practice brahmacharya must therefore marry as a matter of duty. And why should we not, again, introduce an improved ritual? Indeed it is our duty to do so. When I reflected on the matter it was clear to me that all over India, indeed all over the world, the ritual of marriage includes an element of self-control. Marriage is not intended for satisfying lust. It is laid down in the Smritis that couple who exercise self-control live in brahmacharya… Those who cannot entirely destroy passion can at least keep it in check by leading a life of self-control… They must not become slaves to passion… Shastras of course say that union is permitted only when progeny is desired.[19]

Thus, a satyagrahi should cultivate in him the trait of sexlessness which in turn would serve the women in the Farm, and later in the ashrams. Gandhi held that women could not share their private problems with men because of some social taboos. A satyagrahi would be a helpful companion for women for his desireless character. Gandhi actually developed in him such a trait through the conquest and sublimation of sex. He once described himself as 'half a woman.' Mrs Polak, a member of Gandhi's community household in Durban, had especially noted in her reminiscences of him this trait of 'sexlessness' which was so pronounced even during his South African days, and which enabled members of the opposite sex to shed their shyness in his presence.[20] "There are some things relating to our lives," remarked a highly educated, aristocratic, Indian society lady once, "which we women can speak of to, or discuss with, no man. But while speaking to Gandhiji we somehow forgot the fact that he was a man."[21]

In this context, the psychoanalytical study of Gandhi by E. H. Erikson reveals similar facts. He argued that Gandhi prided himself on being half-man and half-woman and blatantly aspired to be more motherly than women born to the job, as Gandhi did. He, indeed, viewed a kind of sublimated maternalism as a part of the positive identity of a whole man and such relative devaluation of the martial model of masculinity might well lead to a freer mutual identification of the two sexes.[22]

Gandhi's endeavour to develop feminine traits for the subordination of sex in a seeker of truth, however, was never completed. So, the desire to examine how far it had advanced at any point in time remained a permanent necessity with him. He admitted the fact that "…brahmacharya, which is so full of wonderful potency, is by no means an easy affair…"[23] and the difficulty were laid in the

psychological aspect of the vow. It is certain that discipline begins with bodily restraint, but reaches its perfection only with the control of the mind. "A true brahmachari will not even dream of satisfying the fleshy appetite, and until he is in that condition, he has a great deal of ground to cover."[24] However, he was not surprised by this difficulty as it is embedded in the very origin of human beings. He gave the following explanation: "It is extremely difficult to cultivate such a state. But that should not be surprising. We owe our birth to lust, and love our body which is the fruit of lust. It cannot but be difficult to get rid of this heritage of lust. However, when we realize that the body is the abode of the priceless atman, our brahmacharya would remain inviolate."[25]

Gandhi's deep realization of this difficulty might be traced in his honest public confession in the *Navajivan*, written nearly two decades later after taking the vow:

> I regret to say that I have not attained to the state of such perfect brahmacharya. I am striving every moment to reach it. I have not given up the hope of attaining that state in this very life. I have acquired control over my body. I can guard myself during the waking state. I have acquired fairly good control over speech. I have yet to gain good enough control over my thoughts…
>
> Even so, in my waking moments… I have attained a state, it can be claimed, in which ugly thoughts at any rate do not trouble me. But I have less control over my thoughts during sleep. In that state, all manner of thoughts come to me, even strange dreams, and sometimes desire for indulgences familiar to the body also wakes up in me. When the thoughts are unclean, there may be involuntary discharge too. This condition is possible only in a life troubled by desire. The disturbances in my thoughts are becoming weaker, but I have not ceased altogether… Despite this delay, however, I have not been in the least disheartened, for I am able to visualize the desireless state, am able to glimpse it faintly, and the progress I have made makes me hopeful rather than otherwise… But the golden rule for conquering the sex impulse is to keep repeating the magic name of Rama or some such holy word.[26]

So Gandhi was fully aware of his incompleteness, and also what he had achieved. His perpetual search for the perfect *brahmacharya* proves that he was hopeful for the result and such hope had a wider connotation. He believed that if his mind were pure and free from lust, it would have a certain purifying impact on others as well which, in turn, would help the satyagraha movement and the creation of a new moral society.

Thus, a deep and abiding faith, that he would reach his ideal in this life, filled his mind and it led him to remain steadfast on this difficult path:

> However, the views which I have recently expressed regarding brahmacharya have no flaw in them and contain no exaggeration. With effort, any man or woman can attain that ideal. This does not mean that the whole world or thousands will realize it in my own lifetime. Let it take centuries to be realized, but the ideal is correct, is realizable and must be realized. Man has a long way to travel yet. His instincts are still those of a beast. Only his frame is human. Violence seems to reign all round. Untruth fills the world. And yet we do not doubt the rightness of the path of truth and non-violence. Know that the same is the case with regard to brahmacharya.[27]

Such a mindset brought a dark period in the last two years of Gandhi's life. He came to believe that the violent turmoil on the eve of our independence, for the decision to carve out Pakistan, was the outcome of the shortcomings in his search for Truth and non-violence. And he was determined that his *sadhana* for *brahmacharya* was yet not fully-proved. The god of desire had perhaps triumphed in some obscure recess of his mind. He realized that his utterances no longer commanded obedience and consequently, he had little control over the unfolding of events. As a satyagrahi, Gandhi believed that an individual carries within himself or herself the burden of social failings since social developments are the reflections of one's own thoughts and practices. Thus, Gandhi re-engaged himself with private experiments to re-assure the strength of celibacy even in his old age. A sense of despair led him also to write a series of articles on celibacy in *Navajivan*, puzzling his associates, amid political turbulence. He asked one or another of his few close women associates to share his bed to see whether any trace of sexual feeling had been evoked either in him or in his companion. Despite criticisms, Gandhi viewed it as an integral part of his *Yajna* whose only purpose was a restoration of personal psychic potency that would help him to regain control over political events and people, a control which seemed to be so fatally sleeping away.[28]

In this context, attention could be made to his letter to his female friend Amrit Kaur where he included the capacity to partake in the private company of naked women as an integral part of his definition of *brahmacharya*.[29] Gandhi now described the meaning of *brahmacharya* and the characteristics of true *brahmachari* thus:

> My meaning of brahmacharya is this: One who never has any lustful intention, who by constant attendance upon God has become proof against conscious or unconscious emissions, who is capable of lying naked with naked women, however beautiful they may be, without being in any manner whatsoever sexually excited. Such a person should be

> incapable of lying, incapable of intending or doing harm to a single man or woman in the whole world, is free from anger and malice and detached in the sense of the Bhagavadgita. Such a person is a full brahmachari. Brahmachari literally means a person who is making daily and steady progress towards God and whose every act is done in pursuance of that end and no other.[30]

Gandhi's teachings of *brahmacharya*, however, did hurt his associates who considered his views, in the words of Jawaharlal Nehru, "unnatural and shocking". Nehru argued that Gandhi refused to recognize the natural sexual attraction between man and woman which might lead to frustration, inhibition, neurosis, and other types of physical and nervous ills. Similarly, Bhikhu Parekh's critique of Gandhi stands on the latter's incapability to distinguish between the sexual act involved in the rape and the sexual act that takes place between loving spouses.[31]

Now, we should concentrate on the idea of control of the palate, a vital part of the discipline of self-restraint, and its interrelation with *brahmacharya*. Since his student days in London Gandhi was interested in experiments with food. His involvement in the Vegetarian movement, and practising simple food habits in South African households bore the instances of such eagerness. This attitude, however, got a broader perspective during the satyagraha campaign in South Africa and became an indispensable part of the character-building process of the satyagrahis. The motive for the previous changes in the diet was largely hygienic, whereas the new experiments were from an ethical/ religious standpoint.

According to Gandhi's understanding, "Passion in man is generally co-existent with a hankering after the pleasures of the palate."[32] The unrestricted diet, he believed, was responsible for generating animal desires in a man. So, an aspirant for *brahmacharya* should control his tongue in order to reach perfection. Hermann Kallenbach was the chief companion with whom Gandhi renewed his experimentation in dietetics, in their two-men's 'ashram' in South Africa, when the satyagraha struggle was at its height. And he applied the results of the experiment in the Tolstoy Farm to enrich the satyagrahis. Such connection between sexuality and food became more explicit in Gandhi's later life and was followed by an exhaustive discussion of the types of food that stimulate desire and others that dampen it. Actually, the words for eating and sexual enjoyment have the same root, *bhuj*, in Sanskrit, and sexual intercourse is often spoken about as the mutual feeding of male and female.[33]

As a part of self-restraint, or more specifically restraint of palate,

Gandhi decided to take an exclusive fruit diet, composed of the cheapest fruits possible, or fast. But gradually he found that the difference between the fruit diet and a diet of food grains was not very distinct. In his words, "I observed that the same indulgence of taste was possible with the former as with the latter, and even more, when one got accustomed to it".[34] He, therefore, came to attach greater importance to fasting or having only one meal a day and if there was some occasion for penance or the like, he gladly utilized it too, for fasting. Experiments in fasting for the purification of the body began at the Tolstoy Farm. The students there belonged to three religious communities—Hindu, Muslim, and Parsi. If the Hindus observed *Ekadashi* or ate a diet of fruits, the Muslims observed the *Roza*. The students were encouraged to participate in the observances of each other's religious practices. As a result, many were able to understand the value of such fasting, and a spirit of mutual respect, tolerance, and affection was fostered. Gandhi also fasted in order to control his sexual urges and to bring his passions within his control.[35]

Interestingly, we may trace the origin of some of the restrictions, which Gandhi believed to be voluntarily followed by the *brahmacharis*, in his prison experience in 1908. For instance, the last meal was to be finished before sunset; tea and coffee were not allowed; salt could be added to the cooked food but the prisoners might not have anything for the mere satisfaction of the palate. Immediately, after his release from jail he took the first two regulations upon him for life, and later on, he gave up salt altogether for an unbroken period of ten years. Similarly, he excluded pulse from his diet to avoid extra energy generated from it. Moreover, he gave up milk as it stimulated animal passion. He had long realized that milk was not necessary for supporting the body, but it was not easy to give it up. While the necessity for avoiding milk in the interests of self-restraint was growing upon him, he happened to come across some literature from Calcutta, describing the tortures to which cows and buffaloes were subjected by their keepers. This had a striking effect on him and gave up milk at Tolstoy Farm in the year 1912. The principal objective, indeed, behind such sacrifice was mainly ethical. In his words, "The diet of a man of self-restraint must be different from that of a man of pleasure, just as their ways of life must be different".[36]

**Reorientation**

The scientific outlook of Gandhi led him to challenge the existing order and put everything under strict scrutiny. Ethics, morality, religion, and even spiritual experience he regarded as a fit field for inquiry, experimentation, and research. Gandhi believed that there

did exist an absolute and transcendental Truth and to discover it was the purpose of our lives. And this discovery could only be possible in the experience of living, through a committed moral and truthful practice. At every stage, one had to be firm to the truth as one knew it. At the same time, one had to be prepared to learn from experience, put one's beliefs to the test, accept the consequences and revise those beliefs if needed. Only then would one have for one's moral practice an epistemic foundation that was both certain and flexible, determinate and yet adaptable, categorical as well as experimental.[37]

Such outlook led Gandhi to introduce a major transposition in the idea of *brahmacharya* as depicted in the ancient Hindu documents. In the traditional Hindu philosophy, *Tapas* or self-suffering is one of the vital disciplines to be observed for attaining truth. It is in the most rigorous self-restraint that the Indians hope to find the true road. *Tapas* in the Hindu scriptures refer variously to religious austerity, bodily mortification, and penance and are closely identified with renunciation. *Tapas* only means the development of soul force, the freeing of the soul from slavery to body, severe thinking, or energizing of the mind. And such bodily restraint, essential for attaining truth, was not a part of the daily life of the common man. It was more or less associated with the pursuit of spiritual life for attaining salvation. Gandhi, however, extends this spiritual discipline of self-restraint or the restraint on senses to the realm of group action, where it became an essential element in the technique of satyagraha. Thus, he seized upon the traditional concept only to give new meaning to it.[38]

Very scanty traces of the concept of *brahmacharya* have been found in the *Rig Veda* where the term *brahmachari* was used in the sense of "a continent man, one without wife."[39] The married householder represented the ideal religious life within the Vedic world. A twice-born man, after completing his studies at the teacher's house, returned home and got married. The obligation to procreate was one of the central goals of the then-religious life. And during the entire life, he was engaged in various sacrifices but mainly for worldly happiness.[40]

Later, the increasingly widespread ascetic lifestyle and the subsequent development of the asrama system stood in sharp contrast to this Vedic religious world centered around the householder and his duties of sacrifice and procreation. This asceticism associated three central features—celibacy, homeless wandering, and mendicancy—with those who aspired after the knowledge of the Self. The householder was, thus, replaced by the celibate ascetic as the new religious ideal. The *Majjhima Nikaya* contains one of the clearest statements on the inability of householders to attain liberation. Here Buddha declares that he knows of no householder who has made an

end to his suffering without giving up the householder's life. The *Munisutta* of the *Suttanipata* also dwells on the great disparity between the renouncer and the householder. The desire for children is singled out as one of the chief obstacles to holiness. It also held that care for wife and children makes one like a bamboo tree entangled with another bamboo. Without such cares one becomes like a bamboo shoot, not clinging to anything and growing straight upward.[41] The earliest expositions of the ashrama system, found in the *Dharmasutras* of Gautama, Baudhayana, Apastamba, and Vasistha, tells about the four ashramas—those of the students, householder, hermit, and renouncer. These were the four alternate and permanent modes of life opened to an individual, generally a young male adult. The person, who had completed his Vedic studies under a teacher, was free to choose one of such modes as his permanent state of life. However, what is important to note for our present discussion is that celibacy was the principal feature of all the ashramas except that of the householder. And it was generally believed that the ashramas of the celibates were superior to that of the householders.[42]

Such a binary relationship between ascetic and householder took a new turn in Gandhi's thought. Although he believed that a public service worker must lead a life of celibacy, it did not necessarily exclude family life. To him, any married person can and should lead the life of a *brahmachari* (celibate) by practicing strict discipline in sensual desires, both in thought and action. He allowed conjugality in married life only for the sake of progeny. Otherwise, a married couple should practice brahmacharya for the greater cause of society. Advocating chastity in marriage, Gandhi said, "The husband and wife do not lose anything here, but only add to their resources and even to their family. Their love becomes free from the impurity of lust and so grows stronger. With the disappearance of impurity, they can serve each other better, and the occasions for quarrelling become fewer."[43] Again he said,

> If a man gives his love to one woman, or a woman to one man, what is left for all the world besides? It simply means, 'We two first, and the devil take all the rest of them.' As a faithful wife must be prepared to sacrifice her all for the sake of her husband, it is clear that such persons cannot rise to the height of Universal Love, or look upon all mankind a kith and kin. For they have created a boundary wall round their love. The larger their family, the farther are they from Universal Love.[44]

Thus, by breaking the boundary between asceticism and family life, which dominated the ancient religious thoughts of India, Gandhi established a new knot between the two.

