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Editorial

THE NORTHEASTERN INDIAN state of Manipur has entered yet another uncertain political phase. A new ministry of elected representatives has taken office after months of turmoil, violence, and administrative paralysis. The exclusion of Biren Singh from the new dispensation is being portrayed as a symbolic break with the recent past, while the appointment of two deputy chief ministers, intended to reflect Naga and Kuki representation, signals an attempt at ethnic balancing in a deeply fractured polity.

Yet symbolism alone cannot substitute for governance. The failure to assign portfolios promptly has left crucial departments drifting, reinforcing perceptions that the state machinery is trapped in inertia. More troubling is the reported intimidation of Kuki community members against engaging with the new administration, forcing even a deputy chief minister to take the oath remotely. Such extraordinary measures underline the extent to which fear and mistrust have penetrated everyday political life. When elected leaders cannot safely participate in public rituals of office, the spectre of partial state failure looms uncomfortably close.

The political timing of these moves is also hard to ignore. The ruling party's setbacks in the 2024 parliamentary polls, where the Indian National Congress made gains, have sharpened calculations ahead of the 2027 Assembly elections. Lifting President's Rule and installing a new coalition may be aimed at restoring normalcy, but whether this transition can produce genuine reconciliation rather than electoral optics remains an open question.

Successive governments at the Centre have often treated Manipur's crises episodically, intervening forcefully during flare-ups, but hesitating to pursue sustained political dialogue and social repair. Critics argue that ideological posturing, particularly in a region already riven by ethnic anxieties, has further muddied the waters. Meanwhile, grand strategic visions for the Northeast, articulated through connectivity and regional-integration policies, appear hollow when

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highways are blocked, commerce is disrupted, and civilians remain trapped in relief camps.

Fresh reports of skirmishes between communities in Ukhrul district, though localised, serve as reminders that violence in Manipur is rarely isolated. Roads remain intermittently closed, thousands of internally displaced persons await durable rehabilitation, and routine inter-community travel is still fraught with danger. Perhaps most worrying is the relative absence of strong, cross-ethnic civil-society platforms capable of articulating moderation and rebuilding social trust from below.

For a journal inspired by the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi, Manipur poses a stark contemporary challenge. Gandhian political ethics emphasised dialogue over demonisation, decentralised authority, moral accountability, and the primacy of human dignity over partisan gain. Applied today, this would mean transparent governance rather than ad hoc arrangements, unconditional protection for civilians regardless of identity, and sustained negotiations that go beyond elite bargains to include grassroots voices.

What Manipur requires is not merely a reshuffled cabinet but a credible peace architecture: empowered administrators, neutral security mechanisms, independent humanitarian access, and political leaders willing to incur short-term electoral risks for long-term stability. Without such commitments, power-sharing formulas may appear cosmetic, deepening cynicism rather than healing wounds.

The new government thus stands at a crossroads. It can treat this moment as a tactical pause in a long conflict cycle, or as an opening to re-imagine politics along lines closer to Gandhian ideals of truth, courage, and reconciliation. The choice will determine whether Manipur inches toward durable peace or remains suspended between fragile calm and renewed rupture.

This issue of the journal includes five articles in the main section, two in the notes and comments section, and a book review. We are happy to present them to our dedicated readers.

JOHN S. MOOLAKKATTU
Chief Editor



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Tracing the Civil Liberties in India's New Criminal Code

Narender Nagarwal

ABSTRACT

In an effort to decolonise India's penal system, substantial resources were invested in creating new criminal laws under the BNS, BNSS, and BSA. While these reforms mark a significant shift, they have also introduced ambiguity and legal instability, weakening key legal principles. Concerns have arisen regarding natural justice, including the right to a fair trial, the presumption of innocence, and the right to an impartial investigation. This study examines practical challenges faced by legal practitioners and argues that rising crime and governance crises suggest the new code has not fully achieved its objectives. It further highlights the risks posed by expanded police powers, vague provisions, and the possibility of misuse, particularly against human rights activists. Although crime control measures are necessary, some provisions may criminalise legitimate dissent and undermine human rights, calling for clearer drafting, effective communication, and practical reforms.

Key words: *New Criminal Code, Human Rights, Civil Liberties, Constitution, Democracy*

1. Introduction

THE INTRODUCTION OF the new criminal law framework, the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS), Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS), and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam, 2023 (BSA), replacing the colonial-era laws, marks a major legislative development in India. The objective of modernising criminal justice and aligning legal processes with evolving global standards is widely regarded as a commendable step (Blumenson, 2024). However, as Herbert L. Packer argues, any restructuring of criminal law must preserve

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fundamental principles of due process and human rights, including fair trial, impartial investigation, and adequate defence safeguards (Packer, 1968).

Despite claims of procedural reform, concerns have emerged that the new codes expand police powers without corresponding safeguards (Jaisingh, 2024). Certain changes appear to weaken established protections that traditionally balance state authority and individual liberty, including provisions enabling extended detention and reduced judicial oversight. Questions, therefore, arise about the compatibility of these reforms with constitutional guarantees and international human rights commitments. Critics argue that the BNSS departs from established criminal law doctrines such as the presumption of innocence and grants broad powers to enforcement agencies, potentially undermining fair trial standards. While legal reform is necessary to address contemporary challenges, it should not erode procedural fairness or longstanding judicial principles (Baker and Dennis, 2022).

This study employs a structural analysis framework to examine the relationship between procedural protections and state authority under the BNS, BNSS, and BSA. Drawing on theories of natural justice, judicial precedents, and constitutional principles, it evaluates provisions that raise interpretive and procedural concerns, particularly in relation to pre-trial detention, bail jurisprudence, and investigative powers (Ashworth, 1991). The paper argues that several reforms aimed at improving efficiency risk weakening due process safeguards while failing to address broader systemic issues such as custodial violence, prison conditions, police excesses, and justice for victims of false accusations. Using doctrinal and comparative analysis, the study assesses whether the new criminal code aligns with constitutional commitments to liberty, dignity, and fair trial norms.

2. Research Questions

- (a) In an attempt to decolonise the criminal code, does the state succeed in maintaining a balance between individuals' civil liberties and State power?
- (b) Is the new criminal code pushing India into a Police State?

The aforementioned research questions serve as the architecture of the present study, which evaluates the claims of the protagonists of this contentious criminal code, whether it maintains the balance between the individual's civil liberties and State power? The main aim of this analysis is to interpret and assess the state's assertion that

it has finally abandoned a colonial artefact and given India its own indigenous criminal law.

This study focuses on core principles of natural justice, particularly the maxim *actus non facit reum nisi mens sit rea* (an act does not render a person guilty unless the mind is also guilty), as a foundation for analysing the newly enacted criminal code (Heffernan, 2015). Although presented as a decolonising reform, the new code largely preserves the structure, reasoning, and punitive orientation of colonial-era laws such as the IPC, Cr. PC, and Indian Evidence Act. Many changes appear largely structural, leaving intact a state-centric and punishment-oriented approach rather than advancing a human rights or rehabilitative model.

Claims that the code constitutes a fully indigenous framework require scrutiny through the lens of natural justice and fair trial principles. Critics argue that certain provisions weaken safeguards against abuse and threaten the right to an impartial trial (R. John, 2024). For example, extended police custody under section 187(3) BNSS and expanded electronic evidence provisions under section 175 risk undermining *the nemo tenetur seipsum accusare principle*. Likewise, the principle of *audi alteram partem* appears weakened as expanded police powers shift procedural balance in favour of the state.

3. A Criminal Code amidst Confusion and Chaos

The adoption of the new criminal code, the BNS, BNSS, and BSA, has generated considerable confusion among legal practitioners and litigants, adding pressure to an already overburdened judicial system facing more than 50 million pending cases. At the outset, concerns arose regarding the use of Hindi (Devanagari script) titles despite the constitutional framework under Article 348(1)(b) of the Constitution of India. This has raised objections in several southern states such as Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Karnataka, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh. Since criminal law falls within the Concurrent List, states are permitted to amend central laws to suit local conditions with presidential assent. Many states had previously modified provisions of the Indian Penal Code, 1860, based on regional needs; however, the abrupt implementation of the BNS effectively nullified those amendments, creating legal uncertainty and administrative confusion.

More significantly, critics argue that the new laws depart from established criminal law principles, including protections against retrospective application, requirements of culpability, and safeguards protecting freedom of opinion and ideology. Concerns have also been raised regarding violations of fair trial guarantees, impartial investigation, and judicial neutrality. Critics contend that, rather than

representing substantive reform, the codes prioritise rhetorical nationalism while preserving authoritarian tendencies, thereby undermining foundational principles of a just criminal justice system.

A democratic criminal justice system depends upon maintaining a balance between state authority and individual liberties (Krasner, 2021). India's Constitution, particularly Articles 20 and 21, guarantees protection against ex post facto laws, double jeopardy, and self-incrimination (*nemo tenetur seipsum accusare*), while safeguarding life and personal liberty through fair trial standards and protection from arbitrary detention. Equally central is the principle of *audi alteram partem* — the right to be heard. Critics argue that certain provisions in the BNS and BNSS risk upsetting this constitutional balance by expanding state power at the expense of procedural safeguards.

Further concerns emerged during the legislative process. Legal analysts observed that democratic principles, human rights protections, and the Tokyo Rules of 1990 on custodial measures were insufficiently considered, despite objections from opposition members to provisions potentially inconsistent with constitutional guarantees (Sibal, 2024). The parliamentary standing committee was criticised for overlooking substantial amendments suggested across party lines, raising questions about the adequacy of parliamentary deliberation. In addition, important recommendations from the 154th Law Commission Report — particularly those aimed at balancing investigative efficiency with the rights of the accused — appear to have been disregarded.

This combination of expanded police powers, weakened procedural protections, and limited legislative consultation raises concerns about the erosion of the presumption of innocence, encapsulated in the principle *ei incumbit probatio qui dicit, non qui negat* — the burden of proof rests on the accuser, not the accused. Critics argue that the new framework risks enabling coercive investigations and arbitrary application, potentially infringing personal liberty (Amnesty International, 2024). Although some legal experts note that the reforms largely reorganise existing provisions rather than introduce entirely new ones, the restructuring itself may create practical complications, especially for courts handling thousands of ongoing cases initiated under earlier laws. The resulting uncertainty has already begun affecting trial processes across Indian courts, highlighting the need for careful evaluation of the long-term legal and constitutional implications of the new criminal code.

4. Criminal Law Reform — Superficial or Genuine?

Thomas Aquinas defined law as a rational directive aimed at the common good and created by those responsible for governing society

(Regan and Baumgarth, 2003). This perspective emphasises reason, public welfare, and legitimate authority in law-making. However, such an ideal conception of law is not universally realised, as legal systems differ widely in practice. While some nations pursue transparent, accountable, and rights-based legal reforms, others adopt prosecution-oriented frameworks that risk suppressing civil liberties and dissent.

In India, the overhaul of the criminal justice system, undertaken with the stated objective of eliminating colonial legacies, has sparked debate over whether genuine reform has been achieved. Critics argue that the introduction of the BNS, BNSS, and BSA has had limited impact on pressing human rights concerns and systemic deficiencies. Major challenges — including overcrowded prisons, the high number of undertrial prisoners, police violence, corruption in law enforcement, inadequate prison facilities, and the absence of consistent bail standards — remain largely unaddressed (Hazarika, 2022). Leading legal voices, including Kapil Sibal, have questioned claims that the reforms meaningfully decolonise the legal framework or incorporate indigenous legal principles (Sibal, 2024). Instead, some observers contend that the changes signal a gradual shift from a welfare-oriented system to a more state-centric, punitive model.

Many legal experts point out that the new criminal laws largely reorganise existing provisions rather than introduce substantive innovations. While structural rearrangement may appear reformist, it introduces practical complexity, particularly for courts handling thousands of ongoing trials initiated under earlier laws. Such transitions risk confusion in procedure and interpretation, potentially affecting the administration of justice in the near future. This makes careful legislative scrutiny essential before long-term implementation.

Debates surrounding the new code have also centred on the constitutional balance between state power and individual liberty under Articles 21 and 22 of the Constitution of India. Government representatives have emphasised the need for “rigorous law” to maintain law and order and reduce crime. However, the notion of rigorous or stringent law often implies harsher punishment, and there is little evidence that stricter penalties alone reduce crime rates or address structural causes of criminality. The principles of the rule of law, constitutional supremacy, social justice, democracy, and human rights remain central to evaluating any such legislative reforms (Bhalla, 2018).

A welfare state, by definition, cannot function as a vengeance-based system without undermining its constitutional foundations. Measures that encourage excessively harsh or degrading punishment

would conflict with core democratic values and principles of justice. Critics further argue that stringent legal mechanisms — including provisions similar to sedition laws or frameworks under statutes such as the NIA or UAPA — have often resulted in denial of bail and coerced confessions. Rather than eliminating heavily criticised provisions, the new criminal code appears to retain many of them with modified language or definitions (Bhatia, 2023).

In this context, the central question remains whether the reforms represent substantive transformation or merely a repackaging of existing structures. Without addressing systemic shortcomings, reinforcing procedural safeguards, and ensuring a rights-based balance between state authority and individual liberty, criminal law reform risks being viewed as superficial rather than genuinely transformative.

5. A Paradigm Shift-Welfare State to Police State

Enacting criminal laws that are just, unambiguous, and consistent with society's interests in criminal justice is a significant legislative objective. The criminal code of any nation is crucial to maintaining law and order and stability in society, as opined by J. William Fulbright. The recently enacted criminal code provides a framework for defining criminal offences and determining culpability. However, the code has certain inconsistencies, biases, and ambiguities. Furthermore, some provisions of the code favour law enforcement agencies, which could lead to discrimination and transform the country into a police state. These deviations from established principles of criminal law jurisprudence are a cause for concern.

- (a) **Heightened Police Power:** The new code has significantly heightened police powers, particularly in matters of detention and custody. Section 187 of the BNSS provides that the maximum duration for seeking police custody is 15 days, which may be undertaken continuously or in stages. This represents a hazardous departure from the earlier provision that limited police custody. The constitutional mandate under Article 22(2) requires that no person shall be detained in custody without being informed of the grounds for arrest and shall not be denied the right to consult a legal practitioner of their choice. The Constitution of India and the previous Cr.P.C. prohibit detention in police custody beyond 24 hours. However, the extended police custody provisions under the BNSS seem to violate this constitutional protection. If the police deliberately delay a proper investigation, the accused may remain in jail at the discretion of the investigating officer because the investigation is incomplete.

This situation can worsen for individuals from minority communities. The increased powers granted to the police could lead to more human rights violations rather than ensuring justice.

- (b) **Dignity under Assault:** A close look at Section 43 (3) of the BNSS appears to be a draconian provision to allow routine handcuffing of undertrials. The provision contravenes Supreme Court judgments and the National Human Rights Commission's guidelines. In the language of J. Krishna Iyer, the use of handcuffs is sadistic, deplorable, inhumane, and offensive to Article 21. In *Prem Shankar Shukla v. Delhi Administration* (1980), the Supreme Court categorically held that handcuffing is prima facie inhuman and violates Article 21 unless justified by exceptional circumstances. The new provision of BNSS seems to ignore this settled legal position.
- (c) **Organised Crime and Terrorism:** The BNS's terrorist clause is comparable to the UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act). Since organised crime may occur in any state, including ones without a unique statute, the addition of organised crime as a distinct offence under Section 111 of the BNS fills a vacuum. But in states where such unique laws already exist, this also results in a duplication of laws. Arguably, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh already have their own laws dealing with organised crime. In addition to giving the State several ways to prosecute someone, this redundancy confuses the legal system and may encourage more harassment of the accused. The recently enacted Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) 2023 has introduced significant legal uncertainty into India's counter-terrorism policies. This uncertainty arises mainly from the almost identical descriptions of a "terrorist act" in Sections 113 of the BNS and 15 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) 2020. This legislative overlap creates a dual system for prosecuting identical criminal behaviour, raising serious concerns about double jeopardy, prosecutorial discretion, and the risk of state overreach. Given the anti-human rights nature of the Indian police system, it is conceivable that to ensure rigorous prosecution of suspected individuals, law enforcement might impose alternative charges under the UAPA if a person is acquitted under the BNS.