Another new dimension that Gandhi incorporated into the idea of *brahmacharya* was the participation of women in this observance. Ancient Hindu theology did not recognize any celibate state for women. An adult woman had a single theological identity—she was wife-mother. Her identity and selfhood were thus derived from her relationships with males—her husband, and son. Marriage, therefore, was the only institution that women were not only entitled to but definitely obliged to assume. It was the common belief that women were created for procreating children; they were merely the fields in which men show their seeds. A woman was not an independent religious actor; rather she was expected to perform all religious acts with the approval of her husband.[45]

Gandhi, however, introduced equal footage for women with their male counterparts. *Brahmacharya*, as an ashram observance, was mandatory for both male and female satyagrahis. He actually advocated for sexlessness through the practice of a strict desire-less life of a *brahmachari*. He encouraged the women folk, since the days of South Africa, to join the movement of Satyagraha. Consequently, a large section of women, from the different strata of society, participated for the sake of Truth. In this context, the observation of Sudhir Kakar needs to be mentioned. He opined that although Gandhi was an enthusiastic champion of women's rights, he believed that the solution to the root problem between the sexes lies not in the removal of the social and legal inequalities suffered by women but rather in a thoroughgoing desexualisation of the male-female relationship, in which women must take the lead. He tried to teach women the primary right of resistance by orienting them to say 'no' in the face of the carnal desire of their husbands. Gandhi's relationships with women are, actually, dominated by his unconscious fantasy of maintaining an idealized relationship with the maternal body. And this oneness with the mother is free from desire rather suffused with nurturance and gratitude, mutual adoration and affirmation.[46]

A psychoanalytical investigation suggests that Gandhi's dependence on women in his search for *brahamacharya* rests on his belief that masculinity posed almost a towering obstacle before his quest for mastery over sexual desires, while women had an enviable advantage in this regard. Actually, the idea was prevalent among the Indian renunciates that as long as the penis remains, one cannot be a true ascetic. It, however, does not mean to curtail the activities of the penis rather it must be made to disappear within the body. When the sexual passions are subdued and the mind is prepared for the exercise of abstinence, the penis begins to shrink and gradually draws itself within the body in such a way that it appears to be a female sexual

organ. The experiences of the women, who were intimate with Gandhi and shared a bed with him, suggest that they had ceased to think of Gandhi as a man and felt entirely at ease with him as if he were a woman. Therefore, Manu Gandhi aptly named her book, *Bapu—My Mother*.[47]

Gandhi, indeed, felt that progress in civilization means the introduction of a larger measure of love and self-sacrifice into it which woman, mother of man, best represented in her own person. Naturally, women, to him, are the natural representatives of *Ahimsa* or non-violence. To his understanding non-violence is the way of self-suffering in which the satyagrahi never surrenders his/her respect for the personality of the opponent, and aims at his/her conversion rather than destruction. Satyagrahi tries to bring about a cessation of evil even with the cooperation of the erstwhile wrong-doer. This deep respect for human personality coupled with an infinite capacity for self-suffering was regarded by Gandhi as a characteristic especially associated with the nature of women. He wrote:

> My contribution to the great problem lies in my presenting for acceptance truth and ahimsa in every walk of life, whether for individuals or nations. I have hugged the hope that in this woman will be the unquestioned leader and, having thus found her place in human evolution, will shed her inferiority complex.
> I have suggested that woman is the incarnation of ahimsa. Ahimsa means infinite love, which again means infinite capacity for suffering… She can become the leader in Satyagraha which does not require the learning that books give but does require a stout heart that comes from suffering and faith.[48]

**For greater cause**

"To conquer subtle passions seems to me to be harder far than the physical conquest of the world by the force of arms. Ever since my return to India I have had experiences of the dormant passions lying hidden within me. The knowledge of them has made me feel humiliated though not defeated. The experiences and experiments have sustained me and given me great joy. But I know that I have still before me a difficult path to traverse."[49] The construction of a desireless self remained a constant striving till the last days of Gandhi's life. He believed that the most vital part of making a satyagrahi is character building and ashrams were founded for this purpose. Against the modern capitalist ethos of individualistic living Gandhi dreamt of a collective society based on Swaraj. And to prepare the satyagrahis for this new journey he suggested the observance of *brahmacharya*.

Hence, the ancient religious concept of *brahmacharya* took an ethical turn in Gandhi's mind. Its significance had been shifted from a state of life aiming to master the cosmic power, *Brahma*,[50] to an observance necessary for the creation of a satyagrahi-self essential for Swaraj. Gandhi, actually, took the concept of brahmacharya out of its religious setting and placed it on the social plane. He gave the ancient vow a completely new orientation and enriched it with new socio-ethical content.

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# Exploring the Deliberative Ideal through the lens of Gandhian Thought

*Ekta Shaikh*

ABSTRACT

*Deliberative Democracy theory is an ever-expanding field in political theory. In the present article, I aim to present the significance of Gandhian thought for the theory of deliberative democracy. Gandhi never used the term deliberation or articulated a theory of deliberative democracy specifically while expressing his notion of ideal democracy. For him, discussion, exchange of thoughts, reasoning, etc. was instinctive for democracy and not something that required to be defended within the boundaries of scholarship. I trace the central elements of democracy in Gandhian thought and examine them through the lens of deliberative democracy theory. I also examine the implication of Gandhi's formulations in India. In doing so, I would develop a richer understanding of democracy by bringing clarity to the contribution of Gandhi to the cause of deliberative democracy.*

**Keywords**: Gandhi; Deliberative Democracy; Political Theory; Democracy; Indian Democracy

## I. Introduction

LIBERAL DEMOCRACY HAS the tendency of being overarchingly totalitarian. The fear of this tendency was expressed by Tocqueville long ago when he was mesmerised by the democracy in America. The totalitarian tendency is capable of manifesting in multiple ways, for instance, a highly bureaucratic central system can be organised to conduct the affairs of democracy, people can become vigilantes in a system that represents an ideal form of liberal democracy, the

democratic procedures can be rigged, so on and so forth. Deliberative democrats have criticised existing liberal democracy on these grounds and propagated a deliberative form of democracy that allows people to actively participate in the political processes consistently rather than voting once whenever the elections take place. However, even the deliberative democrats who supported a proceduralist model of deliberative democracy have faced numerous backlashes due to the exclusive nature of the deliberative ideal that has been professed voraciously by them. The critique of modern democracy is not new. Gandhi has termed the modern democratic state as a "soulless machine" due to its amoral nature because the state ends up inflicting violence upon its own citizens[1]. He makes such remarks in the context of European states that are 'nominally democratic' in his viewpoint because citizens lack an active role within the political processes of the states. In the absence of a defined political role, people do not know where they should direct their spirit and passion for the nation[2].

But then what political framework really captures the essence of democracy? Was Gandhi hinting upon the importance of deliberation long before deliberative democrats could formulate their defence of the practice of deliberation in democracy? What did Gandhi imply by democracy and was his formulation ahead of the prescriptions of deliberative democracy?

In the present article, I aim to present the significance of Gandhian thought for the theory of deliberative democracy. Gandhi never used the term deliberation or articulated a theory of deliberative democracy specifically while expressing his notion of ideal democracy. For him, discussion, exchange of thoughts, reasoning, etc. was instinctive for democracy and not something that required to be defended within the boundaries of scholarship. I trace the central elements of democracy in Gandhian thought and examine them through the lens of deliberative democracy theory. I also examine the implication of Gandhi's formulations in India. In doing so, I would develop a richer understanding of democracy by bringing clarity to the contribution of Gandhi to the cause of deliberative democracy.

## II. Deliberative democratic theory and Gandhi's postulates- An Overview

At the heart of the entire deliberative democracy theory lies a basic premise that defends a non-coercive public debate that is utterly unforced in nature. They delegate the responsibility of opinion formation or preference formation to the individual and the collective of the governed. It allows enhancing ways through which an individual who is a part of democracy can move ahead in the direction of decision-

making. Hence, Jurgen Habermas's communicative action is significant. However, the limitation is there because Habermas isn't flexible about the ways through which people can participate in deliberative procedures[3]. It creates limitations at a theoretical level when the idea of people participating in democratic processes beyond elections isn't even entertained in a context where a high level of expertise can't be achieved by all. How are people supposed to sustain their political agency when there isn't any formal space designated specifically for the development of democratic decision-making? Surely, the informal spaces are there where people can enjoy basic freedoms of discussing and enhancing their agency but they aren't immune to perverse forms of verbal persuasions such as rumour mongering, mockery, misguidance, etc. Apart from this, people fall prey to intense information spread through media forms such as broadcast media and digital social media. These are features of modern life where political evolution is not as quick as it should be. Liberal democracy relies heavily on the ability of people to decide but is absolutely silent when it comes to nurturing people's decision-making skills. Mahatma Gandhi, an Indian philosopher, and leader, detected these possible negative outcomes of liberal democracy and pushed forward the ideals of decentralised democracy. Gandhi has not referred to a deliberative form of democracy in the same manner as it developed as a sub-area within political theory a lot later, however, has advocated staunchly regarding people's ability to discuss and deliberate. The foundational core principle that acts as a ground from which the significance of deliberation can be derived is that of freedom. For Gandhi, a democracy cannot prosper if there is some form of restriction upon people's opinion because this type of restriction will inhibit the true realisation of freedom or as Gandhi calls it, *Swaraj*. Gandhi advocated participatory democracy. In this context, the participation of people can be understood as the ability to form a public opinion regarding an issue and the process of legislation should not precede the formation of public opinion. Discussion, exchange of views, ability to understand opposing views, tolerance, and expression of opinion are part of democratic political processes in Gandhi's understanding. Similarly, they are also core values of deliberative democracy, for instance, Gutmann and Thompson explain that reciprocity, public spiritedness, mutual respect, accountability, and publicity are defining features[4]. Deliberation within a democracy cannot be brought to life without participatory mechanisms, however, not every deliberative democracy scholar is in favour of it due to reasons of feasibility. Without a healthy public discussion, a democracy is comprised of moral grounds where people are reduced to passive spectators who outsource

their power to the representatives. The outsourcing of power leads to the concentration of power in the hands of a few and at this point, democracy ceases to be a democracy.

Gandhi is blatantly critical of the democracies in Europe and contrasts it with Nazism and Fascism. He propagates the functions of democracy if it has to be truly the rule of the people. Gandhi intends for "social democratisation of the entire structure" A state where people are concerned with only electing or not electing a representative and nothing more beyond is where the freedom of the individual is also attacked. In order to maintain a balanced democracy, freedom, and social harmony, people are ought to participate in the democracy to make it more substantive rather than keeping it a procedural and amoral democracy.

Alternative imaginings can be drawn from Gandhian thought in contrast to the dominant western paradigm in deliberative democratic theory. Gandhi in his works philosophises the principles that are similar to those that appear in the theoretical foundations of deliberative democracy. The central driving principle for Gandhi is the attainment of *Swaraj* or self-rule. This, in turn, informs the democracy and without this a democracy is flawed. The true architect of the government is the individual. It is wrong to let the outcome of an important issue rest upon the 'will of one person'. Precisely, the following are the premises that Gandhi pursues when he describes his vision of democracy: tolerance regarding opposing views, discussion upon even the most revolutionary matters, respect for diversity of thoughts, openness, legislation of the basis of people's participation, self-sufficiency, and oneness. The essence of the second-order theory is echoed throughout the writings of Gandhi.

Let me provide an overview of the arguments put forth by deliberative democracy. The trajectory of arguments is wide. Scholars like Amy Gutmann, Denis Thompson, John Dryzek, Joshua Cohen, Simone Chambers, David Estlund, and James Bohman focus on the theoretical foundations of deliberative democracy and its merits over procedural democracy. They adapted the ideals suggested by philosophers such as John Stuart Mill, John Rawls, Habermas, and others to put together a normative background for deliberative democracy theory. Cardinal principles highlighted by them are reciprocity, mutual respect, publicity, consensus-building, and reaching an agreement.

The second set of scholars such as James Fishkin, Bruce Ackerman, Jurg Steiner, and Habermas too, focus on creating the best possible procedure in terms doing deliberations. They strictly focus on arriving at a procedure for deliberation and ways of measuring the quality of

deliberation in a controlled setting.

The third set of scholars such as Lynn Sanders, Iris Marion Young, Carol Patemen, Jane Mansbridge, Ian Shapiro, and Albert Weale focus on maintaining the contested spaces alive within the deliberation as opposed to the mainstream goal of striving towards consensus or agreement. For them, deliberation is a way of constantly evolving in terms of thought-process and it is wrong to strive for agreement at all because this agreement could mean numerous negative things such as domination of the powerful over the repressed, invisibility of minority argument, majoritarianism, suppression of critical thinking and loss of the possibility of evolution in terms of ideas.

The fourth set of Scholars such as Ian O' Flynn, Nicole Curato, Baogang He, Vijeyandra Rao, and Paromita Sanyal seeks to widen the scope of deliberation by highlighting diverse sites of deliberation in various contexts that do not have favourable conditions as demanded by the earlier theoretical principles of deliberative democracy. For instance, tracing the quality of deliberations in conflict areas or within deeply divided societies can be challenging. Ian O' Flynn questions the reliance on political representatives in an ethically divided society. He argues in favour of making more room for deliberations across people via civil society and also via elected representatives[5]. Others argue in favour of deliberative forums such as mini-publics, a move towards deliberative governance, and regularisation of deliberations among citizens that are able to inform the parliamentary governance[6]. Deliberative democratic theory imbibes the spirit of constant evolution and makes it more inclusive which will expand its boundaries.

How do people refine their abilities to shape the political reality around them? Is it possible that the deliberative tradition can benefit from the Gandhian philosophy? Gandhi's ideas on democracy have been extensively traced within intellectual history and political theory. But how can any form of interlinkages be drawn out between deliberative democracy and the Gandhian conception of democracy? Gandhi has been interpreted as an idealist and a moralist[7]. However, Gandhi has been characterised as a practical idealist or even realist when his norms are examined through the lens of strategic context[8]. A confluence of ideas between Gandhi's ideas on democracy and the theoretical formulations of deliberative democracy is visible at four major points- the notion of the individual, critique of procedural democracy, deontological approach towards political reality, and decentralisation within a democratic political structure. It can be argued that Mahatma Gandhi propounded the directions for deliberative institutions in India and for substantiating the Indian

democracy as opposed to the highly bureaucratic democracy. Let me explain each point out of the four points stated above.

The notion of the individual isn't oriented towards a highly atomised one who is isolated from the larger network of society because that is how the structure of society directs. Instead, the individual is the primary unit or building block of the larger society. Without an empowered individual who is able to exercise one's autonomy for the greater good, society will cease of exist. Gandhi's understanding of the political world involves a moral-psychological understanding[9]. In this world, an individual is capable of reaching their best possible outcome and not succumbing to their brute nature[10]. The reasoning capacity of one individual should be nurtured. Similarly, deliberative democrats lay emphasis on the development of political agency at the level of the individual rather than focusing on a group since every individual ideally matters for the health of democracy. And this can be done through participation in political deliberation.

Gandhi is concerned with the preservation of the character of the people in democracy. The virtues and ethical nature of a human will always allow one to take the correct course of action irrespective of immediate outcomes. Similarly, few deliberative democrats do not focus only on the usage of deliberation as a mere instrument for reaching an agreement over some issue according to the context[11]. Rather, deliberation has a substantive nature. Ideally, it is supposed to be a method for training people to be democratic citizens. It should let people responsibly develop their skills rather than relying on political propaganda or scintillating media reports or unverified social media arguments. This points towards the emphasis on the deontological approach that exists both in Gandhi's thought and theory of deliberative democracy where we must focus on the means and not only the outcome of the democratic procedures.

Gandhi was vehemently against a procedural democracy because the realisation of such a political structure calls for centralised political system that is governed from the top. It would effectively become another tool for the exploitation of the poor and subjugated sections of society. He perceives parliamentary democracy skeptically as the members of it may act selfishly and people who vote for them could be completely misguided through newspapers or other sources of information[12]. Similar arguments are echoed in the deliberative democratic theory regarding the procedural or aggregate form of democracy. It subdues the political agency of people over time and may function in a way that entirely defeats the purpose of democracy. It is evident from the political functioning of aggregate democracies all over the world as majoritarianism is prevalent. The time of the

electoral campaign before elections resembles a turbulent time as the propaganda to sway people's opinions is at its peak.

Lastly, the practice of deliberation calls for decentralised institutions such as civic bodies, mini-publics, citizens' assemblies, and public forums. People should directly participate in institutions that help them to deliberate upon any issue at hand. This would allow citizens to come face to face with information about the particular issue and reflect upon it. The main goal of it is to create a discourse irrespective of the diversity within the population of any locality or area. It can also help in developing a channel of communication between any deliberative institutions and parliamentary institutions at the centre of the political structure of the polity. Gandhi's vision for a political framework of a democratic state encompasses the decentralised version in opposition to a centralised structure. For him, the ideal democracy consists of a society that is self-sufficient and self-regulated[13]. Each political unit of the democracy, that is villages in Gandhian philosophy, should coordinate with other units to create a peaceful existence. Interdependence between individuals and society is intrinsic to the management of affairs. It will help in the realisation of the goal of *Swaraj* or self-rule. For such a political structure to exist, it is not prudent to assume that Gandhi expected an individual to quietly participate without making an effort to defend the ideal of liberty[14]. Any defence is impossible without discussion over the matter. It wouldn't be wrong to infer that deliberation among people is a valuable part for creating a self-regulating political unit.

In every political theory and philosophy, the impact of any norm or value is understood through its influence on the individual in the beginning since the individual is the primary political unit. Deliberative democracy as a theory expresses its significance in terms of giving every individual importance as one carries political agency. Similar sentiments are echoed by Gandhi when he defends the principle of *Swaraj*

"*Swaraj* will be an absurdity if individuals have to Surrender their judgement to majority"[15]

However, the question remains- how is one ought to maintain all of the above?

### III. Maintaining Democracy: Finding directions

As mentioned at the beginning of the article, Gandhi doesn't use the term deliberative democracy. However, the idea of democracy upheld by Gandhi cannot exist without an active culture of communication and discussion among citizens. In that regard, it is not wrong to argue that Gandhian directions for democracy are automatically valid for

deliberative democracy too. So, can Gandhi's normative guidance enrich the existing normative claims of deliberative democracy and even make substantive additions?

Gandhi had an unconventional view regarding how a modern democratic state ought to be. Unlike his western counterparts, Gandhi created another vision for it for his time because he could detect the demerits of representative democracy and labelled it as nominally democratic. It could either convert into a full dictatorship or a deeper and true form of democracy.[16] We get to see an amalgamation of philosophical inquiry as well as contextualization within the contours of Gandhian democratic theory.

There is no doubt about the essentiality of democracy for the modern state and the actions of citizens that ensure cooperation is essential for any type of democracy. However, it is even more significant for a deliberative form of democracy. How can we gain a richer understanding of Gandhi's contribution in this regard? Gandhi's main goal is to preserve the ideal of *Swaraj* or self-rule that preserves people's freedom to manage their own affairs[17]. This will allow disciplining of the rule from within because the person can achieve self-realisation. In this regard, a person would be capable of practicing self-restraint when required. People should have the freedom to commit mistakes too so that they learn from them and correct them. In order to understand this, let us analyse the major tenets such as individuality, non-violence, and democracy in the Gandhian sense. Gandhi professes staunch individuality but the conception of it differs from liberal understanding influenced by Lockean thought or classic liberalism that influences democracy largely. Let me explain Gandhi's understanding of individuality. The citizen is an individual and this individual is a basic unit of democracy. Every individual is responsible for maintaining the political character of a nation. The moral capacities of the individual must be preserved and one of the ways of doing so is to not forsake participation in decision-making processes and accept an easy role[18]. In this regard, a duty-based discourse is being invoked to highlight the responsibility endowed upon people. Gandhi does not only envision the achievement of favourable circumstances, that is, a free democratic country where the laws are just for its citizens, but also the way to ensure sustenance of these favourable circumstances so that the moral and political character of democracy is not compromised like it did in European countries. Within the duty-based discourse, the citizen is an active and moral individual who acknowledges one's duty to do good and ensure cooperation with other citizens in political matters because ultimately it impacts all[19]. In the absence of such an active role, the citizen would not be able to

ensure the justness of the law because the state, on its own, is capable of using violent means for its self-interest due to its amoral nature. Therefore, the individuals or citizens are responsible for maintaining the moral character of the state since the state itself cannot do it by default. The ability to express one's opinion and inform legislation is not only the right of the masses but also the duty of the masses. For Gandhi, the public opinion holds more power than any other means[20]. It is one of the means to practice non-violence. Non-violence as a principle is the precursor to other principles. Gandhi is vehemently critical of violence in general. For him, violence endangers free discussion, and that in turn endangers democracy[21]. And through such practices of non-violence, a culture of inclusion can be developed and divisions along the lines of class and caste can be eradicated. The conception of non-violence is intrinsic to the thought of Gandhi and in this scenario without it, democracy is a sham. One of the means of non-violence is communal harmony among others[22]. The key to the maintenance of communal harmony is the free expression of an individual's opinion. However, this expression of opinion should not trigger any form of violence[23]. For the situation of disagreement or conflict, "rational discussion and persuasion" are the best means of seeking a resolution[24]. Rather than defending the need for an external moderator or spectator, one's own sincerity and humility should make sure that the discussion is carried out fairly[25]. Moral improvement is a significant prerequisite here[26]. Such practice encapsulates the act of *Satyagraha. Satyagraha* or the search for truth is not necessarily a means of non-violence used against the government. It can be used to ensure stability during the interaction with any individual. In conventional understanding, *Satyagraha* is understood as a means of non-violence and civil disobedience against the oppressive state power in an extreme sense. However, in a less extreme sense, it can be used as a guiding force within any decision-making process where there is disagreement. It persuades a citizen to realize the value of fellow-human beings and the common quest of searching for the truth. It also beseeches one to be insistent upon the quest for truth due to common humanity[27]. This will eventually let the harmony in the community prosper since the value of humility will be realised by all members. Such variation of *Satyagraha* consisted of three elements i.e., argument, suffering love, and insistence upon the truth that invoked the genuine 'reason'. So, is it possible for *Satyagraha* or forms of it be understood as a tool of deliberation in situations of disagreement? For Gandhi, the use of it has been motivated by the idea of making the person or group or British, during colonial times, see the merit of the argument he's putting forward fairly rather than

outrightly dismissing it or even suppressing it in a situation where no consensus can be achieved like formal processes of deliberation promote.

After highlighting the significance of the active role of the individual in a democracy that is required for ensuring cooperation and the overall functioning of the democratic state, Gandhi propagates the ideal way of moving towards a true democracy. In order to make sure that the individual remains in charge, decentralisation is of the true essence[28]. It should be clearly understood that pre-independence India consisted of a population that was majorly from villages and Gandhi mobilised them during the independence struggle. He realised that after independence, people in the villages should not be marginalised in the political process and hence, the suggestions are directives for organising the rural areas. The suggestions, however, invoke such theoretical principles that they are normatively significant for any small unit of the country such as a town or electoral constituency. Compulsory education and completion of community services in any way are ways through which an individual can contribute such as by being a teacher or guard or doctor etc. along with ensuring the self-reliance of the unit and election of village government or *panchayat* are the ways of maintaining decentralisation. The village government is the local government and is responsible for cultivating public opinion. Public opinion should be the real force in maintaining the affairs of the unit. These units ultimately make the individual the unit that connects with other units and together, they form a whole, that is, the nation. He labels this as an oceanic circle. The interlinkages between the various directives are very much visible in the context of an ideal way of preserving democracy. Gandhi explains what he means by participation that helps in achieving decentralisation and helps in realising the best form of democracy. Participation is substantive when the individual understands one's role and is active through the means of discussions in the political realm of decentralised spaces such as villages. The individuals should be able to practice non-violence and collectively form a political opinion. In the absence of a platform where the individual can participate actively in a democracy, the risk of the rise of mobocracy increases because the people who feel intensely for the nation do not in any way perform their duty.

The deliberative democracy discourses argue in favour of a substantive form of democracy where individuals can actively participate in the political processes of the state. The unit of importance is an individual who is a citizen and as a citizen is capable of actively participating in the deliberative processes. Such a collection of citizens is intrinsic in preserving the character of democracy by understanding

their role as deliberators. The aggregate form of democracy faces criticism for erasing the active role of citizens and promoting rational ignorance among them. Situations of conflict or disagreements are not easily resolved due to no proper mechanism and also, due to the persistent lack of communication among the people. Lines of divisions are maintained and preserved based on caste, class, region, religion, gender, etc. because people fail to realise the principle of oneness in the absence of regular participatory processes. Two major philosophical influences over the development and strengthening of the requirement of deliberation, in general, have been Jurgen Habermas and John Rawls. Habermas gives more importance to the 'communicative action' and Rawls highlights the significance of deliberation in the formation of overlapping consensus in the context of diversity. Deliberative democracy scholars have been trying to approach the task of deliberation holistically. For instance, Gutmann and Thompson claim that deliberative processes foster mutual respect even when a consensus is not achieved at the end of process[29]. James Fishkin has worked and developed the method of deliberative polling in order to make a pathway for conducting public deliberation on matters of national significance[30]. Similarly, other conventional writings that give prominence to deliberative democracy, such as Jane Mansbridge, John Dryzek, Jon Elster, etc. have concentrated on building theoretical defence regarding public deliberation.

But how can all these theoretical approaches be contrasted with the approach of Gandhi toward democracy? First, Gandhi doesn't differentiate between the types of democracy as for him there can't be many forms of true democracy. Ontologically, there is only one type of true democracy. Democracy cannot exist without people directly engaging in the political processes regularly. The major point of divergence between the deliberative democracy discourse and Gandhi's arguments is regarding the idea of the application. The dominant theoretical arguments within deliberative democracy scholarship do not encourage deliberations without a clear procedural pathway, for instance, deliberative polling focuses a lot on methodological precision in order to have the desired outcome through it. Obviously, such applicability is not contested in nature. However, the problem of feasibility is regularly faced when the question of implementation of deliberative process is raised, for instance, deliberative polls require heavy budgets in order to be implemented. Such arrangements are possible in a specific context like that of America, however, it hasn't been viewed as a regular feature. In the context of Third World countries, budget requirements of deliberative polling can act as a constraint. In citizen juries or assemblies, the

problem is caused by the outsourcing of the thinking process. The sample may not accurately represent the interests of the sampled and there can be a displacement of the sampled[31]. Other forms of sites of deliberation such as the mini-publics can promote the participation of people, however, some parts of the population like the economically well-off may participate more than the disadvantaged sections. So, it creates the problem of misrepresentation and lack of procedural regulation. Such problems get exacerbated when such deliberative solutions are applied in countries that are categorized as developing or underdeveloped.

In contrast, Gandhi had a better hold of the context that is chaotic or unstable by the standard of deliberative democracy theory. The context was provided by British India and its struggle to adopt democracy after Independence. The significance of participation by all people of the country in the political processes where they should be able to 'discuss' was expressed in a time when there was no discourse of deliberative democracy. In the absence of a mechanism that ensures the preservation of the voice of the people, centralised democracy would be just like replacing imperial rule with another newer form of imperialism that will concentrate the power in the hands of the few. How can it be ensured that democracy in India is a democracy in the true sense? A decentralised democracy as propagated by Gandhi is a mechanism to ensure that it helps democracy to gain roots within India too and not be left behind Europe in terms of political development. What is the best way possible to preserve the democratic character of a country that is newly independent and be at par with other countries that do not have the same recent history of political turmoil? The philosophical guidance of Gandhi in this regard is ambitious but not utopian. The goals of the present-day deliberative democracy discourse are the same as that of Gandhi. The difference appears in principles and approach. So, what do principles translate into when they are implemented? The next section focuses on the deliberative culture promoted by local political institutions that are based upon the democratic principles of Gandhi.

**IV- Impact of Gandhian Philosophy on Democracy in India**

What is the influence and contribution of Gandhian philosophy in matters of democracy? For Gandhi, it seems that it was really important to have intellectual freedom. It was the only element responsible for the preservation of the substantive character of the political freedom gained by India from imperial British colonial rule. Democracy requires the masses to develop consciousness, a sense of power, and responsibility held by the political unit i.e., the citizen so

that democracy could be sustained after implementation. Did Gandhi view local institutions as a means to promote discussions, thereby deliberations, as a way to preserve the character of democracy as a whole? Gandhi defended a change that could have an impact on the political structure as well as on its substantive nature.

Gandhi not only perceived the state as sovereign but also the people and recognised various non-conventional ways of unifying people, for instance, he appealed to religious leaders or Hindu *sadhus* to create solidarity among people through their mass-appeal mechanisms[32]. He acknowledged that people do not conform to standard rational argumentation styles but rather use various emotive techniques to put forth their concerns such as public shaming of the person in charge who has been accused of corruption with the budgetary funds for public works in the area.[33]

The enactment of the 73rd amendment and 74th amendment was done to jumpstart the process of local-level democracy in India that is based upon the principles of Village Swaraj. *Gram Sabha* or village assembly was the site for public deliberation in the rural areas. Participation of people within the local democracy was never understood as a non-deliberative form. It has served as the largest forum for the people. The push for it came in the 1990s when the entire discipline of democracy was witnessing the 'deliberative turn'.[34] During this time, the modern *Gram Sabhas* were created but were first initiated by the Government of Karnataka in 1985 when the *mandal panchayat* (it consisted of *gram sabhas)* was democratically constituted for discussing and deciding upon the developmental problems and plans[35]. In the villages, people make claims regarding their personal interests such as declaring their economic status, whether they are below the poverty line or above the poverty line[36]. They demand governance and put forth the developmental issues at hand. They do shed the skin of other identities and become citizens when they are discussing the matters that impact all. People do not have prior experience participating in these *sabhas*. They do not grasp the concept of deliberation and they assume that the meetings held here are a platform for putting forth complaints and problems in front of the authorities. However, *gram sabhas* act as a training ground for the people participating here. They are the 'training ground' in Indian democracy and it is not just about arriving at decisions and developing consensus. People eventually learn that the village assembly is not a forum to put forth their complaints but a way to do a lot more. The education-oriented role of *gram sabha* is present that allows people to cooperate and take a collective decision upon the matters that impact all of them. Along with this, the duty function is fulfilled too. People

realise the responsibility they have towards the democratic society they live in and they are the source of power[37]. Can institutions such as local institutions be of deliberative nature that helps to bridge the gap between state and people? Is it possible for state agents and other public institutions to promote a culture of deliberation in an attempt to preserve democracy? In order to move ahead in a direction to find an answer to this, let's turn to urban local institutions and analyse them.