The more immediate and practical danger, however, arises from the investigative and procedural disparity between the two statutes. A police officer of the rank of Superintendent is vested with the discretion to register a case either under the UAPA or the BNS for the same set of facts. This discretion effectively grants the state a power of "forum shopping," allowing investigative agencies to choose the legal regime that offers them the greatest tactical advantage, often to the severe prejudice of the accused.

The UAPA's procedural framework is notoriously stringent, featuring difficult bail conditions that effectively shift the burden of proof onto the accused, mandatory government sanction for prosecution, and trial in special courts. In contrast, a case under the BNS would be tried in a regular sessions court under the standard procedures of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), which offer far greater procedural safeguards for the accused.

A dangerous situation has been developed from this incongruity. A fresh prosecution under the UAPA might follow an acquittal in a case tried under the less strict BNS, with the state claiming that the special law was always the right vehicle. Even though they are legally separate, the accused would be troubled twice for the same fundamental cause of action, which would be against the spirit of Article 20(2). Additionally, several prosecutions for related but distinct offences arising from a single incident are permitted under the broad definitions. For instance, a state law concerning organised crime and the BNS (related to terrorism) might prosecute a terrorist act involving extortion as a separate charge. Although each accusation has distinct elements, the defendant faces numerous, onerous proceedings for a singular set of actions. To defend the rule of law, there is a pressing need for statutory clarity. This could be achieved by integrating an explicit provision into the BNS that clarifies that its terrorism section does not apply to acts that fall directly within the jurisdiction of the UAPA.

- (d) **Procedural Safeguards under Threats:** Section 223 of the BNSS creates a discriminatory distinction between Complaint-based cases and those initiated by FIR, allowing an accused in Complaint-based cases to be heard before the concerned magistrate takes cognisance of the offence. This creates an arbitrary classification that may not pass the test of constitutionality under Article 14. The Supreme Court in *E.P. Royappa v. State of Tamil Nadu* (1974) held that equality is a dynamic concept with many aspects and dimensions. Any arbitrary distinction without reasonable classification would violate Article 14. The procedural distinctions introduced by the new laws appear to fall foul of this constitutional requirement.
- (e) **Voice of Dissent Crumbled:** Though Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) has been abolished it addresses actions that provoke hatred, contempt, or disloyalty towards the government, whereas Section 152 of the BNS Act penalises actions that incite "subversive activities" or promote "feelings of separatist activities" that endanger the "sovereignty or unity and integrity of India", which are quite ambiguous and prone to be misused, as it is up to the police how to charge a person. While the term

“sedition” has been removed from the penal statute, the new provision appears to impose more restrictions on individual rights than its predecessor. The misuse of the sedition law under BNS Sec 152 is another area of concern, and it might be employed to stifle dissent and silence critical voices of the government. Activists, journalists, and students have faced sedition charges for expressing their opinions, undermining the democratic values the nation strives to uphold. The broad interpretation of sedition allows authorities to target anyone who challenges the *status quo*, effectively suppressing freedom of speech and expression. Concerns have arisen about the targeting of political dissenters following the new rule, which extended police custody from 15 to 90 days. It is crucial to emphasise that Clause 187 BNSS incorporates the default bail clause present in the Cr.P.C along with a schedule of either sixty or ninety days. However, even if the magistrate lacks jurisdiction to hear the case, Clause 187(2) allows imprisonment for up to 15 days during the first 40 or 60 days. On the other hand, Clause 187(3) permits detention beyond the first 15 days, including in police custody, and requires a magistrate with jurisdiction. According to Clause 187(3), the magistrate must consider the accused’s bail status before granting custody.

- (f) **Presumption of Innocence Removed:** The fundamental principle that an accused is innocent until proven guilty forms the bedrock of criminal jurisprudence. However, the enhanced detention provisions and expanded police powers effectively reverse this burden. Moreover, it challenges the principle of presumption of innocence, as it allows individuals to be held for extended periods. In *State of W.B. v. Mir Mohammad Omar* (2000). The Supreme Court reiterated that the presumption of innocence is a basic right and a crucial component of Article 21 of the Constitution of India. This essential idea seems to be compromised by the recently added Section 105 of BSA 2023. A prosecutor ensures that prosecutions are handled fairly and protects the interests of the state, not the police. The goal of any criminal trial is to investigate the crime and determine whether the accused is guilty or innocent. The prosecutor’s main duty is to help the court ascertain the case’s veracity. The prosecutor must therefore do his duty in a fair, courageous, and accountable manner. The facts of the criminal justice system must be weighed against these expectations, though. In landmark case *P N Krishnalal v. Govt of Kerala*, the apex court reaffirmed that the presumption of innocence doctrine is deeply rooted to the legal system as India is a signatory party of international law, viz Article 10 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 14 of the ICCPR and 21 of the Constitution of India.
- (g) **Offence of Mob-lynching added without understanding:** The

new criminal code under BNS 2023 has introduced a provision addressing the offence of anti-mob lynching, which can be seen as a progressive step. However, this approach highlights a concerning gap that there is a lack of clear explanation or interpretation regarding the sociological complexities of targeted violence, hate crimes and religious-centric violence against minorities. Moreover, the code does not address the pre-mob lynching activities, such as the spread of hate, the instigation of violence, and the distribution of caste- and religion-based hateful content through different platforms of social media, including WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram.

While the new provision categorises mob lynching as a serious offence, it lacks clarity regarding punitive measures for pre-violent activities that provoke hate and violence against minorities. In the latest Delhi Riots of 2020, the capital police displayed a biased and highly obnoxious approach to managing the violence and maintaining law and order in the disturbed area, with numerous instances where officers themselves were involved in assaults against minorities, targeting their homes and properties. Article 21 of the Constitution guarantees the right to life and personal liberty, mandating that the state take proactive measures to prevent mob violence. However, the BNS provisions appear to adopt a reactive stance, which may be insufficient to effectively combat this grave issue.

The new BNS, BNSS, and BSA, if examined closely, reveal that the new codes encompass other necessary components of the criminal justice system, such as bail terms, sentencing guidelines, jurisdictional boundaries, appeal proceedings, and rules governing commutation, probation, and imprisonment. All these critical elements ensure that the criminal justice system functions impartially and effectively to protect civil liberties and maintain public safety. The respect for human rights in criminal justice administration is a crucial measure of a civilised nation, observed Justice Bhagwati. A close look at the latest changes to the criminal codes raises questions about some basic principles of criminal justice administration and infringes on human rights jurisprudence.

One of the defining characteristics of colonialism was the unreasonable enlargement of police powers, and the same was heavily misused against the dissenters and citizens who were pretty critical of anti-people policies and state-sponsored tyranny (Martin, 2012). The latest criminal code in the name of BNS still has the same characteristics; the new criminal law do not deviate from this colonial mindset of an all-powerful state. Instead, by broadening police powers and introducing provisions for vaguely defined yet harshly punished

offences, they further reinforce the power dynamic between the state and its citizens. In this context, the most significant remnant of colonialism in our criminal laws is the Indian Penal Code's chapter on 'Offences Against the State,' which includes the crime of sedition under Section 124A. Although the chapter remains largely unchanged under the BNS, 'sedition' has been replaced by a new offence with a wider interpretation, placed under section 152 of the BNS, entitled 'Act endangering sovereignty, unity, and integrity of India,' which differs in some respects from its equivalent in the IPC. However, this provision has given enforcement agencies greater powers.

6. Vague and Undescriptive Criminal Code

The *Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita* 2023 (with 356 sections, of which 175 were amended, 8 added, and 22 repealed) was introduced to enhance transparency, accuracy, and fairness in the criminal justice system. However, it has been controversial since its implementation, as it overturned the previous criminal law, which had been expanded through various judicial interpretations. The new criminal code, in the name of BNS, has raised concerns due to its lack of precision and clarity. The language used in the amendment is ambiguous and can be interpreted in different ways, which can lead to arbitrary enforcement by the police and the strong possibility of undermining human rights can't be rejected. This imprecise language raises significant questions about the fairness and impartiality of the legal system. There are three prime examples of how the new criminal code exhibits its vagueness and confusion, which led to giving more discretionary power to the judicial officers:

- (i) **Confusion over Community Service:** Perhaps the most cynical element of the BNS's reforming pretences is the adoption of 'community service' as a form of alternative punishment. Although this provision appears to be progressive on the surface, it operates within a system that is so fundamentally weakened by caste and class hierarchies that it risks becoming yet another instrument of discriminatory justice. Sections 202, 209, 226, 303, 355, and 356 of BNS require community service as punishment. The rich and powerful might end up painting schools while the poor are imprisoned for the same offences—a situation that would make even the most cynical person cower. The Act offers no significant protections against discriminatory application, despite Article 14 of the Constitution of India mandating equal treatment under law; the principle requires that alternative punishments be applied with the utmost justice and equality. The UN Standard Minimum Rules for Non-custodial Measures

(Tokyo Rules, 1990) and other international human rights legislation highlight that alternative sanctions must be implemented impartially and under proper supervision.

(ii) **Organised Crime Definition Uncertain and Confusing-**

Although the BNS defines organised crime as a separate offence under section 111, practically all types of crimes fall under this umbrella. Moreover, this special clause permits the prosecution of “illicit goods and services,” “land grabbing,” “unlawful activity,” “financial scams,” and “cybercrime” within the framework of organised crime, without providing sufficient definitional detail. It is particularly problematic, since “land grabbing” is classified as organised crime in a country where land conflicts often involve complex issues of state policy and customary rights, which criminal law is ill-equipped to address. What comprises cybercrimes, illegal goods and services, and how an offence will be considered a cognisable offence have not been specified by the BNS. Section 111 of the BNS has given the police wide powers to arrest any individual and convert a minor offence into an organised crime offence; hence, the possibility of misuse of this provision can’t be ignored, considering the pathetic record of the Indian police system.

(iii) **Hit and Run Case-Proportionality Lost in Translation:**

Section 106(2) of the BNS offers a comprehensive description of the hit-and-run offence committed by a driver. It is essential to recognise that motor vehicle accidents are not deliberate acts of violence, as they typically lack the requisite *mens rea*; rather, they are unfortunate incidents that may result from factors such as poorly maintained roads, unforeseen mechanical failures, or other automotive malfunctions. In situations where a driver strikes a pedestrian or another vehicle while attempting to avert a greater danger, a more empathetic approach should be taken. The ten-year punishment outlined in 106(2) may be excessively harsh and could contribute to heightened anxiety. If a driver takes the initiative to provide medical assistance to accident victims, a more compassionate sentence should be considered.

Furthermore, if an individual remains at the scene to aid the victim, the probability of a mob counterattack against the driver must not be overlooked. According to the Supreme Court’s recognition, in *Mithu v. State of Punjab*, of the proportionality concept as essential to constitutional governance, the severity of the penalty must match the seriousness of the offence. Ten years in prison for what might have been a panic attack after an accident points to a legislature more concerned with projecting a tough-on-crime image than with establishing constitutional justice. In *State of Maharashtra v. Som Nath Thapa (1983)*, the Supreme Court warned about the dangers of vague criminal provisions and emphasised a criminal statute must be rational

and fair. The rules of certainty and rationality, well-established in several judgments including *Kartar Singh v. State of Punjab* (1994), require that criminal laws be just, fair and unambiguous.

Prominent voices of the Indian legal fraternity believe that these new criminal codes are more rigorous and lack any essence of Indianness as propagated by the government (Mustafa, 2023). Further, these laws also exhibit state paradoxes in the legislation-making process. It claims to be innovative and modern, yet it relies heavily on prior criminal laws, creating a sense of inconsistency. This inconsistency between the government's words and actions raises doubts about their commitment to true legal reform. The recycled provisions not only fail to bring any substantive change but also betray the government's lack of sincerity in their promise of reform. The most shocking part of these criminal codes is that they have almost eliminated the basic principle of criminal law, i.e., the presumption of innocence until proven guilty. This is bizarre and outrageous.

The possibility of these laws being abused against innocent people, particularly members of minority communities, cannot be ignored in addition to the aforementioned concerns. Notably, the Indian police system exhibits extreme prejudice towards Dalits and religious minorities. The Indian police system is already under severe criticism for gross human rights violations and custodial torture. With the introduction of a new criminal code, concerns regarding possible abuse have been further raised by recent changes that have increased law enforcement's authority. The broadening of the power of search and seizure, detention, and surveillance, etc., has given the police immense power to overreach, resulting in constitutional and privacy violations. A major threat to civil liberties is also posed by these criminal codes, which permit preventive detention on ambiguous grounds without adequate safeguards.

7. Commutation of 'Any' Sentence: An Arbitrary Move

In the BNS, some significant provisions for commuting capital punishment to life imprisonment were added without examining their rationality. When interpreted literally, these provisions appear to represent a progressive step toward creating a more humane legal system, as they involve not only determining guilt but also considering justice, compassion, and the safeguarding of human rights. The power to commute a death sentence should be grounded in equitable principles, free from the influence of politics and any kind of bias. Unfortunately, under the BNS, the government has provided an ambiguous definition of commutation for any sentence. According to

Section 5 of the new criminal code BNS, the government can commute the death sentence or life imprisonment. However, it has come to the attention that this clause applies only to commuting life imprisonment and the death penalty, whereas Clause 475 of the BNSS allows for commuting any punishment.

Additionally, it is worth noting that Clause 5(b) of the BNS allows for the commutation of a life sentence to a maximum term of fourteen years. This leaves room for subjective considerations, personal biases, and political motivations to influence the process. The issue is made worse by a lack of transparency, which makes it difficult to tell whether choices are made spontaneously or based on sound logic. Public mistrust is exacerbated by this opacity, which also calls into question the uniformity and fairness of the commutation procedure. The power to commute sentences and grant mercy rests with the executive government. Nonetheless, given that the political class controls the executive branch, there are worries about the impact of factors that appear arbitrary and unreasonable on commutation decisions.

8. Terrorist Acts under BNS-A New Puzzle

Tracing the definition of terrorism in the new criminal law of India, i.e., the BNS, is a difficult task. Instead of defining the term terrorism, Section 113 of the BNS provides a list of acts and uses words like “striking terror”, “damage to public property”, “unity of the country”, “integrity of the nation”, “economic security”, and “threat to the nation”, among others. However, it is still unclear what constitutes terrorism, and lawmakers have simply listed certain acts that are already considered offences under the previous UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act 2019). According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the word terrorism refers to an act of coercion. The McMillan Dictionary of Britain defines terrorism as an act of unlawful use of violence and coercion aimed at achieving a social, political, or ideological objective.

Section 113 of the BNS criminalises a broad array of acts that threaten India’s unity, integrity, and security. However, the language of this provision is vague and ambiguous. It penalises acts aimed at intimidating the public or disrupting public services, thereby lowering the threshold for what can be classified as a terrorist act. Although this provision is comparable to the intent requirement provided under Section 15 of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 1967 (‘UAPA’), it includes an additional clause that further widens the ambit of what may be considered a “terrorist act”.