The deliberation within the local village assembly is often a place of interest. In urban spaces, the adaptation of Gandhian principles has been done. Various local institutions have been created to let people participate in daily affairs, usually developmental. Few examples of these institutions have been Municipal corporations, Residential Welfare Associations, Ward Committees, Nagar Panchayats, and many more. The main role of the citizens is limited to that of consultancy[38]. People do participate directly, though not everywhere. People are consulted in very limited affairs and this consultation may involve deliberations, for instance in the matter of budgeting. In some cases, people are supposed to nominate representatives, such as representatives of the wards or welfare associations, who can deliberate on limited matters on behalf of the people they are representing. Is such a form of participation, that can be labelled as nominal in practice even when it shouldn't be theoretically, in line with the Gandhian principles for democracy?

However, not in all places, citizens are even consulted. The local institutions are allocating budgets for various infrastructure needs and overseeing the works of the designated area. Participation that involves deliberation in any sense is largely missing. Communication regarding policies and other decisions is told to people by various heads, councillors, and in charge reflects the lack of democratic spirit because people do not have an active presence. They can try to reach the local representatives to express themselves, however, a platform or practice ensuring democratic empowerment remains absent. Discussion and deliberation as prominent features have been lacking here. So how can people or citizens be incorporated into the political processes that are more substantive and regular in nature? Is it possible to truly move ahead in a direction that is closer to Gandhi's concept of democracy? The answer to such a question is complex. Yet, instead of it, one interesting development that has taken place in contemporary times is that of Mohalla Sabha. Urban areas like Delhi are often associated with centralised forms of government because of the demographic landscape and its political status as a Union territory in the present time. Gandhi posited village *swaraj* as a counterforce to

the centralised structure of the cities so that the spirit of democracy is truly kept intact. However, local government that involves active participation on behalf of the citizens is highly significant for urban areas as well. The local units of the city are intrinsic to the participatory democracy that is deliberative in nature. Through the adoption of the same Gandhian principles, Mohalla Sabha has been established as the site for ensuring the active presence of people in the political processes. The core idea behind it has been that a true form of democracy can't be achieved if people participate in the political sphere only during elections. The element of discussion and deliberation within the structure of Mohalla sabha sets it aside from other urban institutions. It has the potential, theoretically, to fully realise democracy. In order to stabilise the functioning of the Mohalla Sabhas and to let an active political participation culture prosper, only developmental issues are at the pinnacle of the discussions. However, sometimes development issues are caused by political reasons and hence, the percolation of political issues such as corruption or information regarding the political progress has been part of the agendas for Mohalla Sabha. The central vision behind the institution has been to let people exercise an active role in democracy. There are 2972 Mohalla Sabhas in 70 constituencies of Delhi. Similar institutions for urban spaces have existed in Kerela and West Bengal. In Kerela, the municipal act of 1994 exists that allows for the formation of ward committees and in West Bengal, the West Bengal Municipal rules 2003 allows for the formation of ward committees. However, the deliberative aspect is not extended to all the people of the wards but rather to the nominated members of the ward. The problem arises in this regard when there is a lack of structure that allows for the opportunity for the people to get involved in deliberative practices that reflects positively upon the democratic aspect of political. So how does the urban local institution imbibe the principles professed by Gandhi about decentralisation and democracy? Is it capable? Can Gandhi's principles for democracy inform the deliberative form of democracy in general at all? I believe they can. Let me briefly put forth in following points to support my claim.

First, Gandhi promotes large-scale participation of people in the democratic functioning of the polity. Such participation involves deliberations too. The recognition of deliberation as the crux of participation implies large-scale deliberations among people. A deliberative exercise can be used as a trust-building mechanism within a population.

Second, incorporation of the local values can be expected which can produce vibrant deliberations. Such outcomes can't be anticipated sometimes but only observed such as vernacular verbalisation allows

people to express themselves more freely without any inhibitions.

Third, regular participation in politics is possible even at the local level since Gandhi does talk about ensuring self-sufficiency along with the promotion of people-oriented institutions. People can use deliberative institutions to promote the cause of self-sufficiency since the issues can directly inform the institutions at the centre.

Fourth, it will fulfil the large gap in informing the people. Since deliberative institutions are supposed to give space to people to bring up issues about their well-being. They are also capable of protecting people from falling prey to propaganda. The educative function is embedded within the functioning of deliberation. Communication and exchange of reasoning allow one to educate themselves.

## V. Conclusion

The potential of adopting Gandhian thought and principles for deliberative democratic theory is vast. Existing trends point towards accommodating diverse principles so that it is made feasible in nature. There will be some loopholes always but still, a clear-cut way of making deliberation possible in a wide range of contexts would help in retrieving the moral script of democracy in general. Gandhi can be referred to as the torch bearer for a deliberative form of democracy. His understanding of democracy is inclusive of deliberative function, unlike the dominant understanding within the area of democratic theory where one can classify types of democracy such as representative democracy or competitive democracy, etc. that do not consider deliberative practices as intrinsic to the overall health of democracy. Gandhi's point of view is different and can be summarised as any democracy that does not promote active people's participation where they use their agency fully then it's just another form of political structure that has imperialist tendencies just like the British colonial rule in India.

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# Tracing the postmodern Gandhi: Khadi, Village Industries, and the zeal of Swaraj

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ABSTRACT

*The paper intends to analyse Mahatma Gandhi's postmodernism in his distinct articulation of khadi and village industries in India. Lloyd Rudolph and Sussane Rudolph have attempted to establish Gandhi as a postmodern thinker in his approach and method, bringing in various instances where Gandhi was unique and distant from others and the west, and providing an alternative. The postmodern attribute of Gandhi can be traced to the Indian freedom movement against British colonialism. One of Gandhi's political weapons was the khadi and village industries. Khadi and village industries, which were a result of the Swadeshi movement in India, were perfected at the hands of Gandhi. Not only its swadeshi avatar but the sector was also seen as having the potential of bringing a utopian decentralized village to India, which Gandhi idealized. The paper hence takes into account khadi and village industries as Gandhi's unique political methods which makes and establishes Gandhi as a postmodern thinker.*

Keywords: Gandhi, khadi, village industries, swaraj, postmodern

## Introduction

KHADI AND VILLAGE INDUSTRIES were a virtuous emblematic symbol that was perfected by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi during the freedom movement of India from British colonialism. Lisa Trivedi discusses the different ways in which khadi was turned into a national symbol by the nationalists and the common people, through visual vocabulary and communication which according to Trivedi led to a mass national consciousness.[1] Khadi and village industries in India

broadly can be related to three things. Firstly, in terms of the economy of the nation; secondly, a large section of the rural population of India is dependent on it and third, it is a product of Indian nationalism articulated by Gandhi. But what is strikingly noteworthy is that khadi and village industries in India which constitute the village economy of the country took shape as a result of dynamic forces that was operating at large during the days of the nationalist movement against the British colonial power. The first serious engagement in the sector emerged when Gandhi identified khadi and village industries as a basic and necessary part of the rural economy and evolved various means and methods not only to project it in terms of acceptability in the Indian situation but also to make it a basic necessity of human life. Khadi and village industries had so distinct and special emphasis in Gandhi's analysis that he referred to khadi as a 'birth-right'.[2] The nature of the Indian freedom struggle was not uncommon, while some took to negotiation with the British to meet its demands, others resorted to armed struggle and revolution. In the fight against British colonialism and in the greater movement for rights, liberty, equality, and fraternity among the Indians, Gandhi devised his own methods which were not only philanthropic in nature but also had an adequate message to the Indians, different from the rest. Rahul Ramagundam studies the historical location of the 'Khadi Movement' in India in all its manifestations, tracing the whole genealogy of 'khadi'- its significance, vitality, politics, and social issues in the colonial era arguing that the history of the khadi movement should not be restricted to its political facet only.[3] While Ramagundam offers an understanding of the wider meaning of 'khadi'- particularly the moral significance of the movement, it offers a spectrum of analysis to comprehend khadi not only as a political movement but also as a way of life. During the Indian freedom movement against British colonialism, Gandhi never conformed to the standard idea of fighting for freedom or submitting it to the ways and models of the imperialist West. This sidelines Gandhi and his philosophy from the other thinkers of India. Gandhi developed khadi and village industries in its indigeneity in carrying forward the Indian freedom movement and making Indians realize the greater understanding of '*swaraj*'. The distinct articulation of khadi and village industries as rooted in Indian traditional ways of subsistence and village life stands strong as an answer to not only colonialism and imperialism but also evolving postmodern ways of addressing the pertinent issues. Lisa Trivedi argues that the time when the world was complementing print capitalism for playing its due role in the rise of nationalism of the third world nations which has a minimal role to play in a country with vast numbers of illiterates, khadi was

given that nationalist image having the sartorial symbol of awakening the masses from bondage, slavery and continued exploitation of the British.[4] Accompanying khadi were the village industries. Khadi and village industries hence were the backbone of Gandhi's socio-political thought and struggle and there must be an understanding of the deeper traits which Gandhi wanted to convey to his fellow Indians. The enigmatic virtues of khadi and village industries are unknown to many, for the dilemma that exists is, it is left only with the *swadeshi* emblem and thus merely a symbol of Indian freedom and independence. For khadi and village industries was an ideology of Indianness, larger rights, freedom, and democracy in Indian society, polity, and the economy was ascertained by Gandhi in multiple ways.

Lloyd Irving Rudolph and Susanne Rudolph argue that Gandhi was a postmodern thinker who challenged the established order and paved a path of Indian nationalism diverging himself from the loyal constitutionalism and terrorist violence which Indians adopted.[5]They state that Gandhi had powerful symbolic expressions of a whole set of cultural attitudes which draw on 'self-control rather than self-expression, on self-suffering, and calls for the restraint of the impulse to retaliate'.[6] These arguments, while presenting Gandhi as a postmodern thinker, are supplemented through khadi and village industries, which directly originated from his thought and efforts. The paper thus attempts to establish Gandhi's beliefs and practices as having postmodern attributes through his construction of khadi and village industries. While understanding Gandhi as a postmodern thinker, his philosophy must not be limited to the nonviolent methods of resistance he adopted known as Satyagraha.

The paper proceeds to understand and trace Gandhi's postmodernism by discussing his formulation of khadi and village industries in his distinctive works in the first section of the paper. The second section of the paper critically engages with the deeper meaning of the idea of Swaraj through khadi and village industries. In the third section, the paper discusses the sector of khadi and village industries as an answer to both capitalism and socialism, and the binaries of the existing world which sought to reduce the world and history into material terms. The fourth section discusses the ecological harmony which Gandhi was seeking through khadi and village industries which is relevant in the era of excessive industrialization. The final section critically discusses and attempts to establish Gandhi as a postmodern thinker through his greater construction of khadi and village industries in India which is very much contextual as well as distant from the usual power struggles of mankind.

**Khadi and Village Industries in Gandhi's work**

Khadi and village industries[7]are an integral part of the Indian economy constituting a large section of the rural population and a noted feature of the political economy of the nation. However, hand-spinning and hand-weaving were present since the Vedic Age and in the ancient and medieval periods of India.[8] Yovesh Chandra Sharma mentions the development of art in ancient sacred books such as the *Vedas*, *Manusmriti*, *Ramayana,* and *Mahabharata*.[9] But khadi and village industries entered the 'nationalist vocabulary'[10] of the country in the era of colonial rule. It entered during the swadeshi struggle of the nation under the leadership of M.K Gandhi. Khadi and village industries can be regarded as the core of Gandhi's entire social and moral philosophy. It centered around his whole moral, political social and economic thought. For M.K Gandhi, khadi is any "hand-woven cloth made from hand-spun thread. Silk-thread, just fibre and wool woven in this manner may be called, if we like, silk, jute and woolen khadi respectively. But it would be ridiculous for anyone dressed in khadi silk to claim that he was encouraging khadi."[11] Silk or woolen khadi were against the principles of M.K Gandhi. Gandhi said, "You ask about woolens and silks. Who wears them? Can the poor do so? Why should we take all the trouble for a few rich people. These things cannot become universal."[12] Khadi was defined in terms of its universal application throughout the country. Gandhi defines the production of khadi as "cotton growing, picking, ginning, cleaning, carding, slivering, spinning, sizing, dyeing, preparing the warp and the woof, weaving and washing."[13]

To begin with the village industries Gandhi at first clarified the term 'industry'. Gandhi said, "An industry to be Indian must be demonstrably in the interest of the masses; it must be manned by Indians both skilled and unskilled. Its capital and machinery should be Indian, and the labour employed should have a living wage and be comfortably housed, while the welfare of the children of the labourers should be guaranteed by the employers."[14]Gandhi's list of village industries included dairying, hand-pounding of rice and hand-grinding of corn, ghani oil, gur and khandsari, bee-keeping, tanning, soap, hand-made paper, ink.[15]

Khadi and village industries were complementary to each other, which existed side by side. "Village Industries come in as handmaid to khadi. They cannot exist without Khadi. And Khadi will be robbed of its dignity without them", Gandhi said.[16]Gandhi's works seemed to address khadi and village industries differently in his major works. While talking about the banes of 'machinery' in *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi

inadvertently referred to the efficacy of the ancient and sacred 'handlooms' positioning them against machine-made cloth and the big mill factories of the country. Gandhi also dwelled at length on the evils of modern civilisation in *Hind Swaraj*. The book laid the grounds for a simple village-based rural life by denouncing modern civilisation and machinery. Although khadi and village industries have not been mentioned by Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj*, it gave a serious understanding of Gandhi's system of thought in the Indian situation.[17] "Handloom is the panacea for the growing pauperism of India." Gandhi said in his autobiography.[18] In his autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments With Truth,* Gandhi speaks about the 'birth of khadi' at the Satyagraha Ashram, Sabarmati; the discovery of the spinning wheel, the art of spinning, and the adoption of the practice of wearing 'khadi' by the Ashramites.[19] In *Constructive Programme* Gandhi projected khadi and village industries as an integral part of his constructive agenda to achieve complete independence or 'Purna Swaraj'. The *Constructive Programme* was a plea by Gandhi to every Indian to work for the cause of khadi and village industries. It laid out the structure of khadi and village industries in the decentralized village order.[20] The situation of khadi and village industries in Gandhi's work points to the important place it holds in his thought. Gandhi was very much concerned about the importance of khadi and village industries.

Khadi had a stronger place in Gandhi's writings and thoughts than the village industries. Its importance as a symbol was used strongly by Gandhi compared to the village industries. This is because khadi economics was voluntary and universal throughout as compared to the village industries and was so widely used in the swadeshi movement of the nation. "Khadi is the sun of the village solar system. The planets are the various industries which support khadi in return for the heat and the sustenance they derive from it." Gandhi went on to say, "Khadi cannot be moved from its central place. Khadi will be the sun of the whole industrial solar system. All other industries will receive warmth and sustenance from the khadi industry."[21]

**The Road to Swaraj**

Gandhi's socio-political thought resonates with the idea of *swaraj* more. Gandhi's *khadi* and village industries thus first stemmed from his ideas of swaraj. How Gandhi's articulation of *khadi* and village industries resonates with his idea of *Swaraj*? Swaraj for Gandhi is a sacred word, a Vedic word meaning self-rule and self-restraint and not freedom from all restraint which independence often means.[22] Elaborating on his concept of swaraj, Gandhi said, "it is swaraj, when we learn to rule ourselves".[23] In the words of Anthony J. Parel, Gandhi's swaraj

had a clear distinction from swaraj or independence. For Gandhi, swaraj is self-rule, the rule of the self by the self, to be more precise it is the rule of the mind over itself and the passions of greed and aggression. In Hind Swaraj, Gandhi details the path of *dharma* for a simple life where there will be liberty, equality, fraternity, and prosperity. The struggle for independence was given a broad understanding by Gandhi implying that the end of British rule will merely bring independence and will not bring the real *swaraj* or self-rule. While fighting British colonialism and imperialism, Gandhi tried to understand the deep-rooted problems of the Indian society which directly was responsible for its slavery and bondage. He devised methods to attain real swaraj which does not simply means achieving freedom from the British which independence often means. For Gandhi, the expulsion of the British seemed secondary. In a letter to H.S.L Polak, Gandhi clearly said that "it is not the British people who are ruling India, but it is modern civilisation, through its railways, telegraphs, telephones, and almost every invention which has been claimed to be a triumph of civilisation".[24] Mentioning the cities of Bombay and Calcutta as the chief hotspots of the real plague, he directed his mission toward the villages of India. His main worry was if British rule was replaced by Indian rule with the same modern civilisation, real swaraj will be still a distant dream. "We can realize truth and non violence only in the simplicity of village life and this simplicity can be found in the Charkha and all that the Charkha connotes", Gandhi said.[25] In Hind Swaraj, Gandhi has given a sharp and strong criticism of Western civilisation which according to Gandhi posed a much larger threat than colonialism and imperialism. For him, it is the western civilisation that has led to the bondage and slavery of the Indians. Thus, the immediate fight of the Indians was the very process that facilitated the growth of western civilisation rather than the struggle for independence. To merely drive the English out of the country is not what Gandhi was seeking.[26] He was involved in a broader idea of *swaraj* rather than just the physical expulsion of the British. It is in this context of achieving real *swaraj* or self-rule that Gandhi constructed his philosophy of *khadi* and village industries in India.

Gandhi's distrust for modern civilisation was the seeding grounds for khadi and village industries to emerge not only as an alternative to modern civilisation but as a self-regulating mechanism to deplore and desist all that was against his principles and ethos of a simple and dignified life. He found the possibility only in village life- which according to him was a republic and a self-contained unit. Giving due importance to the villages, Gandhi was foreseeing the nature of swaraj

that the 7 *lakh* villages will bring. If the villages perish, India will perish too, Gandhi said. So his philosophy and principles were directed towards attaining village swaraj- an idea of 'a complete republic, independent of its neighbors for its vital wants, where the first concern of every individual will be to grow its own food crops and cotton for its cloth'.[27] And thus Gandhi laid down the basic principles of village swaraj which asserts the supremacy of man where a very human being has a right to live, and therefore to find the wherewithal to feed himself and where necessary, to clothe and house himself and thus limit oneself to these necessities.

The road to freedom was not just independence from British colonialism but freedom from wants, desires, and of self-realization which was also instrumental in the larger fight against imperialism. The vedic word '*swaraj*' which Gandhi often deployed, refraining from using the term 'independence' makes him different from the regular freedom fighters. He uniquely deployed *swaraj* and made a sacred connection with '*swadeshi*'. Khadi and village industries were thus constructed as a *swadeshi* symbol and had the eligibility for a decentralized village order as idealized by Gandhi. The sector though has been identified by many as a 'boycott strategy' of Gandhi actually entailed practical connotations in a society Gandhi envisaged which are- 1) khadi and village industries as a *swadeshi* and nationalist symbol during the freedom struggle of India to boycott foreign goods and adopt Indian goods; 2) khadi and village industries addressed the economic issues of self-sufficiency and self-reliance and 3) if khadi and village industries are adopted universally it was a solution to the social evils and injustices of Indian society.

There was an ideological construct of *khadi* and village industries in Gandhi's thought and philosophy. This ideology pertained as a nationalist symbol of adhering to swadeshi or homemade goods instead of foreign goods. While Gandhi gave a call to the Indians to use homegrown goods and wear homespun cloth discarding the foreign mills, cloth, and goods, *khadi* acquired more prominence ideologically. This was because *khadi* and village industries were projected not only as a nationalist swadeshi symbol but were associated with a whole plethora of meanings and principles of being virtuous and righteous enough to meet the social evils as well as being sustainable in meeting the needs of both the present and the future generation. The philosophy of khadi and village industries thus apart from its political ideology had social, economic, and philanthropic meanings and implications.

Gandhi wanted to give a clear social message to the Indians via khadi and village industries. His particular concern was the

fragmented Hindu society on the basis of caste and the practice of untouchability. To this, he identified true economics which can serve social justice, in promoting the good of all equally. The basis of the practice of untouchability was the economic inequality and the difference in an occupation that was widespread in the country. Gandhi said he wanted to bring about an 'equalization of status' and wanted to establish a casteless and classless society.[28] For that, engaging in spinning and weaving one's own cloth and sustaining the traditional village industries for their immediate needs was important. When the whole of society is involved in similar occupations for their immediate needs and wants, there is less differentiation of class and caste. This is what he called true economics where there is leveling of the wealth of the riches in the most nonviolent way possible. This sacred and holy work of weaving one's own cloth for Gandhi was the path to a non-violent society. With this broader objective, Gandhi wanted everyone to belong to one caste which is of the Harijans- a name he specially coined for the untouchables meaning the 'children of God'. But Khadi although a symbol of unity, as argued by Emma Tarlo, also divided the nation, where Tarlo cites many instances where khadi was seen both as a fabric of unity as well as differences.[29] But what Tarlo misses out on is that the differences existed only as an external piece of cloth, failing to comprehend the larger meaning of swaraj and self-rule that the cloth carries.

Gandhi brought the entire debate of the struggle for independence to the point of adopting *swadeshi* or homegrown products as the basic way of life. The nucleus of the struggle was brought to the ethical idea of adopting homemade goods. While talking of British colonialism, Gandhi never blamed the British for ruling India but instead blamed the Indians who were copying the Englishmen and welcomed the East India Company with open arms. In a question to the reader in Hind Swaraj Gandhi said, "Who assisted the Company's officers? Who was tempted at the sight of their silver? Who bought their goods?" To add further he said, "India is being grounded down not under the English heel but under that of modern civilisation".[30] The dependence on and welcoming of Western industry and civilisation was slavery for Gandhi. The *swadeshi* emblem- *khadi* and village industries played an active role in the swadeshi movement of the country. Taking the freedom movement to the villages, Gandhi saw freedom not only as freedom from imperialism and colonialism but also as deep-seated inequality and poverty that exist in the country.

Khadi and the village industries of Gandhi worked in harmony with the principles of simplicity and nonviolence. Khadi, hand-spun, and hand-woven cloth were championed because of the simplicity

they carried. Though silk was also hand spun and hand woven it was denounced by Gandhi because it involved killing the silk pupae in the process. With a great distrust for modern machinery, it represented a great sin according to Gandhi who wanted to replace the same because it impoverished India. The spinning wheel or the charkha represented the seven hundred thousand villages, which underlined the importance of body labour in a village economy like India. It was a symbol of unity, solidarity, and fraternity among the rich and the poor, high and low. Modern machinery was responsible for unemployment, poverty, and exploitation for it takes on the labour of men. To quote Gandhi's words, "Mechanization is evil when there are more hands than required for the work, as in the case of India".[31] Gandhi was concerned with the leisure and the idle hours that will follow, generally unemployment when mechanization takes over. To be certain, Gandhi was not opposed to science and technology, but what bothered him was the very alienation from the basic virtues of life. Khadi and village industries evolved and symbolized not only a remedy and solution to India's bondage of slavery to British colonialism and imperialism but a whole plethora of meaning, rooted in the village life where pauperism, starvation, and idleness will be unknown.[32]

If one reads Gandhi's Hind Swaraj which was written in 1909, a period before the Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, and Quit India Movement; an account of the way to counter British imperialism and colonialism was explained scientifically. The book which was banned in India by the British implanted the seeds for independence which was different from the usual ideas of the leading freedom fighters of India. What differentiated Gandhi was the very idea of independence in ideas and thought and extreme disagreement with the very idea that modern science and technology can change the condition in India. Gandhi saw the root cause of poverty and social evils as well as imperialism and colonialism in excessive dependence on foreign goods. Thus his key to achieving swaraj was made a moral idea, not just limiting itself to expelling the British from the Indian land. His postmodernism was included in his attempt to universalize khadi and village industries as an antithesis of modern civilisation and colonialism.

Thus, khadi and traditional village industries were the whole plethoras of his belief system towards a simple self-sufficient village in India. Through *khadi* and village industries Gandhi wanted to i) establish a united nation cutting through the differences of caste, class, religion, region, culture, etc. and work towards achieving social justice; ii) make the people self-reliant in meeting their economic needs and iii) work harmoniously in establishing a non-violent societal order.

**An answer to capitalism and socialism**

Khadi and village industries were an alternate ideology to the two dominating ideologies of the world- capitalism, and socialism. The former is rooted in the industrial capitalist class and private ownership in contrast to the latter which opined for more economic equality through public ownership of the means of production. Gandhi took another way to counter the power centers of the world. No direct warship, no diplomacy with no emphasis on foreign relations with the other countries, diminishing the role of the market Gandhi certainly gave less emphasis on the state's ownership and control over the mode of production. Rejecting both, Gandhi said, "Nehru wants industrialization, because he thinks that if it is socialized, it would be free from the evils of capitalism. My own view is that the evils are inherent in industrialism, and no amount of socialization can eradicate them"[33] while contradicting Jawaharlal Nehru's idea of socialism. The Indian socialists heavily borrowed ideas from Soviet Russia to counter British imperialism and colonialism.

His idea of industrialism was indigenous to the village life that persists in India. In contrast to the ideology of capitalism and communism which centers its belief in the individual and the community welfare, Gandhi completely dismissed the idea of individual and community interests and sought to expand the larger idea of 'humanity' through khadi and village industries. In his words, "there is no place for self-interest in Swadeshi which enjoins the sacrifice of oneself for the family, of the family for the village, of the village for the country, and of the country for humanity".[34] His political thought extends beyond the idea of nation-state, bringing in the idea of humanity, though not completely diminishing the importance of individual welfare as well as community well-being. As discussed earlier, Gandhi considered the growth of cities as an evil thing, unfortunate for mankind and the world.[35] For Gandhi, it is through the cities that the British exploited India. Gandhi thought that the cities are built by exploiting the villages and the poorest. The wealth of the cities, as Gandhi was quoted saying, comes from the blood of the villages. So, it is significant that Gandhi was more engaged in fighting an ideology of exploitation rather than the British. Khadi and village industries were constructed to exemplify the villages and as an ideology of swaraj inherent in them.

Through khadi and village industries, Gandhi engaged in a kind of ethical politics, that diverged from the usual power struggle on which both socialism and capitalism based their politics. While capitalism advocated a free market economy, communism advocated

state socialism. Both ideologies dominate the world, tussled in a kind of power struggle of having maximum control over others and dominating or regulating the world economy. Khadi and village industries were paved to exercise self-control and self-restraint over greed and passion. This distanced Gandhi from the established and recognized understanding of the economy and the ideologies of the world. Both ideologies were seeking to control the rest of the world. Gandhi emphasized controlling one's own self, greed, and passions-the rule of the mind over itself.

Khadi and village industries were modeled also as a response to the advanced scientific technology which the West positioned to the backward village life of India which was considered economically backward and socially contaminated. The West which claimed to be superior in technology and science was guiding India on a similar path of industrialisation. Khadi and village industries were seen as having the potential to revive village India to progress, upliftment, and economic self-sufficiency. These virtues of khadi and village industries have been central to the Indian setup, where the village was taken into consideration. Gandhi's ideas came from the villages. His vision of development was seen rooted in village life and simplicity. When the world was counting on heavy and modern industrialisation as the path to development, Gandhi saw traditional and simple village industries as the solution to meet basic needs. His ideas of development were based on simplicity. Khadi and village industries were not only a means to revive the lost traditional art and craft of India, but a greater idea of self-realization and a path towards progress and development, unlike the Western ideas. It was to lay a foundation for a society that was secular, modern, and self-reliant. It was also a path towards community living and sharing. Ria Modak sees Gandhi's principles as more tinted towards neoliberal capitalism, including his khadi programme, because his ideas of swaraj synthesize with the idea of the self, and human dignity and resonate with individualism.[36] But Modak fails to see Gandhi, as not falling within the binaries of science and technology and giving primacy to the moral and spiritual faculties of man rather than the economic and moral needs. Modak deduces khadi and Gandhi's principles to human needs and wants, whereas Gandhi never reduced the human to a mere economic being and totally diminished the role of the market.

Gandhi to revive the village of India, developed an idea that remains relevant to all the existing forms of Western models of civilisation and the future repercussions of advanced industrialism and liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation. Western civilisation which claimed to be inherently progressive in character in terms of

science and technology and modern education was challenged by Gandhi who sought to bring the idea of progress within the villages of India. The British in order to develop India from deep-rooted social evils and poverty introduced modern education and science and technology in production. Gandhi said, "Industrialism is, I am afraid, going to be a curse for mankind".[37] Gandhi sought to bring the focus to the villages of India, where in Western capitalism the city is made the area of concentration and development. The socialist countries which deployed state-owned public goods and services as the key to counter capitalism, Gandhi sought to renovate and make the villages self-sufficient and independent without any help and support from the state. Gandhi constructed the idea of an ideal village and sought to organize human society on this basis.

**Ecological Harmony**

Khadi and village industries are sustainable. Sustainable development technically was included in the developmental agenda in the 1980s when environmental protection became an increasing concern around the globe. In the era of globalization the concept of 'sustainable development' assumes great importance in Gandhi's khadi and village industries. Khadi and village industries time and again were emphasized for their quality to meet the needs of the millions of Indians without any consequences in the future. Khadi and village industries as an economy, were sustainable in the long run. The tremendous degradation of the environment through heavy industries, pollution from industrial wastes, and technological modernization of the economy resulted in the inclusion of the environment in the development programme of all the countries of the world.[38] The growing need to preserve the earth's ecology has prompted the recent politics of development, and the debates over sustainable development or the environment debate which has become a concern all over the world. Khadi and village industries have claimed to meet the values of being 'environment friendly'. While environmental concern has not been directly addressed by M.K Gandhi in any of his works, Gandhi had indirectly said once, 'Earth provides enough to satisfy man's need and not every man's greed.'[39] Khadi and village industries in the due course have been connected with human life and its quality. At the time Gandhi constructed the economy of khadi and village industries, 'sustainable development' or sustainability, in the long run, was not a concern of the world at large. Khadi and village industries were an answer to the heavy industrialization and have always stood as a challenge to it, where the cause behind the emergence of the sector was the barbaric culture of modern civilisation.