Furthermore, the provision designates the act of causing significant disruption to essential infrastructure as a terrorist act. However, it

does not clarify what is meant by 'significant disruption' or 'essential infrastructure,' which allows for wide interpretation. As a result, even simple acts of protest or dissent against government policies or legislation, such as blocking a road, a sit-in dharna at the District Magistrate's office, or boycotting a polluting factory, could be classified as terrorism. The blurred distinction between resistance and terrorism poses a serious threat to fundamental rights, such as freedom of speech, expression, and assembly. A hasty response to minor actions can be extremely reckless.

9. Impact on Civil Liberties and Human Rights

There are substantial concerns about the potential deprivation of human rights and civil liberties when redundant criminal laws are introduced abruptly without examining their grave repercussions for society. There is a serious risk of misuse and disproportionate police enforcement powers due to the broad authority granted to them by the new BNS regulations, as well as the imprecise and confusing definitions of offences. Under the guise of fighting terrorism or preserving national security, people may find themselves the target of excessive scrutiny and harassment, especially those who are members of marginalised populations, those struggling for their land rights, human rights activists or those who hold dissenting opinions. Additionally, in the absence of appropriate safeguards and vigilante mechanisms, police lawlessness is almost impossible to halt. The lack of rigorous accountability allows police and enforcement agencies to operate with impunity, at the cost of human rights, viz., the rights to hold opinions, form associations, and enjoy privacy, etc. In addition to undermining the democratic ideals that underpin India's legal system, this undermines efforts to promote accountability and fairness in governance.

10. Two Criminal Codes: Challenges of Complexity and Confusion

Although a new criminal code, labelled BNS, BNSS, and BSA, is in force, practitioners still refer to the provisions of the old IPC, Cr.PC, and the Indian Evidence Act in their submissions. The continued use of the old criminal code raises basic questions about the logic of the newly enacted code. Also, the implementation of the new criminal code poses a significant challenge in determining which crimes should be criminalised, as it is a complex task to revise the legal terms, parts, and amounts. This complexity may lead to confusion among lawyers, police and the courts, thereby creating disparities in the application and interpretation of the law, senior advocate at the Telangana High Court, M Ravi Kumar, observed. For example, the repeal of Section

304A and the issuance of a new code under BNS make it difficult for judicial and correctional authorities to decide on commutation, parole, or furlough for persons convicted under Section 304A and imprisoned in correctional facilities. These complications can eventually lead to inequalities in the administration of justice.

Enactment of a new criminal code in Nagaland is also a daunting challenge, as it must be specifically notified under Article 371A of the Constitution of India. This is because the state and tribal regions of North East India, i.e., Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram, are governed under special provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. Further, the simultaneous operation of two distinct criminal codes may create confusion among various components of the criminal justice system. The police and enforcement agencies may find it challenging to interpret and enforce the new sections of the BNS, BNSS, and BSA. The courts are often seen struggling to interpret two disparate criminal codes simultaneously, and prison authorities meet challenges in enforcing uniform sentencing procedures and executing commutations. These two codes certainly become a great puzzle for lawyers, judges, police, jail authorities, and litigants. This misunderstanding may jeopardise the justice system's general effectiveness and equity. Additionally, it is not practical for solicitors to have two law books with them and provide references at the same time throughout the trial.

11. Justice to the Victim Missing

Ironically, despite the claim that the new code contains provisions for justice to the victims with better protection, factually, the new code has furthered the victimisation of victims of crime. The enlarged definitions of offences, ambiguous terminology, and heightened police powers provide potential for harassment and exploitation. As the system becomes less predictable, it becomes more difficult for the average person to comprehend their rights and responsibilities. The Supreme Court in *Bachan Singh v. State of Punjab* (1980) emphasised that the criminal justice system must balance the rights of the accused with the interests of society. The new laws appear to have tilted this balance heavily in favour of state power at the expense of individual rights.

It is simply an old wine wrapped in a new bottle, observed Faizan Mustafa (Mustafa, 2023, Indian Express). Additionally, the new criminal code has also broadened law enforcement agencies' power and functions. It seems that the government is solely focused on developing a stringent criminal law, without paying attention to other significant human rights and other problems within the police system,

viz, police criminality, distrust, and violent behaviour. It is disheartening to note that the new criminal code fails to address the pressing issue of justice for victims of state crimes, particularly instances of police violence and all forms of extrajudicial killings (Klinkner & Davis, 2020). Custodial murder and third-degree inhuman police torture are major problems in the Indian police system, and to get to the bottom of things, each one needs to be thoroughly investigated. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reports that while the number of deaths in custody varies annually, between 2010 and 2019, there were approximately 100 deaths in custody on average. Of these, 3.5% are believed to have resulted from injuries sustained by police, 8.6% were caused by escape, through exact reasons of escaping not verified, escaping theory purely a one-sided police version, 28.1 were suicides, and a variety of other causes caused the remaining deaths.

The new criminal code (BNS, BNSS, BSA) does not include provisions for justice regarding custodial violence, police abuses, and state crimes. There is no mechanism to support victims, particularly from poor, Dalit, or minority backgrounds. The state is required to provide compensation and rehabilitation, and to hold officials accountable, to prevent such crimes and reduce impunity (Doak, J., 2008). Globally, there has been significant progress and encouraging practices in law and the criminal justice system regarding crimes like custodial murder, torture, and various forms of police violence, yet challenges still persist. However, the latest development in the Indian legal system is quite shocking.

Unfortunately, political rhetoric in recent years has been about more stringent laws but putting victims' rights outside the general discourse on criminal justice administration. It is sad that police authorities still enjoy a high level of impunity from the claims of custodial torture and other lawlessness during investigations. It is a travesty of justice to see that a state has brought a new criminal code claiming that it ensures justice to each section of the society, wherein the same code is completely silent on some critical questions of the criminal justice system viz, custodial murder, police lawlessness, police criminality, police extortion, massive corruption and deliberate lapses during the investigations.

12. Concluding Remarks

The analysis of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam (BSA) suggests that individual civil liberties are increasingly vulnerable and face a heightened risk of human rights violations. Several provisions

appear inconsistent with core principles of criminal justice administration, raising concerns about the direction of the new criminal framework. As David Garland observes, penal power in a liberal democracy is legitimate only when grounded in rights, constrained by law, and subjected to democratic oversight (Garland 1991). When these constraints weaken, liberal principles themselves are undermined (Ashworth & Tomlin, 2013). Critics argue that the expanded police powers introduced under the new code indicate a troubling shift from a welfare-oriented model toward a more coercive, state-centred framework. Instances such as the alleged circumvention of a Judicial Magistrate's order to register an FIR against a senior police officer in Sambhal, Uttar Pradesh, have heightened concerns about accountability and enforcement practices under the new system. The rapid passage and implementation of the code, accompanied by limited parliamentary debate and consultation, further raise questions about democratic legitimacy.

A well-functioning criminal justice system requires robust protective mechanisms, including safeguards for witnesses (Sahu, 2014). However, critics contend that the new code fails to address several longstanding structural problems, such as weak witness protection, delays in trials involving police misconduct, poor prison conditions, and systemic corruption within justice institutions. Moreover, gaps remain concerning provisions related to hate crimes, targeted violence against minorities and Dalits, and protection for whistle-blowers — safeguards considered essential in liberal legal frameworks (Spencer & Spencer, 2014). Human rights lawyers and scholars have argued that rather than departing from colonial legal paradigms, the reforms risk preserving authoritarian tendencies while undermining constitutional protections guaranteed under Part III of the Constitution. Although presented as a decolonising exercise, the reforms are criticised for largely rebranding earlier structures rather than introducing substantial rights-based change. Key concerns persist around the presumption of innocence, proportionality in punishment, and safeguards against arbitrary state action, raising doubts about constitutional compatibility.

The rule of law remains the foundation of a democratic society, requiring equal application of justice to all citizens (Bingham, 2010). Critics argue that the new code disproportionately strengthens state authority while weakening traditional principles of natural justice and civil liberties protected by the Constitution. Fundamental rights — including equality, personal liberty, and protection against discrimination — cannot be diluted by legislative reform, regardless of its stated objectives.

Implementation of the new codes has also imposed significant financial and administrative burdens, including extensive training programmes for judges, prosecutors, police, and law enforcement personnel. While such measures aim to ensure a smooth transition, the complexity of the reforms risks confusion and unintended consequences that may adversely affect the criminal justice system. Concerns have also been raised that expanded penal powers, justified in the name of decolonisation, may ultimately benefit the state and political elite at the expense of civil liberties. Issues such as selective targeting, broad interpretation of laws, and erosion of privacy rights highlight the importance of continuous scrutiny. Therefore, sustained engagement by citizens, civil society, and the legal fraternity remains essential to ensure that criminal laws uphold natural justice, impartiality, human rights, and the rule of law.

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Toward a Sustainable India: The Relevance of Gandhian Economics in a Neoliberal World

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ABSTRACT

This paper assesses the relevance of Gandhian economic principles in today's neoliberal India, focusing on issues such as economic inequality and environmental degradation. It explores Gandhi's concepts such as Swaraj, Swadeshi, and Trusteeship, suggesting they could serve as alternatives to the neoliberal focus on market deregulation and minimal state intervention. The analysis highlights the socio-economic disparities worsened by the 1991 reforms and proposes that while a complete return to Gandhian economics is not feasible, integrating these principles into current policies can foster sustainable development. The conclusion offers a policy framework geared towards community empowerment and ecological balance.

Key words: Gandhian Economics, Neoliberalism, Sustainable Development, Economic Decentralization, Indian Economy

Introduction

GANDHI IS RECOGNIZED as a pivotal figure in modern history and the leader of India's nationalist movement for over thirty years. Influenced by the writings of Ruskin and Tolstoy, as well as principles from Jainism and Vaishnavism, Gandhi developed a philosophy that emphasised non-violence and a broad perspective on society. His ideas are examined in the context of their ongoing impact on political leadership, nonviolent resistance, and racial justice today, as noted by scholars such as Louis Fischer, Dennis Dalton, and Claude Markovits. The paper contrasts Gandhi's economic philosophy with

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India's neoliberal reforms initiated in 1991, which, while promoting economic advancement, have intensified socio-economic disparities and ecological degradation. It advocates revisiting alternative economic models grounded in equity and sustainability, highlighting Gandhi's vision for a just society rooted in moral values. Gandhi championed an economy that prioritized the needs of the masses over profit, stressing the importance of village industries and community welfare while critiquing excessive industrialization and consumerism. The paper's structure comprises a theoretical overview of Gandhian economics, an analysis of Gandhi's key economic principles, a discussion of neoliberalism in India, and an exploration of the relevance of Gandhian economics in today's neoliberal context, culminating in findings and forward-looking recommendations. The analysis relies primarily on secondary data sources.

Gandhian Economic Ideologies and Neoliberalism: Theoretical Perspectives

This section examines the theoretical perspectives of Gandhian economic ideologies and neoliberalism, highlighting their foundational concepts and contrasting approaches. Neoliberal theory champions free markets, deregulation, and privatisation as the primary drivers of economic growth, contending that state intervention hinders development (Birdsall, de la Torre and Valencia, 2010). In this view, developing countries are urged to eliminate barriers to capitalism and let market forces lead development (Saad-Filho and Johnston, 2005, p. 51). Since India's 1991 economic reforms, neoliberalism has significantly influenced its economic trajectory—bringing higher GDP growth and a shift from state-led planning to market-oriented policies. However, while these reforms accelerated economic expansion, they also exacerbated income inequality and regional imbalances (Laruffa, 2022). Critics argue that neoliberalism in India has sidelined social welfare, with inadequate investment in health, education, and poverty alleviation. Friedman (2002, p. 95) argues that economic freedom is a necessary condition for political freedom. Hayek (2007, pp. 112–113) warns that extensive state planning can undermine individual freedom and lead to authoritarian outcomes. While Jeffrey Sachs and Thomas Piketty critique neoliberalism's failure to address social justice, rising inequality, and its wider repercussions for democracy and equity (Sachs, 2005, pp. 245–246). In a neoliberal era, Gandhi's economic principles provide a powerful critique of the dominant economic paradigm. His focus on self-reliance, localization, economic equality, and non-exploitation offers a path toward a more just, sustainable, and equitable society.

The theory of distributive justice addresses the equitable allocation of resources and opportunities within a society. John Rawls advanced this theory through his difference principle, asserting that social and economic disparities are defensible only if they benefit the least advantaged (Rawls, 1999, p. 57). In contrast, Robert Nozick, in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, presented a libertarian critique, arguing that justice lies in rightful acquisition and voluntary transfer, not in redistributive outcomes (Nozick, 1974, p. 69). Amartya Sen further broadened the debate by introducing the capability approach, shifting the focus from mere resource distribution to individuals' real freedoms to achieve well-being (Sen, 2009, pp. 278–279). In the Indian context, particularly after the 1991 liberalization, these theories have gained renewed relevance. Economic growth has often highlighted disparities, prompting critical reflections on how policies address—or fail to address—the needs of marginalized communities. Gandhian vision of an economy of sufficiency, non-violence, and self-reliance offers a perspective on distributive justice fundamentally different from the individualistic, profit-driven paradigms of neoliberal economics.

Participatory democracy emphasizes direct citizen involvement in decision-making processes, promoting decentralized governance and civic engagement. Thinkers such as Carole Pateman (1970, p. 79) and C.B. Macpherson highlight that participatory models go beyond electoral politics by ensuring continuous public involvement in governance (Macpherson, 1977, pp. 56–57). Jürgen Habermas adds the dimension of rational public discourse, where consensus is formed through inclusive deliberation (Habermas, 1996, p. 324). Digital platforms today further enable participatory democracy by facilitating wider public input. In the Indian context, Gandhi's vision of self-governance closely aligns with these ideals. He advocated for village-level autonomy, panchayat democracy, and self-reliant local economies—placing community participation at the heart of democratic functioning.

Economic Philosophy of Gandhi

Constructed on the doctrines of *Ahimsa*, *Satyagraha*, and *Sarvodaya*, Mahatma Gandhi developed an ethical economic framework, later systematized by J. C. Kumarappa as Gandhian economics. In *Gandhian Economic Thought* (1951), Kumarappa critiques industrial capitalism and proposes a model rooted in values like non-violence, truth, self-sufficiency, and Trusteeship. He argues that economics should serve not just physical needs but also moral and spiritual well-being (Kumarappa, 1951, p. 33). Highlighting this holistic vision, he writes, “if an economy is well-conceived it will afford free play to all creative

faculties of every member of society” (Kumarappa, 1945, p. 78). This section explores the key economic philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi.

Gandhian Trusteeship Theory

Gandhi’s concept of Trusteeship, rooted in the principles of aparigraha (non-possession) and ahimsa (non-violence), offered an alternative to capitalism. Like Ruskin, Gandhi believed that political economy involves the production, preservation, and distribution of useful and pleasurable things at the right time and place; thus, Gandhian political economy advocates for the careful use and fair distribution of resources (Chakrabarty, 2015). Gandhi described Trusteeship as “the technique of change of heart,” in which the wealthy act as trustees, managing their wealth for the welfare of society rather than for personal gain. The system aimed to transform capitalist society into an egalitarian one, with production driven by societal needs rather than personal desires or greed (Pulla, Nayak, and Walke, 2017). Gandhi believed human nature was redeemable, and thus, the wealthy should use their resources for the common good. In Gandhi’s vision, the state would regulate wealth to ensure it benefits society and is not used for selfish purposes. He argued for limits on personal wealth, advocating a reasonable gap between minimum and maximum incomes to discourage excessive accumulation and exploitation (Dwivedi, 1982, pp. 429–439). The system aimed to reduce the wealth gap and exploitation while promoting equality through shared responsibility and productive labor for all. While Gandhi’s Trusteeship fundamentally challenges private property norms by prioritizing societal needs, the following section will explore how this concept offers a practical pathway to reducing modern economic disparity. In *India of My Dreams*, he notes ‘the rich should be left in possession of their wealth, but should act as trustees of it for the betterment of society’. His concept of Trusteeship also sought to prevent revolutionary mass action by encouraging reform within the bourgeoisie, as noted by E.M.S. Namboodiripad (Namboodiripad, 1981, p. 61). ‘Revisiting Gandhi’s Idea of Trusteeship in the Context of Globalization and Inequality’ by Stefy V. Joseph and Mucheli Rishvanth Reddy (2021) explores Gandhi’s concept of Trusteeship as a pragmatic and ethical model of development, presenting it as a viable alternative to both capitalism and communism (Joseph and Reddy, 2021, pp. 51–73).

Gandhi on Environment and Development

Mankind’s relationship with the environment has existed since the dawn of human civilization. The 1987 Brundtland Report (“Our Common Future”) highlighted the risks to humanity’s future posed

by unsustainable development practices (WCED, 1987, p. 23). The current environmental crisis stems from humanity's long pursuit of material comforts, which has only recently become a global concern. In consumer-driven societies, technology is often used out of greed rather than necessity. Gandhi's principle, "The world has enough for everyone's needs, but not for everyone's greed," offers an alternative vision of development that is both economically viable and ecologically sustainable. An early critic of industrialization, Gandhi warned in *Hind Swaraj* (1938) that unchecked technological progress leads to environmental and social harm, famously stating, "Industrialize and perish." (Gandhi, 1938, p. 55). He viewed modern machinery as a destructive force, particularly responsible for the degradation seen in Europe. Gandhi championed village industries as essential to rural regeneration, with the Charkha and Khadi symbolizing his vision of a nature-friendly economy. He believed true economic vitality depended on harmony between human activity and nature, emphasizing waste recycling, sustainable production, and the interdependence of the economy and the environment. Gandhi's decentralized development model promoted integrated growth, in which human needs are met without environmental degradation. His vision stood in contrast to Western, consumption-driven models of development, which had become deeply rooted in India, posing challenges to the adoption of more sustainable alternatives. Pathak (1993, p. 4) critiques modernist trends, emphasizing a return to traditional and ethical frameworks in social and cultural life. He was also highly conscious of the impact of pollution on human health and the environment. His thoughts on nature and its preservation have influenced many global environmental movements that seek to balance human development with ecological sustainability. Gandhi's deep connection with nature is evident in his statement, 'I need no inspiration other than nature's. She has never failed me as yet. She mystifies me, bewilders me, sends me to ecstasies' (Masakui, 2021). J. C. Kumarappa (1951, p. 35) advocated sustainable development through organic farming, local systems, and forest conservation while opposing large dams and chemical agriculture. Pachauri (2024, p. 67), in *A Global Shift to Gandhi*, promotes Earth-Shastra, a Gandhian framework aligning human progress with ecological balance, calling for a global shift in values and policies. Similarly, Manglik (2023) highlights Gandhi's ecological vision of simple living and harmony with nature, showing its relevance to modern sustainable development and environmental ethics (Manglik, 2023, p. 98).

Gandhi and Modern Civilisation

In *Hind Swaraj*, Mahatma Gandhi sharply critiques modern civilization, particularly British colonial rule in India. He maintains that British rule has made India “irreligious” and blames lawyers and doctors for contributing to the nation’s decline—lawyers for fueling communal tensions and supporting British dominance, and doctors for encouraging self-indulgence and weakening health. Gandhi compares modern civilization to the poisonous Upas tree and condemns the British-introduced Western education system as “false education,” arguing that education should focus on moral development and self-control rather than creating a new elite, as the Macaulay system has done (Pradhan, 2009). Gandhi’s critique of Western civilization echoes Edward Carpenter’s *Civilisation*, particularly in challenging the elevated status of science (Carpenter, 1899, p. 27). Though not a traditionalist, Gandhi aligns with *occidentalism* as defined by Buruma and Margalit (2004) in questioning Western ideologies. Kohn and McBride, in *Political Theories of Decolonization*, present Gandhi as a decolonial thinker who proposes a spiritual and communal alternative to Western political foundations (Kohn and McBride, 2011, p. 156).

Gandhi opposed Western civilization for its materialism, hedonism, and individualism, criticizing its focus on wealth over moral and spiritual values. He saw the industrial revolution as dehumanizing, threatening India’s agrarian way of life. Instead, he advocated growth grounded in indigenous traditions that balance material progress with ethics and spirituality, emphasizing service over power. As he stated in 1921, “I do want growth, I do want self-determination, I do want freedom, but I want all these for the soul.” Deeply concerned about industrialism’s role in global exploitation, he believed true civilization is based on fulfilling duties with morality (Gandhi, 1938, p. 83). In his A Letter to a Hindu, Tolstoy argued that ‘a commercial company could not enslave a nation of two hundred million people; rather, he believed that Indians enslaved themselves by accepting force as the foundation of social order’, a view echoed by Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj* (Tolstoy, 1908, p. 112). Gandhi envisioned a post-independence India grounded in simplicity, self-sufficiency, and harmony with nature. He believed true fulfilment arose from self-restraint and moral values rather than material wealth. Prioritizing village life over urbanization, he advocated progress aligned with India’s cultural and spiritual tradition. His vision of socialism was rooted in Indian traditions and emphasized national unity through mutual respect among all religions. Kumarappa (1945, p. 35) warned that technology applied without respect for social context, such as electrifying handlooms, can harm

livelihoods—comparing it to fitting a powerful engine to a fragile bullock cart: efficient yet destructive.

Swaraj and Sarvodaya

Gandhi believed that Swaraj (self-rule) was the self-determination of the individual, requiring them to make decisions without dependence on others. He defined Swaraj not just as political independence but also as the welfare and happiness of the masses (Gandhi, 1947, p. 83). For Gandhi, true Swaraj could only emerge from within, grounded in spiritual thinking and personal responsibility. He applied this idea both at the individual and national levels. He argued that the path to self-rule lay in educating the masses to recognize their ability to control authority and practice self-discipline (Nanda, 1990, pp. 234–235). For Gandhi, economic Swaraj meant economic freedom at the individual, village, and national levels, with an emphasis on self-sufficiency and decentralized economic power. His promotion of Khadi and the spinning wheel was ingrained in the idea of self-reliance and the abolition of the divide between the rich and the poor (Parekh, 1997, p. 126). Gandhi's concept of Gram Swaraj (village self-rule) was central to his vision of a self-sufficient, decentralized India.

Sarvodaya, meaning “welfare of all,” was first used by Mahatma Gandhi in 1908 as the title of his translation of John Ruskin's *Unto This Last* (Gandhi, 1908, pp. 94–95). Over time, it evolved into the cornerstone of Gandhi's political philosophy, emphasizing a decentralized, non-violent society grounded in ethical and moral values (Parel, 1997, p. 156). In this vision, politics becomes a means of public service, guided by truth, love, self-sacrifice, and non-violence (Iyer, 1986, p. 267). Rejecting party politics and class divisions, Sarvodaya advocates for economic and social equality, where all professions hold equal value and every individual is free to realize their potential (Bajaj, 1998, pp. 56–57). It promotes non-possession, cooperative labor, and redistribution based on need, eliminating profit, rent, and interest as sources of exploitation (Bondurant, 1958, pp. 112–113). Rooted in self-denial and collective good, Sarvodaya aims to build a just, harmonious society by uplifting all.

Decentralization and Village Economy

Decentralization, a core principle of power-sharing, was central to Gandhi's political thought. He advocated for self-reliant, village-based communities that foster self-rule, personal responsibility, and participatory democracy, aiming to prevent power concentration and promote local autonomy in governance and economics (Hardiman, 2003, p. 95). According to Gandhi, *'It is my conviction that a village*

economy founded on the principle of self-sufficiency is the best guarantee for the happiness and prosperity of the people'. By linking smaller communities into federated structures, Gandhi aimed to reduce the risks of centralized power and political alienation. He cautioned that as democracies grow larger and more centralized, individuals and local communities lose influence over decisions that affect their lives. Hence, he favored a decentralized political system in which governance begins at the grassroots and extends upward through local, district, and state bodies (Parel, 1997, pp. 114–115). For Gandhi, decentralization went beyond the political; it was ethical, economic, and social, grounded in his principle of non-violence (ahimsa). He asserted that centralized systems often rely on coercion, which is antithetical to a non-violent society (Iyer, 1986, pp. 267–268). At the heart of Gandhi's vision was Swaraj, or self-rule, which he envisioned through the Panchayati Raj system. Each village would function as an autonomous republic, managed by a locally elected council or panchayat with authority over village affairs. Gandhi's three-tier Panchayati Raj system—village, block, and district—promoted participatory governance by empowering local communities. Economically, he emphasized "production by the masses" over "mass production," advocating small-scale industries like khadi to revive rural economies, foster self-sufficiency, and ensure equitable resource distribution (Chakrabarty, 2006, p. 156). Gandhi's metaphor of the "oceanic circle" beautifully illustrated his decentralized model. In this system, personal sacrifice and service to the community were essential for achieving self-reliance and enduring peace in rural India.

Neoliberalism in India: An Overview

According to Ghosh (1998, pp. 301–318), liberalization refers to "reducing government regulation of economic activity and limiting state intervention—except in ensuring private property rights—while allowing market forces to operate freely in shaping economic processes." This can involve either opening the economy to the external flow of goods and services or easing domestic regulations. 'Structural Adjustment Programs' (SAPS) were introduced by the 'International Monetary Fund and World Bank' in the 1980s in response to a series of economic crises in the global South. These programs were often circumstances for receiving loans from the 'IMF and World Bank'. They aimed to foster economic growth by promoting free-market policies, including free trade, open competition, lowering trade and tax barriers, removing subsidies, implementing environmental and labor reforms, reducing government spending on social sectors, shrinking government roles, deregulation, and debureaucratization

(Kohli, 2006, pp. 17–34).

Since the liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991, several key measures have been initiated to stabilize and restructure the economy. Economic stabilization efforts aimed to control inflation and reduce budget deficits, setting the foundation for growth (Joshi and Little, 1996, p. 167). FDI was promoted to attract capital and technology, while reforms focused on boosting efficiency, private sector growth, and financial credibility. Key measures included cutting government spending, implementing tax reforms, controlling inflation through monetary policy, devaluing the currency, liberalizing trade, privatizing state-owned enterprises, and deregulating markets. These LPG reforms since 1991 have significantly transformed and sustained India's economic growth. Pranab Bardhan offers a critical analysis of India's economic reforms, focusing on challenges related to growth, inequality, and social welfare (Bardhan, 2017, p. 121). In contrast, Jagdish N. Bhagwati presents a balanced critique of neoliberal reforms from a global perspective (Bhagwati, 2007, p. 176).

Towards a Sustainable India: Relevance of Gandhi's Economic Vision in a Neoliberal Era

This part examines the applicability of Gandhi's economic vision towards fostering a sustainable India amidst the challenges posed by neoliberalism. Gandhian thought is deeply practical and holistic, encompassing ethical, political, social, and economic aspects. This multidimensional philosophy continues to captivate scholars worldwide, especially as they explore its relevance to today's complex challenges. As India embraced neoliberal reforms in 1991—marked by liberalization, privatization, and globalization—there emerged a renewed interest in Gandhian economics, especially regarding its critique of unrestrained capitalism and materialism (Kumar, 2012). Gandhi's vision, as outlined in *Hind Swaraj* and through his prolific writings in *Young India*, *Harijan*, and *Indian Opinion*, offers a foundational framework for an economic system rooted in moral values and human well-being. He famously remarked, "The final consummation of all wealth is in producing as many as possible, full-breadth, bright-eyed and happy-hearted human beings" (Gandhi, 1938, pp. 3–17). This vision stands in stark divergence to the neoliberal economic model that prioritizes GDP growth, foreign investment, and market efficiency, often at the cost of rising inequality, ecological degradation, and the marginalization of rural communities.

Gandhi opposed capitalism for its exploitation of labor and the concentration of wealth among a few. In the neoliberal era, these issues have worsened, with growing inequality and neglect of the

informal sector, which Gandhi viewed as essential to India's self-reliant economy. Gandhi believed that nature provided sufficiently for everyone's needs, but not for everyone's greed (Gandhi, 1938, p 32). His emphasis on self-restraint, sustainability, and decentralized village economies offers a counter-narrative to the consumer-driven, profit-centered ethos of neoliberalism. Gandhi's economic thought prioritized human well-being over material wealth, focusing on holistic development and dignity rather than merely higher living standards devoid of social and moral values. He championed small-scale industries and agriculture as crucial for India's rural economy. This perspective, now recognized by many economists, highlights the importance of decentralized production and agricultural revitalization for sustainable growth (Mathur, 2013, p. 113)

Since the 1990s, countries like India have embraced liberalization, privatization, and globalization (LPG) policies that boosted growth and foreign investment. However, from a Gandhian economic perspective, these reforms expose significant contradictions that challenge the principles of equity, self-reliance, and sustainability. Despite the impressive growth statistics, the benefits have not trickled down equitably to the poor, exacerbating income disparities and social exclusion (Chakrabarty, 2006, pp. 113–114). According to Economic Survey 2024, FDI inflows to India declined from USD 42.0 billion during FY23 to USD 26.5 billion in FY24. USD 97 million in 1991. India's total exports are estimated to grow at 10.25 % in 2024. India ranks 5th in the world's GDP rankings for 2024, and the *economic growth rate reached 8.2 per cent* (GoI, 2024). The country's GDP growth since 1991 has been remarkable, making it the fastest-growing economy after China. However, alongside this growth, income inequality is rapidly widening. Economic growth has not translated into corresponding social and human development. According to the Global Hunger Index 2025, India ranks 102 out of 125 nations (Global Hunger Index, 2025). 21% of people live on less than US\$1.90 a day. 1/4 of the world's undernourished people live in India (WFP) (Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe, 2024). Certainly, growth has contributed to a substantial reduction in absolute poverty; however, its incidence continues to be high. Economic progress has not considerably enhanced infrastructure in rural areas, including hospitals, roads, and water and sanitation facilities.

Many fundamental socio-economic challenges that could have been addressed through enhanced economic growth remain unaddressed. In the 'Social Progress Index' 2025, India stood at 110 among the 170 countries. According to Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze, "education, enrolment and the infrastructure differ by region, gender, urban and

rural areas, and among diverse social groups” (Drèze and Sen, 2013, p. 256). Globalization-led economic growth has pointedly impacted land acquisition, habitat, and livelihoods, particularly for marginalised groups in rural and tribal India. “The policies of trade liberalization and corporate globalization have triggered a growing spiral of debt and despair, initiating the tragic process of farmer suicides since 1997”. India is 134 out of 193 countries in 2025 Human Development Report. India has the largest gender gap in labour force participation rate—a 47.8 percentage-point difference between women (28.3%) and men (76.1%). The Global Gender Gap Report for 2025 shows that India ranks 131st out of 146 countries (World Economic Forum, 2025). Poverty is arising out of economic reforms.

Gandhi opposed mass production through heavy machinery, warning that it could generate unemployment in a densely populated country like India. He once wrote, “We have no need for big mills and heavy machinery. If one machine can do the work of a hundred men, then where will those hundred men find employment?” (Gandhi, cited in Mathur, 2007, p. 8). For Gandhi, machines that displaced labor and concentrated power were not just economically problematic but morally unjust. In terms of Income Inequality, top 1 per cent in India holds 40 per cent wealth. The work “Income and Wealth Inequality in India, 1922-2023: The Rise of the Billionaire Raj” revealed that “Between 2014-15 and 2022-23, the rise in top-end inequality has been especially pronounced in terms of wealth concentration. The ‘Billionaire Raj,’ led by India’s modern bourgeoisie, is now more unequal than the British Raj, which was governed by colonial forces” (Bharti et al., 2024). Gandhian advocacy of decentralized and cooperative production was a direct challenge to industrial capitalism.