**Postmodern Gandhi**

Khadi as a symbol of unity and fraternity thus was propagated by Gandhi in a divisive and plural country. Gandhi envisaged a society where 'there will be neither paupers nor beggars, nor high or low, neither millionaire employers nor half-starved employees, nor intoxicating drinks or drugs'.[40]Khadi and village industry was championed as means of self-reliance and self-independence not because the people engaged in the traditional craft can become so without any dependence on foreign industries but because the industries are themselves self-reliant and required no special support. In the words of Gandhi, "I have ruled out organized industries because they do not need any special support. They can stand on their own legs and in the present state of our awakening, can easily command a market".[41]Big machines were positioned not only on the inefficacies and ineffectiveness in a village India but also on the moral vices which didn't conform with Gandhi's idea of livelihood. Machines were the source of idleness and rising unemployment and hold little value in human life. Gandhi's schema thus, has a moral and philanthropic idea rather than just economics.

The decentralized village order was the basis of the ideal society of Gandhi. He wanted to establish economic equality through it, which is the only master key to a nonviolent society. The economic equality which Gandhi envisaged was essential to abolish the eternal conflict between capital and labour and leveling out the distinctions between the rich and the poor. For that rural economy needed to be revived and be the centre of the economy from where all other activities would follow. Agriculture along with khadi and traditional village industries remains the backbone of humane society in Gandhi's thought. Gandhi's main concern was to live together in a society guided by communitarian feelings where there was an increasing sense of individuality and hierarchy in the ranks of occupation. For that Gandhi gave more emphasis on the broader ethical function khadi and village industries can perform. Khadi and village industries were a substitute for armed revolts and the moderation policy with the British to attain swaraj. Swaraj thus was not limited to independence from the British per se but a greater idea of self-rule and self-control from greed, wants, and passion. Khadi and village industries were Satyagraha, the truth force and the soul force.

Thus, khadi for Gandhi was 'a wholesome swadeshi mentality, a determination to find all the necessaries of life in India and that too through the labour and intellect of the village".[42]The villages in Gandhian schema were never to swipe away the cities and ruin them,

rather they constitute the self-contained units that will voluntarily serve the cities. The British involved in destroying the village life of India were given a fitting response by Gandhi who got involved in reconstructing the same. Reconstructing the rural by adopting simple khadi and village industries to fulfill the necessities of life was a postmodern approach to counter both capitalist and socialist tendencies of power concentration. Dispersal of power among the federating units was the approach Gandhi adopted. The method to counter the modern tendencies of the world caters to the principle of non-violence per se. Distancing from the violent revolutionary methods which use force to achieve ends, Gandhi was never a nonrevolutionary in any way. Gandhi wanted to make a revolutionary change in the minds of the Indians by making them understand the true meaning of swaraj or self-rule through khadi and village industries. The revolution existed in regulating the self and limiting oneself to the basic needs of simplicity and moderation. Khadi and village industries thus were a non-violent revolutionary way to counter the rapid expansion of modern science and technology which was paramount in both capitalist and socialist ideologies. It constituted the truth, the soul force to resist modernization, luxury, and comfort. Contextualizing khadi and village industries, thus allows us to understand its virtuous and symbolic features in a deeply impoverished country. The postmodern attitude of Gandhi was reflected in the sense that he never considered the fact that western science and technology could solve the deep-rooted problems of the country like casteism, untouchability, economic dependence, inequality, and the like. He was deeply skeptical of the same and questioned its ideas and values, rejecting its myth and symbolized khadi and village industries which can bring in progress and civilisation. His preference for khadi and simple traditional industries was constructed keeping into account the mass unemployment, idleness, and ecological harmony.

In an era of market economies and political democracies, Gandhi's idea of khadi and village industries evolved as relevant to Indian society, polity, and economy. His theory and formulation of khadi and village industries were based on a non-reductionist approach, it never perceived the world in material terms, which capitalism and Marxism did. Gandhi rejected Western rationality of technological progress through khadi and village industries, and reinstated the faith in community life, moral values, and simple rural life. Gandhi's khadi and village industries cannot be reduced as an answer to anti-colonialism or heavy industrialism. It was an answer to the existing binaries of the economic world. The village economy was paramount

for Gandhi, for it represented India in its totality and thus it was essential to reclaiming the village space which has been lost in the garb of excessive modernisation and industrialisation. Gandhi's thought was original and oriental, not derivative from the discourses of the West. This reclamation of the village space through khadi and traditional village industries was the centre of his political thought. The question of rights, equality, fraternity, communal unity could be addressed only when real village *swaraj* is achieved. For that, khadi and village remain paramount in his action and belief. Gandhi just didn't take khadi and village industries for granted. He did not just equate it with salvation from colonialism and imperialism. For Gandhi khadi and village industries were a guiding principle of self-control, and self-perseverance, and his uniqueness lies in his urge to understand the meaning of life through it and not be carried away by delusions and temptations of any kind. Khadi and village industries of Gandhi's schema of thought are not a means but also an end in itself.

## Conclusion

Peter Gonsalves rightly comprehended Gandhi's use of Khadi as a powerful 'nonverbal communication', different from the established practices of bringing a revolution in the minds of the people in an unusual way.[43] While modernism was hell-bound to improve the social and economic evils of India through modern science and technology, Gandhi constructed his idea of khadi and village industries against that prevalent notion. In fact, village India of Gandhi can be seen as having postmodern attributes that provide an alternative to the binaries of the world and also to the western construct that modern science and technology can solve the existing problems of the world. Gandhi never reduced his philosophy to material terms and was nonreductionist in his approach. As capitalism and socialism viewed man and the existing relations in purely economic terms, Gandhi's construction of khadi and village industries was a different philosophy altogether. This became revolutionary in its own roots, and from which emerged not only his way of facing the adversaries of the world but also a thought system that had postmodern attributes of change and development.

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# Gandhi's Political Life Writings: The Known and the Unknown History of the Indian Freedom Movement

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ABSTRACT

*The present study articulates some of the most intriguing aspects of prison life writings of Indian freedom fighters keeping the experiences of Mahatma Gandhi's incarceration in British colonial jails as a central trope. The primary focus of this paper is to foreground the nuances of life writing through an analysis of the style, technique, and ideology of a few select biographies of Gandhi with an attempt to compare and contrast Gandhi's experiences in South Africa and Indian jails. The study's objective is to highlight the subtleties, nuances, and radical departures in the convention of political life writings in early twentieth-century India. The heterogeneous experiences of political prisoners in colonial jails evoke essential discussions regarding the Indian penal administration. These life writings help us foreground the contradictions, prejudices, and biases in the treatment of certain political prisoners by colonial jail authorities.*

**Keywords**: Life Writings, Auto/Biography, Political Prisoners, Penology, Colonial Prison

JAMES OLNEY OBSERVED that life writing or "autobiography is the literature that most immediately and deeply engages our interest and holds it".[1] The deep engagement induces an increased awareness and generates an understanding of a 'life' in similar or dissimilar conditions. Olney has probed a few relevant questions in his preface

to the *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* "why men write autobiographies" and explores its dominant place in literature since time immemorial and "why we continue to read them?"[2]

Barbara Harlow records in "Prison Memoirs of Political Detainees" that the political life writings mark a difference from the conventional autobiographies "in a redefinition of the self and the individual" in the face of everyday struggle and venture.[3] The narratives of the political prisoners differ in form and structure from the conventional auto/biographical writing such that the former discovered their writing style, technique, and interest in colonial prison. They represented the collective enterprise through writing. What Barbara Harlow wrote in 1987 was already written by Gandhi on 13 October 1908 from Volksrust Jail as a message to satyagrahis and other Indians. Gandhi wrote, "They [i.e. the political prisoners] have not gone [to gaol] to serve their own personal interests".[4] These prison writings are rather testimonies of national struggle written by individuals. The significant element of prison memoirs that bestows its difference from life writing is its "historical and cultural specificity" in politically resisting the prison apparatus/administration through collaborative strategies.[5] In prison writing, the narratives consist of literary works written during the incarceration, following the incarceration, or incarcerated after the publication of a narrative sustains a significant connective link between the nationalists imprisoned and the nationalists fighting outside. The life writings, life histories, or 'auto/biographies' from the Indian subcontinent during the pre-independence movement ran parallel to the emergent history of the Indian freedom movement. The political life writings, an all-encompassing narrative, etched an alternative history of India to serve as a guide for post-colonial probing. The act of writing became important for political activists or political prisoners to capture the nuances of history, its shifts, and transformations. These political life writings furnished a blueprint of the Indian freedom movement and "created a sense of the networks" coexisting alongside the anti-colonial struggle.[6] Besides accounts of prison struggle, the narratives embody the *charita* of other convicts or state prisoners imprisoned alongside political prisoners.

The persistent question remains unanswered "why men write [political] autobiographies?" Documents on the struggle reveal the choreography of the movement, "the failed political actions", clandestine facts, etc.[7] Primarily, the life writings narrated the history of the struggle "from the perspectives of the figures who spent their long periods of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s in detention or Jail".[8] Another interesting aspect is the variation in the life histories that are

brought forth by the profusion of narratives contributed by the moderates, revolutionary terrorists, congressmen, independent activists, etc. Durba Ghosh states that "By writing their own history, they [political prisoners] made themselves into historical subjects of a new nation that had a new homeland".[9]

The security prisoners or political prisoners invaded a primarily colonial arena through writing. The task of writing itself becomes a counter-hegemonic technique to demonstrate political resistance to the prison administration and the bureaucratic mechanism. Their writing implied an organized resistance against "the prison authorities and the repressive state apparatus which they represent".[10] The political life writings that encompass the experiences of the colonial gaol mushroomed out of the "larger framework of resistance literature".[11] In a similar vein, though in a different context, Helene Cixous' concept of 'writing' is analogous to the life histories of political prisoners. Cixous wrote that "writing frees", it liberates, "….Why don't you write? Write! Writing is for you . . .".[12] The process of writing is beyond an exercise, it is an "act of self-definition".[13] The Empire itself was a textual exercise. It maintained an array of writings, "political treatises, diaries . . . administrative records and gazetteers, missionaries reports, notebooks, memoirs, . . . , letters 'home' and letters back to settlers".[14] The colonial intervention, too, conformed to the textual enterprise. Through these texts, the colonial masters created and distorted images. The defining trait of India's select political life writings was the upright rejection of the oppressive system and the consistency in saying "no". The prison narratives of the freedom fighters challenged the power structure and sought to alter the system's hegemonic, imperialistic, and authoritative power over the political detainee.

In the political life writings of some, especially Aurobindo Ghosh, Jawaharlal Nehru, Bhai Permanad, and to some extent Mahatma Gandhi, the narrative suggests a form popularly known as 'conversion narrative'. Conversion narratives capture the transformation of an individual after a moment of revelation through an "unplanned for experience", for instance, solitary punishment and social isolation.[15] In *Tales of Prison Life*, Aurobindo Ghosh said, ". . . when I awoke, God took me to a prison and turned it into a place of meditation. . .".[16] Again, Bhai Permamand (political prisoner in Andaman Cellular jail) in the *Story of My Life* notes the conversion, "what was to convicts worst form of imprisonment . . . was to me . . . a means of attaining salvation to my soul".[17] Similarly, Gandhi recognized prison as "abodes for attaining nirvana".[18] The thoughts resulted from an understanding that 'sufferings' in prison provide the ultimate happiness.[19] He believed that "ceaseless self-discipline and purification of the spirit [can be

achieved] through the fire of suffering" in colonial prisons.[20] However, Gandhi's initial experience of imprisonment in colonial jails, especially during the first decades of the twentieth century in South Africa (1908) contains interesting anecdotes to highlight his psychological transformation. He was agitated when instructed to sit "on a bench kept there for prisoners".[21] In *Satyagraha in South Africa*, Gandhi recollects that ". . . I was now a prisoner. What would happen in two months? Would have to serve the full term? If the people courted imprisonment in large numbers, as they had promised, there would be no question of serving the full sentence. But if they fail . . . two months would be tedious as an age".[22] Later, Gandhi advocated jail going. Jail became a source of attaining *nirvana*. It became synonymous with performing "services in the interests of his country. . ." or rather jail going legitimized the fight for freedom against colonial forces.[23] The allusion to 'silences' in life writings are referred to as "strategies of protection" in *Telling Lives in India: Biography, Autobiography and Life History* by David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn [24] But Majeed foregrounds the intimate revelations of Mahatma Gandhi, the intimate sexual details or the reference to sexual jealousy in Gandhi's life writings can be labeled as confessional. The 'shame' is undisclosed giving rise to new form of life writing in India that challenges the cultural stakes perpetually maintained by auto/biographers. These political autobiographies, besides being confessional narrative are narratives of 'displacement' where an individual documents his experience of "complex and shifting notions of place".[25] Gandhi's *Satyagraha in South Africa* can be termed as a narrative of displacement because his experiences of incarceration in South African jails was harsh and inhumane, compared to his later Indian penal experiences in Indian Jails. This diverse experience about imprisonment gives him the impetus to write, cite and refer to those incidents. Thus, it can be stated that the "prison changed Gandhi more than he changed the prison".[26]

The mass courting of imprisonment, the culture of jail going intensified under Gandhian influence or rather the civil disobedience movement. Gandhi's *My Experiment with Truth* (1927) eschews details of his prison experiences, though it was partly written in Yeravda jail in the early 1920s. His work *Satyagraha in South Africa*, was originally written in Gujarati and published in 1928, focuses on jail going much before it became associated with patriotism, nationalism, and anti-colonialism. In the preface to *Satyagraha in South Africa,* Gandhi highlighted his unwavering approach toward imprisonment:

> "Are you ready to go to jail?'' I asked.

"We are ready to march to the gallows," was the quick reply.
"Jail will do for me", I said.[27]

Interestingly, Gandhi drafted the initial thirty chapters of *Satyagraha in South Africa* in Yeravda jail. The significance of his South African experience in the context of political life writings of the Indian subcontinent ought to be underlined. The significance is better understood by reading Gandhi's outlook as documented in the preface. Gandhi writes, "The reader will note South African parallels for all our experiences in the present struggle to date".[28] Simultaneously, Gandhi gets into the crux of auto/biographical writings and identifies the importance of writing. Gandhi communicates that "my only object in writing this book is that it may be helpful in our present struggle, and serve as a guide to any regular historian who may arise in the future".[29] These writings are the molecules from which a more extensive historiography of the movement can be written.