In modern times, Gandhian principles have found echoes in the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR). As Mathur (2011) explains, Trusteeship can be understood as a theory of need-based production, equitable distribution, and social justice (Mathur, 2007, p. 134). CSR, too, aims to redistribute wealth accumulated by the corporate sector to broader society, albeit in a voluntary and non-confrontational manner. Chakrabarty (2017) argues that CSR in the post-liberalization era can be viewed as a contemporary adaptation of Gandhi’s Trusteeship—a means to reallocate economic resources while maintaining investor confidence and social harmony. With global competition for investment, governments are reluctant to pursue strongly redistributive economic policies (Chakraborty, 2012, p. 234). As a result, in India and elsewhere, reducing inequality is largely pursued through persuasion and voluntary mechanisms, such as CSR, rather than structural reforms. In “Starvation and India’s Democracy,”

Dan Banik argues that “policymakers, bureaucrats, and public representatives avoid accountability for high levels of malnutrition and hunger-related deaths, justifying it by claiming that a developing country must endure such hardships before achieving stability and self-reliance” (Banik, 2015, pp. 123–124). Regarding the impact of LPG on agriculture, Farmers suicides has increased to 1,12,000 from 2014-2023 (NCRB). The Suicides by daily wage workers has increased to 3,12,214 (2014 and 2023- NCRB) (National Crime Records Bureau, 2023). The Allocation for MGNREGA has been drastically curtailed (a 33% decrease in 2023). No hike in fund allocation in the 2025-26 Budget. The 2024 UN Report on food security stated that India had the highest undernourished population in the world, at 194.6 million (Down to Earth, 2023). This raises the question: can neo-liberal policies truly achieve growth with equity?. Gandhi’s economic philosophy, rooted in human dignity, decentralization, and ethical production, remains a compelling counterpoint to neoliberal orthodoxy.

The Gandhian idea of Gram Swaraj holds critical relevance in contemporary discussions on social and environmental sustainability (Pathak, 2004, p. 89). Long before the formal articulation of ecological limits in economic theory, Gandhi’s assertion that “there is enough on the earth to satisfy everybody’s need but not for anybody’s greed” offered a profound critique of unrestrained consumption and material development. His views anticipated modern concerns regarding ecological sustainability and overconsumption (Gurukkal, 2012, pp. 34–38). Gandhi was deeply skeptical of the long-term viability of a development model grounded in mass production and consumerism. The post-liberalization moves toward market-driven economies, focused on maximizing marketable surplus, have led to overproduction, resource depletion, and unsustainable waste. These trends, fueled by global capitalism, clash with ecological boundaries and social equity. While globalization boosts industrialization and income, it often causes environmental damage, such as deforestation, resource overuse, and toxic pollution. Gandhian economics offers a compelling alternative rooted in minimizing wants, local production, and community self-reliance. His principle of producing for local requirements rather than distant markets can guide modern strategies for green development (Moolakkatu, 2010, pp. 151–158). These notions redirect not only an economic model but a moral vision of sustainability and simplicity.

The concept of Swadeshi, or self-reliance, was central to Gandhi’s philosophy. It aimed to reduce dependence on external markets and resources and to empower communities to take charge of their economic destinies. By emphasizing decentralized economies, Gandhi

advocated a system in which economic power is equitably distributed and the exploitation of marginalized groups is curtailed (Lal, 2013, pp. 547–562). Global warming, climate change, and resource depletion are among the most pressing global challenges today. Integrating Gandhi’s principles, such as simplicity, self-restraint, and harmony with nature into environmental policies and sustainable development frameworks can offer a morally grounded and ecologically balanced path forward. According to Gandhi (1921, p. 325), “I cannot picture to myself a time when no man shall be richer than other. But I do picture for myself a time when the rich will spurn to enrich themselves at the expense of the poor and the poor will cease to envy the rich. Even in a most perfect world, we shall fail to avoid inequalities, but we can and must avoid strife and bitterness”. There are numerous examples of the rich and the poor living together in perfect harmony; we only need to multiply such instances. Gandhi believed that “Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the minutest details of the activities of man...” This conviction drove his efforts to uplift women, encouraging their participation beyond domestic confines and advocating self-reliance—an idea that remains deeply relevant today. A tangible reflection of this vision is the ‘Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme’ (MGNREGS), which promotes inclusive rural development. It has empowered millions of rural women by offering them income-generating opportunities, strengthening their financial independence, and enabling active involvement in community life—echoing Gandhi’s call for the social and economic empowerment of women.

In the context of post-liberalized India, Gandhi’s critique of industrialization and his insistence on the dignity of human labor remain deeply relevant. He asserted, “Through Khadi, we sought to affirm the supremacy of human labor over the dominance of power-driven machines” (Gandhi, 1958, p. 234). This statement gains renewed significance in a neoliberal economy where mechanization and automation increasingly replace human labor, leading to rising unemployment and underemployment, especially in the informal and rural sectors. Gandhi warned, “We must utilize all available human labour before we entertain the idea of employing mechanical power”. Yet, in today’s India, liberalization has intensified reliance on capital-intensive industries, marginalizing labor-intensive sectors such as handicrafts and village industries, which once formed the backbone of rural livelihoods. His idea of real planning as “the best utilization of the whole manpower of India and the distribution of the raw products of India in her numerous villages instead of sending them

outside and rebuying finished articles at fabulous prices” contrasts starkly with the current model of export-oriented growth and dependency on global supply chains (Gandhi, 1947, p. 83). In this globalized setup, India often exports raw materials at low value and imports high-cost finished goods, resulting in trade imbalances and neglect of domestic small-scale production. Gandhi viewed every individual as a living engine of productivity: “Every human being is a machine, only it should be kept oiled and in proper trim”. However, the post-1991 economic reforms have not adequately addressed the skilling and empowerment of the rural poor, leading to distress migration, precarious employment, and widening socio-economic inequalities.

Much of the persistent poverty and inequality in post-liberalized India can be traced to the erosion of the Swadeshi ethos in our economic and industrial life. Liberalization has undoubtedly brought economic growth, technological advancements, and global integration, but it has also deepened urban-rural divides, encouraged dependence on global supply chains, and marginalized small-scale and traditional industries. Had India balanced growth with grassroots economic self-reliance, the villages of India could have truly become vibrant, self-sufficient units—lands flowing with milk and honey (Datt and Sundharam, 2001, p. 156). The Swadeshi doctrine, reinterpreted for today’s context, urges us to build local ecosystems of production and consumption in which communities collaborate to identify and fulfill one another’s needs. With technology and connectivity at our fingertips, every village or small town in India can become a self-supporting unit, exchanging only those goods and services that cannot be produced locally. This is not about economic isolation, but about localized resilience in an interconnected world (Chakravarty, 1999, pp. 3041–3052). Khadi still remains a powerful symbol. Not just a fabric, it represents economic freedom, ecological sustainability, and dignity of labour. In a time when fast fashion dominates, Khadi and other traditional crafts offer an alternative—ethically made, environmentally friendly, and rooted in Indian soil. As Jawaharlal Nehru (1946, p. 356) poetically said, Khadi is the livery of India’s freedom; in today’s terms, it can also be the attire of conscious capitalism and sustainable living.

To rebuild the economic foundations of rural India, we must see that villages first become self-contained—not in the old sense of complete isolation, but as net contributors to the national economy. Once their basic wants are secured, they can become valued associates in urban growth by supplying high-quality, decentralized, and often artisanal goods and services (Saxena, 2013, pp. 204–218). Khadi remains

the sun in the village's economic solar system, radiating employment, identity, and creativity. The planets—handicrafts, agro-processing, renewable energy, rural tourism, and digital services—can grow around it. But as Gandhi himself foresaw, these industries will only flourish if they are revived and innovated to meet modern demands. Charkha, in today's metaphor, can be expanded to include low-tech, high-value tools such as solar looms, eco-friendly packaging units, and even rural coding academies. The spirit of self-reliance and sustainability can drive village uplift, empowering people to create wealth without migrating or being exploited (Patel, 2016, p.75). "You cannot build non-violence on a factory civilization," Gandhi warned—and today we see the truth of this, as industrial expansion often leads to environmental degradation, land displacement, and alienation. But a regenerative rural economy, built on decentralized models and ethical business, can eschew exploitation, the core of violence, and instead foster shared prosperity (Gandhi, 1940, p. 331).

On machinery, Gandhi was nuanced: "Machinery has its place." In post-liberalized India, this translates to appropriate technology—tools and machines that empower people rather than replace them. Digital India, if rooted in Gandhian values, can enhance rural productivity, democratize education, and promote transparency—without dehumanizing labour or making people redundant (Chakravarty and Bandyopadhyay, 2009, pp. 9–15). Mass industrialization, especially when driven solely by profit motives, risks perpetuating cycles of urban concentration, rural exploitation, and ecological imbalance. Therefore, India must strive for a hybrid economy—one that combines modern tools with local wisdom, global trade with local resilience, and growth with justice. In this model, even modern machines are welcome—as long as they serve the many, not just the few (Banerjee and Duflo, 2019, p. 134). In this context, Professor Gunnar Myrdal (1968, p. 789) offers a perspective that broadly supports Gandhi's emphasis on village and cottage industries. Myrdal warns that "South Asian countries are at risk of creating "petty islands of highly organized Western-type industries that will remain surrounded by a sea of stagnation." This is a critique of unchecked industrialization that bypasses the needs and realities of the rural masses, widening the gap between the modern industrial sector and the underdeveloped rural economy. According to Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze, "The welfare of individuals should be the central focus of development, as expanding their capabilities leads to greater freedom. Development should be viewed as a process of enhancing freedoms, addressing issues such as poverty, tyranny, lack of economic opportunities, social exclusion, and neglect of essential public services"

(Drèze and Sen, 2020, p. 56). Implementing Gandhian economics today faces significant hurdles, including resistance from powerful corporate interests, the dominance of global supply chains, and a consumer culture driven by materialism. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts by policymakers, civil society, and the private sector to shift economic priorities toward Gandhian principles. In 2020, the Prime Minister of India, stated that 'self-reliance or atmanirbharta must ensure justice for poor, equal opportunity for all, the lower and middle classes should not face any obstacle to their growth, government should not come in their way as well as of social systems such that their dreams are not curbed in anyway. This resonates with Gandhi's view of minimum governance and maximum self-governance with government acting as a facilitator for economic growth and human welfare'(The Hindu, 2020).

The Government has implemented numerous schemes, including Swachh Bharat, Swasth Bharat, Saksham Bharat, Swaraj Gram, and Satat Krishi, all aimed at fostering cleanliness, health, empowerment, rural development, and sustainable agriculture. *'India's Economic Evolution Towards Inclusive Development: Exploring the 'Bhartiya' Model'* (2025) by Charan Singh and Arvind Virmani offers a concise analysis of India's inclusive development approach, highlighting the Bharatiya model's focus on equity, empowerment, and community participation (Singh and Virmani, 2025, p. 34). The Indian model of inclusive growth, from a development economics perspective, rests on three pillars: market economics, empowerment, and pragmatism. However, despite advocacy for an Indic Market Economy, current financial growth has not translated into substantial progress in education, public health, or social welfare. This gap raises critical concerns about the model's ability to deliver truly inclusive development in a country still grappling with deep regional disparities and entrenched caste and class inequalities. The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the relevance of Gandhi's philosophy of Swaraj in today's world. His focus on self-reliance, decentralization, and community welfare has become a guiding principle for addressing both the immediate challenges of the pandemic and the longer-term need for sustainable, self-sufficient societies. Gandhi once urged, 'Think about the face of the poorest and most vulnerable person you have ever seen, and ask yourself whether the action you are about to take will help them in any way'. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments significantly advanced the Gandhian principle of decentralization by empowering local self-governments in rural and urban areas, thereby promoting grassroots democracy and participatory governance. Gandhi's principles offer a blueprint for

rebuilding more resilient, equitable, and sustainable economies that can withstand future crises while prioritizing the well-being of every individual, especially the most vulnerable.

Conclusion

India adopted neoliberal economic policies emphasizing liberalization, privatization, and globalization (LPG). Over the past several decades, these policies have driven India to become one of the fastest-growing economies, even surpassing China in GDP growth rate. However, this remarkable economic growth has not translated into an equitable distribution of benefits across all sections of society. Resources generated through liberalization have been insufficiently directed toward alleviating poverty and inequality, which continue to affect a significant portion of the population. In conclusion, the integration of Gandhian economic principles into India's contemporary context, especially in the face of the challenges posed by a neoliberal era, offers valuable insights for accomplishing sustainable development. While the forces of globalization and market-driven growth have undeniably brought about significant economic advancements, they have also led to increased inequality, environmental degradation, and the erosion of traditional livelihoods. Gandhiji's emphasis on self-reliance, village-based economies, and moral responsibility in economic activities presents a compelling alternative to the exploitative models of industrialization and mass consumerism that dominate today's global economy.

Promoting village-based economies is crucial for strengthening rural areas by fostering small-scale, decentralized industries that prioritize local needs and sustainability. This approach reduces reliance on large-scale industrialization, which often leads to environmental harm and social displacement. By revitalizing cottage industries and empowering rural communities with appropriate technologies, India can align with Gandhian ideals and modern economic needs, supporting self-reliance and sustainable livelihoods. Additionally, encouraging ethical business practices, investing in green technologies, fostering inclusive growth, and reimagining globalization with a human-centered approach can further safeguard development and assist all sectors of society. Strengthening local governance, prioritizing environmental stewardship, reviving traditional crafts like Khadi, and promoting non-violent economic practices will help create a fairer, more equitable, and more sustainable future for India.

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Gandhi and the Paradox of Modern Democratic Freedom

Megha Kapoor

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the paradox of modern democratic freedom through the critical lens of M.K. Gandhi's political and ethical philosophy. While liberal democracies claim to secure individual liberty and autonomy, they increasingly rely on institutional, technological and consumerist mechanisms that undermine genuine self-rule. Gandhi foresaw this contradiction, warning that modern civilisation, despite its promises of freedom, fosters dependency, moral disorientation and alienation from oneself. Drawing on his principles of Satya (truth), ahimsa (non-violence) and swabhava (inner nature), this paper argues that freedom, when divorced from ethical discipline and responsibility, becomes reduced to choice without conscience and autonomy without restraint. Through close engagement with Gandhi's writings and relevant philosophical critiques, the paper examines consumerism and state apparatuses that manipulate fear and desire, creating conditions of subtle domination.

Key words: *Modern Democratic Freedom, Swaraj, Consumerism, Ethical Self-Rule*

Introduction

MODERN DEMOCRATIC THOUGHT rests on a powerful assumption that freedom expands with choice. The more options we have, the more products we can buy, the more lifestyles we can pursue, the freer we must be. Yet, this link between choice and freedom produces a 'tension'. While democratic societies formally protect liberty, the everyday lives of individuals are often shaped by anxiety, comparison, and competition that unsettle individuals' sense of control over their lives. This paper approaches the 'tension' as a paradox of

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modern democratic freedom¹ and aims to analyse it through M.K. Gandhi's philosophical lens. It specifically asks: how do institutional, technological, and consumerist mechanisms in liberal democracies undermine genuine self-rule while claiming to secure individual liberty? As the paper progresses in its analyses of the contradictions of modern democratic freedom, it reflects on Gandhi's identification of this predicament long before the rise of social media and consumer capitalism. To further analyse this, the paper asks two questions: In what ways does Gandhi's critique expose the deficiencies of modern democratic freedom? And how can Gandhi's philosophy offer a morally grounded conception of freedom that counters the paradoxes inherent in contemporary democratic life?

To address these questions, the paper proceeds as follows: The first section, 'The Paradox of Modern Democratic Freedom', elaborates on the inherent contradictions within contemporary liberal democracies, drawing on Gandhi's foresight and supported by other philosophical critiques. The subsequent section, 'Where Does Modern Democratic Freedom Go Wrong?', delves into the specific ethical deficiencies by examining the detachment of modern democratic freedom from Gandhi's triad of *Satya*, *ahimsa*, and *swabhava*. Finally, 'Morally Grounded Ideals of Democratic Freedom' posits Gandhi's philosophy as a powerful counterpoint, reimagining freedom as rooted in ethical self-limitation and shared life, thereby offering a path to a more meaningful democratic existence.

1. The Paradox of Modern Democratic Freedom

The ideal of freedom within modern democratic thought is often regarded as a normative achievement, grounded in the 'belief' that individuals are autonomous agents capable of shaping their own lives through choice, rights and participation in collective self-rule. This section argues that this 'belief', when analysed within social and economic conditions of modernity, often narrows the space for self-direction and well-thought-out action. The following three subsections, titled 'Contradictions of Modern Democratic Freedom', 'Philosophical Lineage of Scepticism', and 'Fear, Consumerism, and the Erosion of *swabhava*', explore Gandhi's engagement with the ideas of modern democratic freedom.

1.1. Contradictions of Modern Democratic Freedom

Despite promises of autonomy, equality, and self-governance, modern democratic freedom contains deep contradictions that undermine its own ideals. Liberal democracy presents itself as empowering individuals through rights, participation, and representation, offering

freedoms to speak, vote, consume, and dissent. Yet these freedoms are increasingly shaped and constrained by the very systems that claim to protect them. Bureaucratic governance, capitalist markets, media structures, and technological infrastructures often mediate and manipulate individual agency rather than liberate it.

This contradiction forms what may be called the paradox of modern democratic freedom — where the promise of liberation conceals subtle domination. Even seemingly empowering developments such as technological access, civil rights, and free expression become complicit in this paradox. The digital sphere, often celebrated as democratic, increasingly fosters surveillance, algorithmic control, and echo chambers, subjecting citizens to invisible constraints. Economic freedom, similarly, operates within neoliberal rationality, demanding continuous productivity and consumption, producing anxiety and insecurity rather than emancipation. Wendy Brown argues that neoliberalism transforms democratic citizenship into economic entrepreneurship, reducing individuals to human capital valued primarily through market participation (Brown 2015). In this context, freedom becomes synonymous with market choice rather than moral or civic agency.

Gandhi's critique anticipates these tensions with remarkable clarity. Although modern democracies claim to uphold self-rule, Gandhi warned that they cultivate dependency on impersonal institutions and external authorities. His critique was moral and existential rather than merely political. He wrote, "This civilization is such that one has only to be patient and it will be self-destroyed... Parliaments are really emblems of slavery." (Gandhi 1909, p. 34). While his language appears severe, it reflects ethical concern rather than contempt for individuals. Gandhi distinguished between people and the civilizational form organized around endless wants. Even while calling modern civilisation a "Satanic Civilization," he insisted that "civilization is not an incurable disease" and described the English as enterprising and "not inherently immoral." (Gandhi 1909, p. 34). His central concern was the cultivation of habits and desires that alienate individuals from their ethical capacities. As Bilgrami notes, this alienation lies at the core of Gandhi's anti-modernism (Bilgrami 2018, p. 7).

Within modern systems, Gandhi argued, *swaraj* — ethical self-rule rooted in self-restraint and communal responsibility — is replaced by individualism and consumption. Nigam highlights Gandhi's concern that industrial modernity, symbolised by railways and machines, uproots individuals culturally and materially, creating profound existential dislocation (Nigam 2009). This dislocation intensifies the paradox of freedom: outward liberties coexist with an inward loss of

moral grounding, or *swabhava*. Consequently, political freedom is reduced to procedural participation, while genuine economic and moral autonomy erodes under global markets and technological dependence. Gandhi thus observed, “Civilisation seeks to increase bodily comforts and it fails miserably even in doing so.” (Gandhi 1909, p. 25).

This raises an important question: was Gandhi’s scepticism unique, or part of a broader tradition questioning democracy’s promises? The following section situates his critique within a wider lineage of democratic scepticism.

1.2. Philosophical Lineage of Scepticism

Gandhi’s scepticism toward modern democracy belongs to a broader tradition of doubt extending from classical philosophy to contemporary critiques of neoliberal modernity. By engaging Gandhi alongside Plato, J.J. Rousseau, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Zygmunt Bauman, this section reframes freedom as an ethical rather than merely institutional problem.

In *Republic*, Plato criticises democracy for allowing “various passions... to have free play,” producing “weakness and dissipation” instead of true liberty (Plato c. 380 BCE, p. 452). He warns that unchecked freedom leads to lawlessness and ultimately tyranny, as private desires overshadow the common good (Plato c. 380 BCE, p. 17, 185–189). Gandhi’s critique in *Hind Swaraj* echoes this concern, arguing that modern civilisation confuses license with liberty (Gandhi 1909). While Plato sees harmony secured through reason ruling the soul, Gandhi identifies the danger within modern civilisation itself, where endless comforts and desires erode moral clarity. His concepts of *swabhava* and *ahimsa* may be read as a democratised form of Platonic discipline — not imposed by philosopher-kings but cultivated through ethical self-restraint. The comparison suggests that democracy cannot endure if freedom is governed solely by appetite. Plato resolves this through elite guardianship, whereas Gandhi relocates discipline inward, insisting that self-rule through truth and nonviolence sustains political freedom. Thus, the crisis of democracy is fundamentally ethical rather than merely institutional.

A similar scepticism appears in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who declares that “genuine democracy never has existed and never will” (Rousseau 2012, p. 200). Rousseau argues that private interests and the impracticality of constant participation undermine democratic freedom, requiring civic virtue grounded in the General Will (Rousseau 2012, p. 169). Gandhi shares Rousseau’s concern about private interests but shifts focus toward inner moral transformation. For Gandhi, the

problem becomes a “problem of spirit,” where freedom collapses when detached from self-discipline. Whereas Rousseau seeks solutions through civic virtue within smaller political communities, Gandhi insists that democracy’s survival ultimately depends on ethical self-rule. In this way, he intensifies Rousseau’s argument by relocating the foundation of political freedom within the moral transformation of individuals.

Twentieth-century thought continues this sceptical trajectory. Maurice Merleau-Ponty exposes tensions within liberal democracy, arguing that claims to universal freedom often conceal domination maintained through law, violence, and propaganda. In *Humanism and Terror*, he notes that liberal regimes present themselves as defenders of liberty while selectively applying rights and delegitimising dissent (Merleau-Ponty 2022, p. 63). Violence within liberalism becomes invisible because it is framed as lawful necessity (Merleau-Ponty 2022, p. 68). Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj* resonates with this critique. His assertion that “modern civilization is a disease” (CWMG 10: 243) parallels Merleau-Ponty’s claim that liberal progress can mask domination. Gandhi similarly viewed institutions such as parliaments and railways as deepening dependency while weakening moral responsibility. Yet he extends the critique by proposing *satya* and *ahimsa* as ethical disciplines that resist domination through self-mastery rather than institutional reform alone.

Later, social theory shifts its focus from political institutions to the conditions of modern life itself. Zygmunt Bauman’s *Liquid Times* describes a world marked by uncertainty, individualisation, and weakened communal bonds, where power increasingly escapes politics and resides in global markets (Bauman 2007, p. 31). Freedom is celebrated as choice, yet the multiplication of choices generates anxiety and disorientation, leaving individuals formally free but substantively powerless (Bauman 2013, p. 5). Gandhi identifies a similar paradox: modern civilisation mistakes license for liberty, creating individuals enslaved by desire and dependent on impersonal systems (CWMG 10: 248). While Bauman diagnoses the uncertainty of liquid modernity, Gandhi prescribes *swaraj* — ethical self-rule grounded in truth and nonviolence — as the discipline necessary for sustaining freedom. Both reveal that liberty without moral restraint produces new forms of bondage rather than empowerment.

Across these thinkers emerges a shared insight: freedom cannot endure where moral formation is weakened. This recognition shifts the discussion from abstract theory to lived experience, where the erosion of ethical grounding manifests through fear, consumerism, and insecurity. The following subsection explores these lived

conditions, focusing on fear, consumption, and the erosion of *swabhava*.

1.3. Fear, Consumerism, and the Erosion of *Swabhava*

The paradox reaches its peak when democracy promises freedom from fear, yet simultaneously amplifies the very dangers that generate fear.² This cycle fuels consumer demand as individuals seek security through the very structures and products marketed to guarantee their freedom. In this way, fear becomes both produced and exploited, used as a tool to drive consumption and deepen dependence on political and economic systems that claim to offer liberation. Gandhi critiques modern civilisation for creating restless, unhappy and unsatisfied individuals who are slaves of their own desires rather than masters of themselves. “Formerly, men were made slaves under physical compulsion. Now they are enslaved by the temptation of money and of the luxuries that money can buy.” (Gandhi 1909, p. 33) While analysing the restlessness, one can reflect on the profound alienation in which individuals lose touch with their *swabhava* and become dominated by external influences that shape their fears. Yet, in the modern world, fear becomes a defining feature, driving people to seek security through possessions and status rather than moral strength.

This dynamic is especially visible in modern consumerism, which Gandhi viewed as a trap of endless desire rather than genuine freedom. He warned that unregulated consumption does not fulfil the self but entraps it. Rohmetra, while analysing Gandhi, said:

A certain degree of physical harmony and comfort is necessary but above a certain level, it becomes a hindrance instead of help. Therefore, the idea of creating an unlimited number of wants and satisfying them seems to be a delusion and a snare. The satisfaction of one’s narrow self must meet at a certain point, a dead stop before it degenerates into physical and intellectual voluptuousness (Rohmetra 2011, p. 629).

Furthermore, Gandhi’s remark in *Young India* writings, calling himself a “farmer and weaver” (CWMG 23: 85), stands as a stance against Western culture and civilisation (as the text of *Young India* mentions) and also acts as a caution against the tyranny of ‘want’. Gandhi saw that in Western culture (as driven by the idea of consumption), people are conditioned to believe that happiness lies in accumulation. Such craving, he argued, leads not to contentment but to perpetual dissatisfaction, fostering fear—fear of losing what one has, fear of not having enough and fear of social marginalisation. The pursuit of material goods becomes a substitute for inner peace,

yet it deepens the sense of insecurity because it externalises the source of freedom. This paper reads Gandhi's analysis as more than a moral warning about desire. It suggests that when the pursuit of material goods replaces inner ethical grounding, freedom itself becomes externalised. The individual comes to depend on possessions, status, and recognition for a sense of security. As a result, the search for comfort intensifies insecurity, turning freedom into a fragile condition sustained by acquisition.

Furthermore, individualism, as celebrated in modern democracies, similarly exacerbates this alienation by fracturing the communal bonds that sustain ethical living. Gandhi believed that the modern focus on the autonomous individual, disconnected from shared values and collective purpose, leads to isolation and existential fear. His thoughts reflect an erosion of social cohesion in favour of individual rights, and warn that modernity often invites moral decay and social fragmentation (Diop, Bhushan and Nikalje 2020). This isolation fuels vulnerability, making individuals more susceptible to fear, which consumerism then exploits by offering false remedies in the form of goods and status. Thus, the paradox of freedom that Gandhi helps identify is that the modern pursuit of freedom through consumerism and radical individualism generates new forms of bondage, in the form of chains forged by fear, insecurity, and moral disconnection. It is profoundly helpful in establishing the argument that the freedom promised by these forces is illusory, as it divorces autonomy from ethical self-mastery and communal solidarity. The pursuit of modern democratic freedom is evident in many aspects of contemporary society. It enshrines individual civil liberties while fostering deep psychological distress, anxiety and social isolation due to fear of the 'other'³. It promises personal fulfilment and progress, but results in widespread burnout and the erosion of shared moral life. In celebrating autonomy, it often forgets responsibility; in protecting rights, it neglects relationships. In other words, modernity causes a loss of *swaraj* as self-mastery is replaced by dependence on systems that manufacture desires and insecurities. From the discussion so far, fear may be understood not merely as a political emotion but as a deeper moral and spiritual condition. By locating fear at the heart of the modern democratic condition of freedom, Gandhi's lens further helps in uncovering liberalism's promise of liberation, which often conceals deeper forms of psychological and moral servitude.

Reflecting on the question, 'How do institutional, technological, and consumerist mechanisms in liberal democracies undermine genuine self-rule despite claiming to secure individual liberty?' This section argues that the answer lies in the subtle reshaping of freedom

itself. Democratic institutions remain procedurally intact, yet large-scale administrative and economic systems organise conduct indirectly. At the same time, consumer culture redirects desire toward acquisition, sustaining cycles of fear and comparison that weaken inner stability. The philosophical scepticism traced here shows that when freedom loses its ethical grounding, it persists in form but thins in substance, leaving self-rule fragile even where rights are formally guaranteed. Together with Gandhi's perspectives, the section adds a crucial layer to the critique: that freedom, divorced from restraint, relationality and inner discipline, becomes indistinguishable from the conditions that undermine it. To further map this, in the following section I argue that the pursuit of modern freedom in democracies is evident in its detachment from *Satya* (truth), *ahimsa* (non-violence), and *swabhava* (innate nature).

2. Where Does Modern Democratic Freedom Go Wrong?

Having established the inherent contradictions and the subtle forms of domination within modern democratic freedom, as anticipated by Gandhi and echoed by other critical thinkers, this section now shifts its focus to the specific ethical foundations that, in Gandhi's view, are compromised. The following subsections will explore how the pursuit of modern democratic freedom, when detached from *Satya* (truth), *ahimsa* (non-violence), and *swabhava* (innate nature), leading to profound moral disorientation that this paper terms as 'social ruin'

2.1. The Compromise of *Satya* (Truth)

Modern democratic freedom often treats truth as negotiable because of its profit-seeking nature. Truth here is subjected to manipulation, spin and personal convenience. Referring specifically to public discourse⁴, particularly within media and politics, the proliferation of misinformation, post-truth narratives and performative speech detaches expression from ethical responsibility. Gandhi, by contrast, is rooted the freedom of speech in a spiritual and ethical commitment to truth. In his words: "Young India [the newspaper] will be stale when Truth becomes stale. I want to see God face to face. God I know is Truth. For me the only certain means of knowing God is nonviolence—*ahimsa*—love. I live for India's freedom and would die for it, because it is part of Truth." (CWMG 23 : 340). For Gandhi, then, freedom was inseparable from a relentless striving towards *Satya*. He insisted that even when the press harshly criticises or errs in judgment, its freedom is meaningful only when it serves truth rather than ego or power. He says, "liberty of the press can be said to be truly respected when the press can comment in the severest terms

upon and even misrepresent matters.” (CWMG 23: 340) But this liberty, he emphasised, must not be a camouflage for self-interest or latent violence; “our thought and word must accord with our practice.” (CWMG 23: 341).

Reflecting on the above analysis, in today’s democracies, public debate is shaped less by careful thinking and more by quick reactions, social media trends and emotional outrage. Information spreads fast, but truth often becomes secondary to what is dramatic or attention-grabbing. When a shared commitment to truth does not guide freedom of expression, people begin to doubt everything, including institutions, leaders and even each other. This points to two significant issues. First, this trajectory reflects a direction in which the internal logic of modern democracies appears to erode the depth of freedom. Second, over time, such distrust weakens public life, making cooperation more difficult and democratic participation feel unimportant, even though people formally remain free to speak, vote and express their opinions. The latter is a significant concern.