The political life writings have often resorted to unveiling personalities, which would otherwise remain unrecognized and obscure. Gandhi's life history focuses on such inclusion and recognition of individuals whose participation remains uncelebrated in India's national history and prison narratives. Gandhi recorded the narration of Sjt. Sanmukhlal and C.L. Chinai, were imprisoned in Sabarmati Central Jail in connection with the penal food that resulted in / stomach infection/ chronic dysentery, stomachache, and diarrhea with thirty to thirty-five motions per day. The satyagrahi detainees refrained from complaining to the prison officers, mostly true in the case of 'B' and 'C' class prisoners. The complaints follow consequences that make the entire episode futile.[30] These life writings exist in relation to other elements or aspects that shape or mould the way one writes. Thus, it can be said ". . . one life history reflects and informs a multiplicity of others".[31] The word 'multiplicity' ushers in an essential aspect associated with Gandhi. The multiplicity of texts on Gandhi challenges the 'truth' or rather the rationale of subjective and objective knowledge. The facts need/ demand to be continuously verified because Gandhi never published his penal episodes in the form of life history other than *Satyagraha in South Africa*, which is again a blend of historical information, political condition, moral inclination, etc. Therefore, it is imperative to consult his official and unofficial letters, petitions to the Directorate of Prisons, and through his articles published in *Young India.* Some of Gandhi's select articles, interviews, and letters connected to his imprisonment were compiled and edited by V.B. Kher and were subsequently published by Navajivan Trust. However, the question is, why Gandhi did not publish another autobiography

regarding his incarceration experiences in Indian colonial jails? After a thorough speculation, I found the explanation in the introduction of *My Experiments with Truth*. Gandhi's initial interest in writing a life history seems certain, but an anonymous "God-fearing friend" insinuated that "writing an autobiography is a practice peculiar to the West. I know of nobody in the East having written one, except amongst those who have come under Western influence."[32] The argument had an impact on Gandhi.[33] However, preventing Gandhi from writing was impossible. Despite the criticism, he continued to write articles for *Navajivan* and *Young India* regarding his experiments with 'truth'. These articles are a constant source of information for hundreds of biographers on Gandhi. Sushila Nayar, incarcerated in Aga Khan Palace with Gandhi, Kasturba Gandhi, Mahadevbhai Desai, and a few others, maintained a Jail Diary regarding Mahatma Gandhi's experience in prison that was first published in 1950 as *Bapu ki Karvavas Kahini* in Hindi. This was later published in English forty-five years later in 1996, as *Mahatma Gandhi's the Last Imprisonment: The Inside Story*. Further, the reasoning of Gandhi's 'God fearing Friend' regarding the classification of autobiography as a genre of the West and 'western influence' can be negated on several grounds. There was an upsurge of political life writings in the late 1919 and early 1920s after state prisoners were released from various colonial prisons, especially from Bengal and Andaman. When Gandhi began writing, the print media stood as one of the most powerful mediums for circulation of political life writings. The revolutionary participants documented their history to encourage the masses to participate in the movement. Durba Ghosh captured the psychological bent behind the explosion of life histories. Ghosh touched upon the thoughts of Bhupendra Kumar Dutta, a Bengali revolutionary terrorist who focused on the immediate preservation of the history of the 'leftists' or the "revolutionary terrorist".[34]

> I have said that it is highly necessary to write a contemporary history, as its absence will render difficult the preparation of history in the future. From practical political experience I know that whatever gains currency among the people or is printed in books, does not constitute history. Actual facts remain for the most part unknown to the people, and historians fail frequently to discover the truth about them . . . The revolutionary movement is extinct today in India and the people have accepted non violence as their creed; and it is time, therefore, to examine the records of our own activities . . .. [35]

The testimonies were recorded and circulated widely as a disclaimer to the nationalists and the colonial government regarding

the ongoing revolution and also to debunk the claim of the British that Bengalis were not hostile or aggressive. The impetus behind their leftist inclination was recorded through the prison narratives. This drives us back to the initial enquiry about "why men wrote" prison narratives. David Arnold, in *Telling lives,* has accurately identified the reason that if they were not written "… stories would otherwise be entirely lost to us".[36] The life writings consist of copious accounts of individual participation in the collective struggle. Javed Majeed observed that the narrators of life or self are constantly "discovered, created and asserted".[37] These manifestos offer only partially successful attempts against colonial India.

The categorization of political prisoners into different ranks (A, B, C) based on caste and class was another contentious issue. However, Durba Ghosh identified that the political prisoners of Andaman were considered as 'A' class prisoners "who were seen to be highly dangerous" specifically the revolutionaries of Bengal.[38] Besides the division between political prisoners and convicts, the sub-division between political prisoners brings in conflicting issues of caste and class. The provision of detention of suspected political prisoners under the Bengal Criminal amendment in 1930 was frequently used as another instrument of incarceration. Political prisoners under detention were not charged under the Indian penal code, but they were kept in detention camps (usually within jail compounds) for months without trial. Besides preferential treatment, the detainees were provided monthly allowances and other additional facilities, but strict vigilance was maintained so that they could not communicate with fellow prisoners. Mahadev Desai, the ardent follower and secretary of Gandhi, convicted on 24 December 1921 was given a tattered coat, a flannel shirt, a loincloth, and two lousy blankets. Gandhi, on the other hand, maintains that the British jail officials usually provided better facilities to him. Gandhi corresponded in *Young India* that:

> So far, therefore, as my physical comforts were concerned, both the government and the jail officials did all that could possibly be expected to make me happy. . . they never let me feel that I was a prisoner.[39]

Mahatma Gandhi's experience in colonial Jails in the Indian subcontinent was comparatively better than his experiences in South African jails. According to a report of the Indian Jails committee 1919-20, political prisoners were to be treated under Special Division Regulations. However, most political prisoners were deprived of the facilities specified under Special Division Regulations. Gandhi was

treated under the Special Division Regulations. Through numerous letters written to the jail superintendents and directorate of prisons, Gandhi tried to refuse the 'special favours' shown to him under the provisions of Special Division Regulations. At the same time, he appealed to the colonial prison authorities to provide the benefits of these regulations to all political prisoners, irrespective of their caste and class. For example, Gandhi wrote on the 6th of September, 1923, to the Superintendant of Yeravda central prison that "I further submit to you that it was awkward for me to enjoy a facility Mr. Gani could not enjoy and therefore my diet too should be so reduced".[40] In another instance, Gandhi referred to three other satyagrahi prisoners namely Messrs Kaujalgi, Jeramdas, and Bhansali "who enjoyed outside a status . . . a softer life" and were compelled to do hard penal labour in Yeravda Jail.[41] Gandhi pleaded very strongly to the jail superintendent that his name should be removed from the Special Division. However, he was conveyed after a few days that such changes in the jail regulations could be initiated at the request of a prisoner.[42]

The segregation of political prisoners from ordinary prisoners or convicts occupies one of the central tropes of discussion in the history of prison literature in India. Though key changes have been introduced in the 1919-20 report of the Jail committee, the political prisoners were deprived of the facilities. In addition, the 1919-20 jail committee report also fails to classify state prisoners as political prisoners. The sub-division categorized the political prisoners as political criminals. However, it states that "all persons who' commit offences from political motives are deserving of special consideration and leniency".[43] Interestingly, Gandhi was imprisoned in the early 1920s and encountered British acrimony for the word 'political'. Sir George Lloyd (appointed as Governor of Bombay in 1918) wrote that he failed to properly decipher the meaning of the term 'political' as applied to a political prisoner and also refused to acknowledge the distinction between political prisoners and convicts. As he wrote, "we do not make any distinction between political and ordinary prisoners".[44]

The commitment towards this denial was addressed to Gandhi in Yeravda Jail in 1922. Gandhi made a willful employment of the word 'political' to the Superintendent of the Yeravda jail in relation to the jail tickets of the state prisoners. Gandhi registers his response to the Superintendant in *Young India*, ". . . I was told by the then Superintendent that the distinction was private and was intended only for the guidance of the authorities".[45] He focused on the distinction "between modes of life".[46] However, he observed that the authorities reckoned the prisoners convicted under the criminal code as invulnerable to political prisoners.[47] Similarly, the 1919-20 report states

that leniency or consideration towards 'political criminals' would be tantamount to emboldening the crime. Thus, the British penal administration reinstates the 'apparent' concept of punishment forwarded by Jeremy Bentham in his correspondence to a friend in England in 1787.[48] Bentham promulgated the idea that its appearance outweighs reality. Therefore, "it is the apparent punishment that does all the service". It is intended not for the punished individual but for all other spectators.

This classification of prisoners offended Gandhi in Transversal. In Johannesburg Prison in 1908, Gandhi was placed amongst Kaffirs. Since Gandhi's mode of writing is confessional, he admits to having felt 'great misery', 'fear', and uneasiness in their company. Though Gandhi reasoned out his fear, his usage of the phrase 'appeared to be wild' signifying the Kaffirs invites a justification. Gandhi was never a constant. His writings portray his experimentation and development of thought. Gandhi's initial objection to being classified among the natives of South Africa has been identified by Nelson Mandela in "Gandhi the Prisoner: A Comparison" as:

> Gandhi had been initially shocked that Indians were classified with Natives in prison; his prejudices were quite obvious, but he was reacting not to "Natives", but criminalized Natives. He believed that Indians should have been kept separately. . . All in all, Gandhi must be forgiven those prejudices and judged in the context of the time and the circumstances. We are looking here at the young Gandhi, still to become Mahatma, when he was without any human prejudice, save that in favour of truth and justice.[49]

Nevertheless, in later years, Gandhi strived for the emancipation of the lower classes in India and identified himself with them.

Most of these political life writings were published as periodicals in different journals and newspapers. For instance, *Karakahini* was published in a Bengali journal called *Suprabhat*, V.D. Savarkar published his anecdotes in *Kesari,* and later *Shraddhanand*, and Gandhi primarily published in *Navajivan* and *Young India*. The growth of print culture in India led to an upsurge in political life writings. In addition to print culture, the language chosen for political or penal articulation was restricted to Indian languages. The obvious intention was to "inspire as well as inform".[50] It became customary amongst political prisoners to renounce English as a language of colonial domination. Thereby rejecting the "systematic imposition of colonial language, some postcolonial writers and activists advocate a complete return to the use of indigenous language".[51] Those who wrote in native Indian languages are considered to have a grip over history or the narrative

and, to some extent the 'self'. By and large, Gandhi disowned English as a political medium. He wrote his autobiographies in Gujarati, later translated by Mahadev Desai into English. Nevertheless, other political prisoners consistently wrote their individual penal experiences in colonial prison in English. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Vijay Laksmi Pandit, and Krishna Hathisingh perennially wrote in English regarding their relentless participation in the Indian freedom movement in addition to their incarceration anecdotes. This discussion can be shaped by roping in Chinua Achebe's perception of writing in English. In the African context, Chinua Achebe notes in "The African Writer and the English Language" that ". . . for me there is no other choice. I have been given the language and I intend to use it".[52] Interestingly in Indian context, Kamala Das in "An Introduction" echoes the notion of the African writer. She writes:

> I am Indian, very brown, born in Malabar,
> I speak three languages, write in
> Two, dream in one.
> Don't write in English, they said, English is
> Not your mother-tongue. Why not leave
> Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
> Every one of you? Why not let me speak in
> Any language I like? The language I speak,
> Becomes mine. . . [53]

Those who wrote in English believed that colonization "gave them a language with which to talk to one another".[54] Since the act of writing itself became a system of resistance, the narrative, irrespective of the language, transforms into a new voice that exhibits experiences previously unexplored by political prisoners.

Ashis Nandy noted a socio-cultural-political change was taking place during the British rule in India. The adoption of western norms and the internalization of foreign cultural elements led to a "crisis in identity" among the natives, especially the Elites. Nandy observed, "this deeper level personality crisis split the elites into two clear groups: the modernists and the restorationists".[55] The former embraced the change for transforming the nation, and the latter focused on revivalism. Amidst rejection and acceptance of the self, with contrasting identities of the two divided groups- the moderates and the extremists, things steered with the appearance of Gandhi in the Indian political situation in the 1920s. Gandhi brought about a conscious move towards agglomeration of different sections of the population towards one political movement. The doctrine of passivity can be retraced to the "cultural, spiritual, religious and philosophical

traditions" of India.[56]

Gandhi's surfacing led to the adoption of the concept of "nonviolence and nonviolent action" which denotes various methods for conflict resolution through peaceful means. He abjured the application of any form of physical violence to 'win' a situation. Rather than adopting a revolutionary method in the conventional sense, Gandhi stuck to an evolutionary process for bringing about social change. The term passive resistance is often associated with the evolutionary concept of Gandhi. However, Gandhi, as an exemplary model in politics, revered as a propagator of 'passive resistance' in India and abroad, rejected the term 'passive resistance' to describe his resistance method. Louis Fischer in *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* and Veronique Dudouet in "Nonviolent Resistance and Conflict: Transformation in Power Asymmetries" foregrounds the aversion of Gandhi and most nonviolent activists towards applying the term 'passive resistance' to glorify their nonviolent struggle against the British empire in India. Dudouet remarked that Gandhi disapproved of the term since the connotation "does not render justice" to the unflinching measures espoused by nonviolent activists.[57] The activists debunked pacifism as a synonym for nonviolent resistance. Similarly, Fischer observed, "there was nothing passive about Gandhi. He disliked the term Passive Resistance".[58] For Hardiman, Gandhi's disapproval of the term passive resistance was because "it implied passivity rather than active and courageous encouragement".[59]

The communication between Gandhi and passive resisters, and Gandhi and European masters, was embedded in a broad purview "of relevant discourses" that generate meaningful discussions within the cultural setting.[60] Ideological discourse exhibits its connection with the connotation of the term 'power', equality, injustice, etc. The interdependence of ideology and discourse extends an understanding of one's creation in relation to the other. Dialogic communication is essential to intervene in the hegemonic institution and terminate the monologue or, rather, the one-sided 'broadcasting' of the 'powerful' colonial masters. Mark. W. Steinberg, in "The Talk and Back Talk of Collective Action: A Dialogic Analysis of Repertoires of Discourse among Nineteenth Century English Cotton Spinners" explicates the role of communication in power relations and debunks the classic system of sending and receiving messages; instead he foregrounds the existence of discourse in an uneven socio-cultural-political situation. Steinberg uses the term 'challengers' to denote the powerless section of society which continuously interrupt or rather struggles to dominate the powerful discourse of the Empirical masters. The petition forwarded by Gandhi to the Director of prisons is a 'talk back' situation

where the powerless strive to challenge the colonial administration's prison discourse. Steinberg readjusted the spotlight to the repertoire of collective action. In this framework, Charles Tilly's argument on repertoire, as quoted in "The Talk and Back talk…" reinforces the concept of 'evolution' discussed earlier with reference to Mahatma Gandhi. Tilly opines that "repertoires are learned cultural creations, but they do not descend from abstract philosophy or take shape as a result of political propaganda; they emerge in struggle".[61] An analogy between the repertoires concept and the resistance or protest methods adopted by Gandhi in South Africa and India whether in prison or far from it, can be drawn to project the innovative ideology behind it. The 'new' repertoire theory broached by Tilly Charles suggests the transformation that came about in the early nineteenth century. Sean Chabot underpins the 'new' repertoire theory of Tilly, which implies "large-scale direct actions like national strikes and mass marches" against the hegemonic discourse. This 'new' repertoire theory mirrors the Gandhian struggle that resorted to mass movements, strikes, a boycott of foreign goods, hunger strikes, and so on. Chabot adds a fresh touch to Tilly's' theory by comparing Gandhi's methods to the 'new' European repertoire and labeled Gandhian repertoire as a "transformative invention in its own right".[62] Chabot noted that despite the similarity between "Gandhian forms of action, organization, and communication" and different social movements, "their meanings and implications" are categorically disparate.[63] Similarly, Dennis Dalton, in *Mahatma Gandhi: Nonviolent Power and Action,* proclaims the uniqueness of his thought and extols Gandhi's 'uncanny ability' to execute and transform his political introspection or ideas into action. It is indeed difficult to determine Gandhian repertoire in the anti-colonial struggle that includes demonstrations, political processions, boycotts, etc., as exclusive from Tilly's 'new' social movements. Sean Chabot identifies the 'transformative invention' of Mahatma Gandhi with reference to his ideologies, principles, and beliefs. Unconditional reliance on the strength of nonviolence, refusal of loathing of opposition, dissemination of love for mankind, analyzing the premise of oppression, striving for welfare, precluding abuse of the opponent in deeds or words, and so on provides Chabot an opportunity to tag Gandhian repertoire as original.