2.2. The Neglect of *Ahimsa* (Non-Violence)

Gandhi understood *ahimsa* not as a passive ideal but as the ethical foundation of political life, and a strategy for resisting injustice. In modern democratic structures, one can perceive a conventional detachment between them. While political systems today claim to safeguard freedom through legal rights, such protections frequently mask the structural violence. Economic inequality, cultural domination and environmental degradation are tolerated in the name of growth and choice, even though they inflict lasting harm. What presents itself as freedom, therefore, often thrives on practices that contradict the discipline of nonviolence. Consumerism is perhaps the clearest instance of this inversion. Far from cultivating the humility and self-restraint essential to *ahimsa*, it fosters competition.

Moreover, in *Hind Swaraj*, it is observed that modern civilisation equates worldly enjoyment with progress. Gandhi said, “In this civilization, the more you have of worldly enjoyment, the better off you are.” (Gandhi 1909, p. 39) It is suggested that ‘enjoyment’ is signalled as coming at a great human cost: it divides people, displaces moral consideration and naturalises harm. Violence persists not just in war, but in consumption patterns that exploit labour, in technologies that alienate and in policies that fragment communities. Seen from Gandhi’s standpoint, such a civilisation misunderstands freedom. True freedom cannot coexist with practices that corrode ethical selfhood and perpetuate harm (see section 1 of the paper). To recover *ahimsa* as political ground is therefore to expose these contradictions and to

envision freedom as inseparable from responsibility, restraint, and justice.

2.3. Alienation from *Swabhava* (Innate Nature)

For this research paper, the idea of *swabhava* serves a critical function, exposing how modern democratic life alienates individuals from this inner nature, making *swabhava* a diagnostic tool as much as a philosophical ideal. Since modern democratic life encourages self-formation not through introspection or moral development, but through choice, performance and consumption, individuals are urged to 'be themselves' by constructing identities in response to trends, markets and images, rather than through ethical cultivation. This leads to a loss of inner direction. Gandhi deeply feared this disorientation, and in his writings, speeches, etc., he aimed to preserve India from it. To mention a closely related perspective, he said, "They want India's billions and they want India's man-power for their imperialistic greed. If we refuse to supply them with men and money, we achieve our goal, namely, Swaraj, equality, manliness." (Gandhi 1922, p. 551) Conversely, the modern subject becomes overburdened with choices, but underdeveloped in conscience. Alienated from their *swabhava*, individuals feel the pull of artificial needs and external validation rather than inner harmony. This misalignment creates a fragile freedom, where autonomy exists without grounding and liberty becomes license. Another aspect that deeply hinders the moral dimension of *swabhava* is Modernity's emphasis on rationality. Bhikhu Parekh elaborates on this in his book:

[Modern civilization], although it had many achievements to its credit, it was fundamentally flawed, as was evident in the fact that it was aggressive, imperialist, violent, exploitative, brutal, unhappy, restless and devoid of a sense of direction and purpose. Gandhi thought that this was because modern civilization neglected the soul, privileged the body, misunderstood the nature and limits of reason and had no appreciation of the individual *swabhava* (Parekh 1997, p. 79).

Parekh's insight into Gandhi opens a critical fissure in the very architecture of modern democratic freedom. It reveals that rational freedom, when detached from *swabhava*, becomes a tool of evasion rather than transformation. Unlike classical liberalism, which casts freedom as the expansion of choice and autonomy, Gandhi's conception demands a confrontation with the meaning of life. This contrast is not merely ethical but ontological as well. Rational freedom assumes the self as sovereign and self-transparent, capable of calculating its

desires and charting its goals. Gandhi, in contrast, sees the self as opaque, fragmented and in need of moral cultivation. Here, *swabhava* is not an essence to be expressed but a discipline to be discovered. It is a process of self-suffering and self-limitation, through which the individual de-habituates from modernity's compulsions.

This points to a deeper philosophical provocation, that the modern ideal of freedom assumes the stability and sufficiency of the 'will', while Gandhian freedom presupposes its inadequacy. Gandhi does not reject reason but decentres it, placing it in the service of the conscience (*antaryami*—the inner guide awakened through suffering, labour and self-rule). In doing so, he anticipates critiques of the autonomous subject that would only later emerge in existentialist, psychoanalytic and post-structuralist thought.⁵ Thus, Gandhi's *swabhava* is not simply an inward turn; it is a rupture in the liberal paradigm, a refusal of the idea that freedom can be engineered through external arrangements without a metaphysical revolution of the self.

So, in what ways does Gandhi's critique expose the deficiencies of modern democratic freedom? From the above account, it can be asserted that the pursuit of modern democratic freedom detached from *Satya* (truth), *ahimsa* (non-violence) and *swabhava* (innate nature) leads to 'social ruin'. This social ruin is problematic because it undermines the very conditions that make genuine freedom⁶ possible. When modern democratic freedom is pursued in abstraction from *Satya*, *ahimsa* and *swabhava*, it breeds a culture of moral relativism, hyper-competitive individualism and spiritual emptiness. The result is not only personal alienation but the breakdown of the ethical structures that hold communities together. Without *Satya* embedded in moral honesty, it becomes instrumentalised for power; without *ahimsa*, conflict is normalised and justified in the name of interests; without having an understanding of *swabhava*, individuals become estranged from their deeper purpose and get dominated by the 'tyranny of want'. Gandhi feared that such a society, driven by desire rather than discipline, by rights rather than responsibilities, would collapse under the weight of its own contradictions. It will produce not liberation, but dependency, anxiety and violence masked as progress. This is why the 'social ruin' Gandhi helped in uncovering is not merely material or political, but civilisational (a loss of the inner and communal capacities needed to live freely).

3. Morally Grounded Ideals of Democratic Freedom

Given the analysis of modern democratic freedom's ethical shortcomings and its detachment from Gandhi's core principles, the crucial question then arises, what alternative vision does Gandhi offer

for a truly meaningful and ethically grounded freedom? This section argues that Gandhi's philosophy provides a powerful counterpoint, not by rejecting freedom, but by reimagining it as inseparable from the project of building the self and the community, rooted in moral self-limitation and shared life.

3.1. Countering Accumulation as an Ethical Practice

As already discussed in this paper, the promise of liberation in modern democracies conceals a reality of subtle domination, producing a profound sense of existential dislocation. Outward liberties mask an inner loss of moral and spiritual grounding, intensifying the paradox of freedom. Gandhi's critique of modern civilisation exposed this contradiction, arguing that a society that generates restless and unsatisfied individuals, enslaved not by physical compulsion but by the temptation of money and the luxuries it can buy. In this context, Gandhi's idea of *Aparigraha* (non-possession) can be read as a deliberate resistance to the psychological and ecological violence of capitalist desire. His critique of consumerism is post-materialist. It challenges the equation of human value with purchasing power and the replacement of ethical life with transactional logic. In his vow of non-possession, he says, "It is not enough not to possess and keep much, but it is necessary not to keep anything which may not be absolutely necessary for our bodily wants. Thus, if one can do without chairs, one should do so. The follower of this vow will, therefore, by constantly thinking thereover, simplify his life." (Gandhi 1922, p. 6) Moreover, the ethical problems of consumerism can be recounted in his vow of non-stealing, "It is not enough not to steal what is commonly considered as another person's property. It is theft if we use articles which we do not really need. Nature provides from day to day just enough and no more for our daily needs." (Gandhi 1922, p. 6) Gandhi's ethical economics offers a sharp rebuke to the commodification of freedom in liberal democracies. When desire is manufactured, and consumption is mistaken for autonomy, human beings are estranged from their moral capacities and social obligations. For Gandhi, true freedom meant 'self-restraint', not 'indulgence', 'interdependence', not 'individual accumulation'.

3.2. Reimagining Freedom: Swaraj Beyond the Consumer Self

Moving to the idea of 'self' that modernity produces, the paper has discussed the surging focus on individualism in the idea of freedom. What Gandhi sees here is a deeply irresponsible individual. As Mahesh Gavaskar explains, "The modern man, Gandhi thought, has become deeply irresponsible. He overeats, gets indigestion, goes to the doctor,

takes a pill and gets on with his life.” (Gavaskar 2009, p. 45). In Gandhi’s view, the modern world allows people to externalise the consequences of their choices onto medical, legal, or bureaucratic systems. But real freedom, he urges, is something that cannot coexist with this evasion. It demands that one confront and transform the self, rather than delegate its burdens to external institutions. If modern democratic freedom prioritises external autonomy such as freedom from constraints and the pursuit of individual interests, Gandhi offers a radically different conception rooted in internal mastery and ethical responsibility.

It is in this context that the idea of *swaraj* must be considered as one of the counter to the paradox of modern democratic freedom. At its heart, *swaraj* is not the freedom of the atomised individual, but the freedom of a person who governs themselves through truth, non-violence and alignment with innate nature. Such a conception of freedom is realised not by eliminating restraint but by embracing it. This paper reads Gandhi’s model of freedom as centred on restraint, where liberty depends on the cultivated ability to limit desire, regulate consumption, and live in ways that reduce harm to others and to the natural world. From this perspective, *ahimsa* is not confined to the refusal of physical violence but extends to the ethical organisation of everyday life. It becomes a principle for withdrawing complicity from structures of domination and exploitation. This analysis suggests that while liberal democracies often define harm in legal or bodily terms, Gandhi’s framework pushes us to recognise harm as moral and structural, embedded in systems that estrange individuals from ethical self-rule.

Furthermore, the argument here aims to suggest that such a reconceptualisation reshapes how we understand the idea of ‘political community’. Gandhi’s account of freedom, as interpreted here, cannot be realised through abstract individual rights alone or through centralised state authority. Instead, freedom must be nurtured within local, interdependent communities sustained by mutual responsibility and ethical care. From this perspective, *Gram Swaraj* is read not as nostalgia for a pre-modern past but as a radical rethinking of political life. It presents freedom as a shared moral condition, emerging through relationships and collective responsibility rather than existing as an individual possession secured solely by institutions.

This is why Gandhi’s emphasis on self-government becomes especially significant and even prophetic in an age where politics is increasingly delegated to experts and economic actors, while ethical self-governance is neglected. He reinforces this principle again years later, writing, “Just as good government is no substitute for self-

government, good justice, if foreign, is no substitute for home-made justice⁷." (CWMG 31 :285) This ethos also explains Gandhi's insistence on *tapasya*, which is understood by Gandhi as 'ethical suffering'. 'Ethical suffering' is considered as essential to political transformation. He asserts, "Now we might have to die so that they [the villagers] may live... If now we die knowingly and willingly, our sacrifice will enable us and the whole nation. Let us not flinch from the necessary sacrifice, if we will live as an independent, self-respecting nation." (CWMG 23 : 454) In a culture of comfort and speed, such an understanding of freedom may appear alien, yet it discloses the ethical depth of democratic life. He says, "Organisations die always for want of men, i.e. honesty, efficiency and self-sacrifice." (CWMG 30 : 520) This is what gives democracy its moral force—not procedure, but praxis; not rights, but responsibility. In his view, "The highest form of freedom carries with it the greatest measure of discipline and humility. Freedom that comes from discipline and humility cannot be denied." (CWMG 30 : 520) This being at the heart of his stance for freedom, highlights it as a moral ground for democratic freedom.

3.3. Gandhi Against Institutionalised Injustice

Gandhi focused on 'situated ethics' where right action depends not on abstract rules, but on one's context, duties and nature. Freedom, then, becomes an ongoing discipline, shaped by tradition, spiritual insight and the demands of the moment. This positions Gandhi's thought as a middle path, resisting both the homogenising tendencies of liberal universalism and the moral relativism of cultural pluralism. Furthermore, his suspicion toward liberalism's faith in codified rights and legal abstractions further illustrates this perspective.⁸ He writes in *Young India*: "We are not much enamoured of the Declaration of Rights business... The Declaration will be of little avail if we have not the strength to have it well administered... Unless we become manly [Humanly] and fearless, no number of rights showered upon us can secure us our liberties." (CWMG 20 : 482-483). Since rights by themselves remain inert without ethical strength, legal frameworks alone cannot constitute freedom. It must be engraved on the heart through discipline, courage and self-rule. Gandhi saw this clearly during the Rowlatt Act, where the suspension of civil liberties revealed the limits of legal guarantees when they are not supported by moral autonomy. "To fatten the statute book... without removing the poison in his system," he warned, "would mean to nourish a man without removing the poison in his system." (CWMG 20: 482-483)

This deep ethical orientation also shapes Gandhi's response to political violence and injustice. Reflecting on the proposed memorial

for the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, he insisted that even in remembering atrocity, the aim must be ethical transformation rather than revenge. "To err is human," he wrote, "and it must be held to be equally human to forgive... Nor does this mean that we may not ask for General Dyer's dismissal... But just as we do not bear ill-will towards a lunatic, so too may we not bear ill-will even towards General Dyer." (CWMG 17 : 38) In this framing, political memory becomes a site not of resentment but of moral awakening, open to all. "I would invite Englishmen to appreciate our feeling... to make common cause with us in our endeavour to regain consciousness... and to realise the same freedom that they enjoy under the same constitution." (CWMG 17: 38) Gandhi's philosophy, therefore, offers a profound alternative to the dominant ideals of modern democratic freedom.

3.4. Rethinking Freedom: The Three D's

A serious question arises here. Can Gandhi's call for internal mastery and ethical responsibility be so easily realised? To frame freedom primarily as a matter of moral reform risks overlooking the intractable burdens of pain, poverty, and injustice that shape people's lives. If suffering is recast merely as an occasion for ethical discipline, does this not risk normalising it as something 'meant to happen', thereby silencing subjective experiences of sorrow that demand political redress rather than moral acceptance? Moreover, the emphasis on *tapasya* and restraint, while ethically powerful, may also conceal the danger of deteriorating living conditions in the name of self-purification. This tension points to why Gandhi often cannot be read as offering ready-made solutions for contemporary democracies. His critique of modernity, even though it is strong, the solutions, if one aims to adopt them, need thorough analysis. I follow the approach articulated by Behera and Nayak in *Gandhi in the Twenty-First Century*, where they emphasise that the relevance of Gandhi today lies not in the literal adoption of his institutional proposals, but in a deep engagement with the moral and philosophical concerns that shaped his thought. Just as we read Plato not to recreate his ideal 'Republic', or Rousseau not to rebuild his 'General Will,' we read Gandhi not to replicate the village republics he envisioned, but to understand what he was trying to accomplish in terms of justice, community and ethical selfhood.

I, here, suggest that re-reading Gandhi for the conditions of freedom in modern democratic life requires what I call the 'Three Ds'. These categories are not those that Gandhi himself explicitly formulated, but they serve as a lens for reinterpreting his thought to illuminate the ethical and political dimensions of freedom today. The

first, 'Discipline', frames freedom as grounded in self-mastery rather than mere indulgence. In an era where freedom is often equated with consumption or the exercise of personal choice, Gandhi's vision can help in highlighting that autonomy attains meaning only when coupled with restraint and ethical responsibility. The second, 'Dissent', derives from Gandhi's practice of *satyagraha* yet, is extended here toward a democratic ethic of resistance. As a sustained ethical practice that interrogates power structures, the category of dissent calls attention to systemic inequities and exposes forms of domination that are often normalised or invisible. Importantly, this dissent does not replicate the mechanisms of oppression it opposes. It seeks transformation rather than domination. In this sense, dissent functions as a mode of collective truth-telling since it demands accountability, amplifies marginalised voices and encourages public deliberation grounded in justice rather than coercion. Such an approach positions resistance as both a reaction to injustice and a proactive cultivation of ethical and political awareness within a democratic society. It also fosters spaces where freedom is both practised and made tangible. The third, 'Democratisation', interprets Gandhi's notion of *swaraj* as a principle that extends freedom beyond the narrow confines of legal rights or elite control.