Recurrent insistence on courting incarceration for the nation's sake underscores the uncompromising psychic development of Gandhi in South Africa. Louis Fischer highlighted the persistence of Gandhi's prison card, which was later held high and preserved by Manilal Gandhi. Fischer casts a spell on the readers with the fascinating details of the prison card:

> It is cream- coloured and two and seven-eighths inches wide by three and one- eighth. His name is mistakenly given as 'M. S. Gandhi' instead of M. K. Gandhi. 'Trade: Solicitor.' No alias. 'Sentence and date: Twenty-five pounds or two months. October 10th, 1908. 'Due for discharge: December 13th, 1908'.[64]

Interestingly, the reverse side of the prison card under "prison offences", as Fischer notes, lay unlisted. Fischer claims Gandhi was a model prisoner. *Stonewalls do not a Prison Make* comprises a section titled "model prisoner," initially published by Gandhi in *Young India*, which pertains to the obligation and function of an imprisoned satyagrahi. Gandhi rejoiced in imprisonment owing to its advantageous condition of obtaining complimentary food, physical fitness as a result of prison work, scanty 'vicious' habit, and sufficient time to invoke God. Gandhi claims that "the prisoner's soul is thus free" and the trajectory to happiness resides in espousing imprisonment and misery.[65] Fischer copiously cited Henry David Thoreau in relation to Gandhi to proclaim the corresponding thought process, though influential and convincing for Gandhi in many respects. Thoreau debunked the concrete barricade as pointless ". . . and the walls seemed a great waste of stone and mortar. . . .".[66] Gandhi's remark on imprisonment mirrored a utopian thought where the political prisoners must positively cherish the experience of the so-called freedom in prison and simultaneously celebrate or anticipate *swaraj*. The articles of *Young India* by Mahatma Gandhi, as presented in *Stone Walls do not a Prison Make,* were testimonies of individual struggle in colonial prison. Through allusion to the experiences of the detainees in colonial prison, Gandhi foregrounds his personal encounter with the system as an inmate. Though intimidated by his initial confrontation with the "pitch black walls" in South Africa, the sufferance and the lesson learnt remain "the richest treasures in life's memories".[67]

In the *Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* published by G.A. Natesan and Co. Madras, Gandhi embarked on the contrasting perspectives of the prison going of individuals and elucidated the virtue of incarceration for a nation. His comprehensive understanding of the reluctance of nationalists to court imprisonment led him to associate it with cowardice.[68] The significance of embracing imprisonment to eliminate anxiety and devote adequate time to health, exercise, religion, country, and so on remains a vital realm of discussion for Gandhi. Since non-violence served as one of his main agendas (for propagation), Gandhi debunked the idea of punishment in prison for both the convicts and the political prisoners. He harped on the ideology of passive resistance and negated the "Penal Code and its

sanctions".[69] Gandhi propagated the concept of reformation of prisoners and criminals, thereby recommending simple imprisonment to thieves and robbers. He advocated that prisons should serve as sites of reform for criminals but rejected the death penalty, detention, deportation, or corporeal punishment.[70] In the letter dated 17 March 1922 to C.F Andrews from Sabarmati Jail, Gandhi rebuffed the idea of establishing a connection with the outside world while in prison. The letter further unfolded the ideal of his prison life as a civil resister. Gandhi communicated the obligation of a civil resister to relinquish privileges to enhance one's "religious value of Jail discipline".[71] Imprisonment in colonial jails gradually became associated with pilgrimage, the attainment of nirvana as reiterated by Gandhi in his political, social, or religious narratives. His discourse on the shouting of slogans inside the prison by political prisoners holds a controversial or contradictory position in the history of penal literature. The life writings of the political detainees emphasized the power of slogans in prison despite the expulsion drive initiated by the system. Gandhi refuted the practice of shouting slogans in prison since it amounts to a breach of jail discipline and underlines the probability of inciting violence amidst the convicts.[72] The sustenance of discipline reigns in the "non-co-operator prisoner".[73] Conforming to jail discipline fortifies the cause and intention of the national movement and subsequently accelerates the dream of *swaraj*. *In Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault remarked on the sudden call for a transformed form of punishment in a humanitarian way without centralizing torture.[74] The reference to the eighteen-century proposition to instill humanity in punishment became a matter of discussion in *Discipline and Punish*. Gandhi echoed the eighteenth-century form of relaxed penalty in his article "Model prisoner". In British prisons in India, a certain extreme form of punishment was prevalent. Gandhi focused on the metamorphosis of those forms through radical reform of prisons and the penal system.

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# *Book Reviews*

**The Ambedkar-Gandhi Debate: On identity, Community & Justice,** by Bindu Puri, *Singapore: Springer,* February *2022; pp. xv + 266, ₹ 8,259.*

Gandhi's notion of 'identity, equality, community, and justice' [p. 26] - premised on his uniquely theological vocabulary of *Ahimsa, Sewa, Tapasya, and Swaraj* - faced definite political and philosophical marginalization/defeat during his final years through Ambedkar's formidable critique concerning their 'inability to respond to the Dalit demand for agency and absolute loss of personhood'. [p. 139] This reasoning has been honed by contemporary Ambedkarite writings that continue to either skeptically underscore the extremely demanding and impractical ontological nature of Gandhi's "thick Swaraj", or epistemologically dismiss the ability of Gandhi[-ians] to 'author' or speak for the experience of the marginalized, particularly the Dalits, for a lack of an 'ownership' of their 'lived experiences'.

To present a dialectical corrective to this scholarship, Bindu Puri's *The Ambedkar-Gandhi Debate: On Identity, Community and Justice,* adopts the theoretical lens of decoloniality within a methodological framework of *Purva-Paksa,* to construct a granular explanation for such dismissals by tracing their genealogical roots to the incompatible, close-ended and irreconcilable *a priori* assumptions of Ambedkar[ites] and Gandhi on 'the nature of the self, the relationship between the constitutive attachments/encumbrances of the self and a conception of justice and the ways in which one can come to the truth about the past'. [p. 1] For, Puri *hypothesizes* that, "[ . .] the Ambedkar - Gandhi debate . . . [is] the space in which one can locate the forging of modern identity as it came to be in its confrontations with more traditional notions of the self which had hitherto dominated the mind of India [and Gandhi]." [p. 26.]

In aid of this argument, the book opens with *three central questions* in the introductory (first) chapter: "[. . .] can an individual access the truth of the past from the standpoint of the present? How should one

to [sic] relate to an emotion (whether it be in the present or in the past) which overrides all other emotions and indeed overwhelms everything else? And lastly, how ought one to understand and respond to the politics of suffering?" [p. 2] The corresponding five chapters delineate (in a rather unstructured manner) the epistemologically divergent responses of Ambedkar and Gandhi to these questions to contextualize their apparent ontological differences on the issue of "untouchability, separate electorates, Hinduism, conversion, temple entry, caste, *varna*, history and tradition" [p. 1] by arguing that, "There could be no meaningful dialogue between . . . [Ambedkar and Gandhi] because though they used the same words, they meant very different things . . ." [p. 125]

In this regard, Puri, in her second chapter, begins by emphasizing the 'importance of memory to the conflicts between Gandhi and Ambedkar and consequently to the self-definition of the contemporary Dalit movement'. [p. 48] This is because she contends that their different approaches to methods of remembering and responding to the atrocities of the past (as history v. *itihaas*) reveal their philosophically distinct (modern v. ancient) assumptions regarding the nature of the self and its position in the world. For, as Ambedkar subscribed to the modern Kantian understanding of the "punctual" self as a rational-autonomous-unique *manuski,* he harped upon using 'History' as a measure to pass an objective third-party judgment on the past to legitimize a remedial politico-legal contractual arrangement in the present.

Ambedkar's modern self was therefore at odds with Gandhi's belief regarding the situatedness of the self in an unbroken critical continuity within the 'past'/*itihaas*, which implied that the past could (not be objectively studied but) only be remembered as 'it so happened' through its "unique immeasurable singularity" [p. 2]. This translated into Ambedkar's impatience with Gandhi's rejection of history as the tool for retrospectively accessing (what Gandhi assumed was) the multi-dimensional truth/*satya* of the past, while forwarding his alternative preference of 'working through' the memories of past atrocities through 'individual atonement'. However, Puri notes that this impatient dismissal of the Gandhian notion of a situated self in favour of the modern approach to *tabula rasa* and selective rewriting of the past memories has produced for the post-Ambedkarite dalit movement and scholarship an absolute loss of dalit cultural past and a resultant "self-minoritization" and "self-closure", as evidenced from their shift in self-representation from a previously multi-dimensional self to a re-constructed "two-dimensional" dalit self, constituted by "only humiliation and pain". [p. 49]

Chapter three then picks up an epistemic discussion on the distinct notions of agency, as constituted within Ambedkar and Gandhi's self, to articulate their responses to the second central question regarding the modality through which an individual can relate to an overwhelming emotion. Here, building upon the ideas of Charles Taylor, Puri suggests that agency/empowerment is understood by the modern self as a 'rights-based' ability to articulate "what I am, what I want, and what I will be", arising from an 'inward' *a priori* Cartesian assumption that 'all order, all control, and all valuation was located in the individual mind' [p. 75]. This helps Puri draw parallels between the rise of the modern "expressivist" self in India and Ambedkar's emphatic need to erase his past sufferings (as noted in the previous chapter) through such remarkable acts as the public burning of the Manu Smriti in 1927, his subsequent re-writing of two separate histories for *Shudras* and untouchables, as well as his conversion to Buddhism and its re-formulation as *Navayana*. Once again though, this expressivist self's rights-based perception of agency dismissed Gandhi's emphasis on true freedom as *swaraj* (rule of soul over mind-body), which understood agency/empowerment as not only the ability to distance oneself from extreme emotions to achieve a state of perfect *sthitaprajna*, but also the *atmabal*/soul-force/love-force to undertake *satyagraha* and *yajna/sewa* of even the most distant to transform their hearts.

Chapter four builds on this difference in notions of self and agency further to contextualize the incommensurate solutions to untouchability as proposed by Ambedkar and Gandhi. Contrasting the former's rights-based 'revolutionary' emphasis on the annihilation of caste, with the latter's widely criticized 'insurrectionary' advocacy of an idealized *varna* system, Puri states, "Given that Gandhi did not share the modern understanding of the inwardness of the self as the source of all value, he sought to keep the *a priori* continuity of the self as a part of his/her *itihaas* essentially unbroken. This led him to seek reform rather than annihilation of tradition." [p. 146] As evidence, the chapter puts forth eight characteristics of Gandhi's "absolute equality", to be understood as *Samata*, *Samadarshana,* and *Samabhava,* that derive from his emphasis on interpreting the self as the "silhouette/*pratibimb* of God" [p. 109] such that it is driven with the *Swabhava* of accepting a unilateral obligation of kinship with and deference to the human and non-human world. How Gandhi deployed this idea of absolute equality to epistemically re-interpret *yajna/sewa*/'bodily labour' in a manner that completely rehauled (rather than erase) the traditional Indian understanding of the *varna vyavastha* then forms the (primarily theoretical contra workable) argument of this chapter.

Chapter five, therefore, projects Gandhi's conception of Justice as a more contextual admixture of *dharma-dhamma-nyaya-niti* which is drawn from each individual's obligation towards maintaining a universally inclusive absolute equality or "[. . .] *Samdarshita* and its derivative . . . *ahimsanat* individual sense of deference to the 'other' whether friendly or hostile." [p. 204, original emphasis] Gandhi, accordingly, invoked the idea of *satyagraha*/soul-force/love-force as well as *tapas* ('intelligent suffering') to harp on individual ownership of responsibility as the only acceptable sanction of justice. This was because he conceived of justice as 'an irreducibly particular and uniquely contextual experience of arriving at the truth in situations of conflict while (all the time) remaining equi-minded to the unjust other.' [p. 226] This is juxtaposed against Ambedkar's preference for a politico-legal contractual notion of Justice (like a separate electorate) that is based on an overlapping consensus which, in turn, is derived from within a 'positionally sequestered' liberal-institutional framework of 'closed' third-party impartiality. For Puri, such a universally closed and non-inclusive conception of Justice came naturally to Ambedkar's inward expressivist modern self given its emphasis upon treating an individual's experience as rather unique, such that, "[. . .] no one who is not born to such suffering/*duhkha* or has shared such an experience can be in a position to know enough . . . about it, so as to be epistemically fit, to enter into debates about . . .[their] justice . . ." [p. 200]

Finally, as the book closes with chapter six, Puri articulates her own response to challenges on the ethics of theorising on the Dalit 'politics of suffering' by stating that, "[. . .] by definition theory involves communication and exchange with other practitioners . . . [hence] one should not exercise ownership over ideas and experiences but share insights in a dialogical space which allows for debate and discussion." [p. 245] In line with this argument, she paves a way forward using Rabindranath Tagore's argument concerning the ability of individuals to mediate a just recourse to their conflict through "trust", that arises from the *surplus*/generosity of the human self which allows them to understand and relate to the sufferings of the other constructively.

The book is a must-read for encapsulating the deeper philosophical issues informing the debate between Ambedkar and Gandhi. The author's long-term familiarity with Gandhi-Ambedkar scholarship (chapter 9, pp 129-143) has gained fresh new ground evident in the deep, insightful, and critical reflection on the contradictions involving the two great leaders on the universal ideas of freedom, autonomy and justice. The book will be of value to those who wish to unravel

Gandhi-Ambedkar scholarship beyond the conventional polemics and hagiography surrounding the two scholars.

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Books: Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p.23.

Articles: Ramashray Roy, "Parameters of Participation", *Gandhi Marg*, 12, 3(October-December 1990), p.276.

Chapters within Books: Pearl S. Buck, "A Way of Living", in S. Radhakrishnan, ed., *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays* and Reflections (Bombay: Jaico Publishing House, 1956), p.51.

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