So, how does Gandhi's philosophy offer a morally grounded conception of freedom that counters the paradoxes inherent in contemporary democratic life? Reimagined for the present, his philosophy suggests a deeper engagement with shared responsibility and collective agency, dimensions often obscured in neoliberal democracies. Approached in this manner, his thought for navigating within the 'Paradox of Modern Democratic Freedom' provides not straightforward answers but conceptual resources for understanding freedom as a disciplined, resistant, and collective undertaking.

Conclusion

This paper identifies a central paradox of modern democratic freedom: while liberal democracies promise individual autonomy, freedom is often shaped and constrained by institutional, technological, and consumerist mechanisms that subtly limit genuine self-rule. The crisis, therefore, does not arise from the absence of liberty but from the conditions under which liberty operates. Importantly, this paradox is not inevitable or permanent; it reflects a particular moral and structural configuration of modern democratic life.

The study was organised into three interconnected sections. First, it examined how modern democratic systems formally secure rights and representation while simultaneously structuring agency through bureaucratic governance, market dependence, and technological

mediation. Neoliberal rationality recasts citizens as economic actors, reducing freedom to participation in markets. Through engagement with thinkers such as Plato, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Zygmunt Bauman, alongside Gandhi, the paper demonstrated that democratic freedom becomes fragile when detached from ethical formation. Gandhi's critique of the multiplication of wants highlights how consumer modernity produces fear and insecurity, distancing individuals from *swabhava* and anchoring freedom in acquisition rather than self-governance.

Second, the paper analysed the ethical distortions emerging when freedom is separated from *Satya*, *ahimsa*, and *swabhava*. Truth loses its binding power, non-violence is weakened by structurally sanctioned harm, and individuals become estranged from their moral orientation. The result is not juridical unfreedom but a form of liberty emptied of ethical substance, leading to wider social consequences described as social ruin.

Finally, the paper argued that Gandhi offers not a rejection but a reconfiguration of democratic freedom. Practices such as *aparigraha* and the ethical ideal of *swaraj* reconnect personal restraint with collective responsibility. Building on this, the proposed framework of Discipline, Dissent, and Democratisation reimagines freedom beyond procedural liberalism. Addressing the paradox of modern democratic freedom ultimately requires a "metaphysical revolution of the self," in which liberty is inseparable from moral honesty, self-limitation, and ethical commitment to others.

Notes

1. This paper approaches 'modernity', 'liberalism', and 'democracy' as intertwined elements of a single moral and political condition. It is held that together they shape not only institutions and rights, but also the form of the modern self and its experience of freedom. It is within this convergence that the paradox of modern democratic freedom is analysed.
2. Modern democratic orders often intensify fear indirectly through the conditions that sustain them. Competitive market economies produce economic insecurity and constant comparison, while media saturation amplifies perceptions of threat, crisis and social instability.
3. In Bauman's account of liquid modernity, the "other" includes strangers, migrants, and marginalized groups who become projections of structural insecurity and anxiety rather than actual threats. Fear of the other thus reflects broader social instability, deepening isolation while obscuring its systemic causes.

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4. Public discourse is foregrounded here because modernity's technological and media transformations make mediated communication a central site where perceptions, fears and meanings are produced and circulated.
5. Gandhi's idea of *swabhava* sees the self as something shaped through ethical discipline rather than naturally free. Like Sartre and Lacan, he viewed freedom as confronting responsibility and inner conflict. Practices such as fasting and celibacy discipline desire, making freedom a process of self-transformation through restraint rather than expansion.
6. Freedom to speak, to vote, to consume, to dissent
7. The phrase 'home-made justice' should not be understood, in a Gandhian sense, as an automatic moral endorsement of what is local, traditional, or culturally indigenous. Gandhi does not romanticise what emerges from one's own soil simply because it is native. His thought consistently subjects the local to ethical scrutiny. Practices, customs, and institutions rooted in a community remain open to critique if they reproduce hierarchy, exclusion, or violence.
8. Maya Tudor observes that India's democratic decline is characterised not by overt authoritarianism but by legal and bureaucratic tools—such as selective prosecution of opposition leaders, silencing of dissenting media and concentration of executive power—which mimic democratic form while hollowing out its ethical content. Her analysis exemplifies Gandhi's fear that formal democracy, when divorced from moral strength and civic responsibility, becomes a mechanism of domination rather than liberation. See Maya Tudor, "Why India's Democracy Is Dying," *Journal of Democracy*, April 2024, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/why-indias-democracy-is-dying/>.

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“Can Mahatma Gandhi Save China?”: A Glimpse of the Discourse on Gandhi in China’s *Eastern Miscellany*

Prashant Kaushik

ABSTRACT

The rise of Mahatma Gandhi as leader of the Indian National Movement and his methods of nonviolent resistance attracted significant attention among Chinese intellectuals in the early twentieth century. Eastern Miscellany played a leading role in introducing and debating Gandhi’s ideas in China, particularly their applicability to Chinese conditions. Drawing on the magazine’s archives, this article shows that Gandhi’s life, personality, and satyagraha were closely examined as potential strategies for overcoming semi-colonialism and warlordism. Chinese intellectuals actively debated whether Gandhian methods could serve China’s liberation struggles. Although many thinkers increasingly interpreted Gandhi and the Indian movement through a Marxist-Leninist framework, influenced by the Communist International, by the 1930s, intellectual interest in Gandhi and his nonviolent philosophy continued in China until the mid-twentieth century.

Key words: *Mahatma Gandhi, China, Eastern Miscellany, save, discourse.*

Introduction

IT IS COMMON FOR Chinese leaders visiting India to invoke Mahatma Gandhi’s view that India and China share a common destiny. This raises important questions about why such references persist, how Gandhi is understood in China, and whether China historically engaged with his nonviolent methods. These questions can be

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explored by examining Gandhi's place in Chinese intellectual discourse. In the early twentieth century, several Chinese thinkers, including Taiyan Zhang (Binglin Zhang, 1869–1936), recognised a cultural affinity between India and China and advocated Sino-Indian fraternity, viewing both as natural allies (Lin 1999; Deepak 2001: 44). Zhang even perceived hope for India's resurgence under a "certain Indian barrister" in South Africa, later understood to be Gandhi (Deepak 1999).

Gandhi, for his part, expressed admiration for the Chinese people, praising their "thrift, industry, resourcefulness and internal unity" (CWMG 1979: 223) and describing them as highly intelligent and diligent, particularly in agriculture (Gandhi 1928: 227). As an early advocate of diasporic nationalism, he also received active support from Chinese communities in South Africa led by Leung Quinn (Guan Jun) (Gandhi 1928: 226; Biswas 2013).

Gandhi's leadership of the Indian National Congress and his development of nonviolent resistance and satyagraha made him a significant figure within Chinese discussions of the Indian national movement (Xue 1998: 42). According to Prof. Quanyu Shang, the first phase of Gandhi studies in China extended from the 1920s to the 1950s (Shang 2013). During this period, twenty-seven books and over one hundred articles on Gandhi appeared in Chinese journals and newspapers, including *The Eastern Miscellany* (Dongfang Zazhi), *National News Weekly*, and *China Youth*.

This article examines the first phase through archival material published in *The Eastern Miscellany* between 1920 and 1948. It first highlights the magazine's significance in Chinese intellectual life, then analyses debates surrounding Gandhi's personality and nonviolent methods, including their potential relevance for China's struggle against semi-colonialism and warlordism. Finally, it argues that, by the 1930s, many intellectuals had adopted Marxist-Leninist interpretations under the influence of the Communist International, while sustained interest in Gandhi and his ideas continued in China.

THE EASTERN MISCELLANY

Dong Fang Zazhi, known as *The Eastern Miscellany* in English (1904–1948) was one of the most widely circulated and influential magazines in China during the first half of the twentieth century. It was started by the Commercial Press (*Shangwu Yinshu Guan*) on 11 March 1904 in Shanghai. It published 44 volumes running into 819 issues consisting of around 20000 articles (Tao 2013:18). It remained in publication during an eventful and momentous period in history and bore witness to the change, strife, and turmoil within and without China. All these

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found ample reflection in its columns. In five decades of its existence, it actively participated in the intellectual discourse inside China, and served as a medium of exchange of ideas between China and other parts of the world. At the same time, it also reviewed and discussed academic and intellectual ideas giving space to diverse opinions and ideologies.

Since the magazine’s target readership consisted of intellectuals, politicians, officials, and overseas Chinese, it paid more attention to the academic, intellectual and political scenario of the times both at the domestic and global levels. It was commonly said in China during the first half of the twentieth century that “you can know the affairs of China and the world by just getting a copy of *The Eastern Miscellany*” (“*de yi ben Dongfang Zazhi, bian zu zhi zhong wai jinshi*”). Such was the popularity of the magazine that at one time its circulation reached 60,000 copies, the maximum for any contemporary magazine. Understandably, it was called “the magazine of magazines, the paramount magazine” (“*Zazhi de zazhi, zazhi de zhongzhen*”) (Xinhua 2002).

Having witnessed and recorded the unfolding of major events in the first half of the twentieth century, the *Eastern Miscellany* became a significant repository of historical material and debates. Given this significance, all the volumes of the magazine have been republished and digitised by the Commercial Press, China and are held in various libraries across the globe (Ru 2010).

India was regarded as a close neighbour by Chinese. The *Eastern Miscellany* paid close attention to events taking place in India and almost every aspect of India such as politics, economics, industry, railways, and society was discussed in its columns. Notably, Mahatma Gandhi also became an enduring subject of discussion for the magazine. A series of seven special columns titled “*Gandhi and New India*” (*Gandi yu xin Yindu*) focusing on Gandhi, and a special issue consisting of 13 articles to mourn his demise (*zhuidao Gandi zhuanhao*) besides more than fifty other articles on almost every twist and turn in the Indian National Movement and the role of Mahatma Gandhi stands testimony to this. The discourse surrounding Mahatma Gandhi that unfolded in the pages of the *Eastern Miscellany* certainly deserves a closer scrutiny.

EMERGENCE OF GANDHI IN CHINESE DISCOURSE (1920-30)

The third decade of the twentieth century was an eventful period in India and China. While India struggled to throw off the British yoke, China sought to end warlordism and semi-colonialism. Under such circumstances, Mahatma Gandhi, his life, ideas, nonviolent methods of political struggle, and movements found loud resonance in China.

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A total of thirty-nine articles discussing Gandhi appeared in the *Eastern Miscellany* during this period.

The Person

Gandhi's career and family background were introduced to Chinese readers for the first time by the *Eastern Miscellany* during the early 1920s. Chinese noted that Gandhi was son of a prime minister of a small princely state (Porbandar), who went to England to study law, practiced law in Bombay on his return, fought for the rights of Indians in South Africa, organized a medical team in South Africa to rescue war injured, got soaked in asceticism, left all his wealth, stopped practicing law, and fully devoted himself to social causes (Hua 1922b).

Chinese regarded Gandhi as one of the three great Indians in the modern era, alongside Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) in literature and Jagadish Chandra Bose (1858-1937) in science (Hua 1922a). Gandhi was considered great in the "aspect of real action" and was called a leader in the realm of Indian thought. He was hailed as a saint on whose advice Hindus and Muslims ceased animosities and aroused by him, Indians burnt immeasurable quantity of foreign cloth and started using handmade *khadi*. Chinese credited Gandhi with inspiring a revolution against the British, empty-handed (Hua 1922a).

Seen as a "revolutionary" by the Chinese, "Gandhi of new India" was mentioned alongside "Lenin of new Russia" as "two greatest figures in the world" (Hua 1922b). It was mentioned that though Gandhi had no real political power, his latent force was enough to shake the world. He was hailed as the first person to challenge modern Western civilization and as the first revolutionary to cherish great ideals and to exercise immense influence on humanity in the cultural and spiritual realms (Hua 1922b).

The Chinese called Gandhi an embodiment of Eastern culture who stood for freeing India from the British yoke through passive resistance, breaking away from Western civilization, and independently developing India's ancient traditional culture. He was considered an Indian Rousseau and an Indian Tolstoy, advocating satyagraha and opposing violence (Hua 1922b). From the perspective of social revolution, Gandhi was equated with Gautama Buddha, and Chinese writers highlighted the commonalities between the social impact of Gandhi's movements and early Buddhism (Yu 1922).

The Leader

In China, the demand by Indians for "Home Rule" was seen as a sign of political awakening in India (EM 1920; 1921a). The magazine described the Indian National Movement as "a peaceful revolutionary

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movement" and a "non-cooperation movement" led by Gandhi.¹ Gandhi was called the pivot of the movement whose aim was resurgence of India's old morality, to make Indians see fellow countrymen as family members and shun all differences. It was noted that Gandhi opposed aspects of Western culture, such as subservience to industry, material civilization, money worship, and warmongering (EM 1921b). It was noted that Indian masses looked up to Gandhi for guidance and respectfully called him "Mahatma" (Song 1924a). People prayed for him when he was in prison, and public sentiments were aroused when news of his illness came (Gandhi was operated on for appendicitis on 12 January 1924) (Song 1924a). Chinese noted that Gandhi attached immense importance to the revival of cottage and small industries.

Ideas and Methods

Methods of nonviolence, satyagraha, and non-cooperation employed by Mahatma Gandhi in India's freedom struggle attracted considerable attention in China. Chinese observers emphasized that Gandhi firmly rejected violence and relied on moral resistance to pursue justice. They noted that participants in the Non-Cooperation Movement boycotted British goods, education, employment, and institutions, creating a form of passive resistance that could not easily be suppressed by armed force (1921b).

Chinese commentators described the Non-Cooperation Movement as distinctly "Indian in style and content" (Yu 1922). Gandhi's ideals were understood as both political and social: abolishing caste hierarchies, using passive resistance and individual self-sacrifice for national renewal, promoting religious tolerance, and encouraging economic self-reliance through the spinning wheel and domestic industry (Yu 1922). Chinese writers also highlighted Gandhi's role in promoting Hindu-Muslim unity, reducing religious antagonism, and increasing women's participation in public life (Yu 1922).

Chinese intellectuals observed that Gandhi's familiarity with the British constitutional system enabled him to strategically organize and regulate the movement while maintaining a commitment to nonviolence (Yu 1922). They remarked that his methods challenged Western assumptions that leadership is necessarily a "product of violence," showing instead that moral authority could mobilize mass participation (Yu 1922).

The concept of satyagraha was introduced to Chinese readers as an expression of Gandhi's distinctive philosophy and personality. Writers asked whether "satayagraha" was not a concept "stirring the whole world" and whether Gandhi's arrest was not a major event in

the East (Yi 1922). Chinese commentators traced the development of satyagraha to Gandhi's experiences in South Africa, linking it to Hindu influences, his upbringing, and the Bhagavad Gita (Yi 1922).

Non-cooperation was acknowledged as Gandhi's primary weapon, grounded in a clear theory and systematic plan (Hua 1922c). Chinese commentators argued that if non-cooperation succeeded in liberating India from British rule, it would prove that revolution and resistance need not rely solely on violent means. Instead, a peaceful path to transformation could emerge through collective moral force and refusal to cooperate with oppression (Hua 1922c).

Translations of Gandhi's statements, including his confession in a Bombay court after his arrest on 10 March 1922 and letters written after communal violence during the Prince of Wales's visit in 1921, were published to help Chinese readers understand his critique of British rule and his commitment to nonviolence (Hua 1922d; Gao 1922). These texts demonstrated how Gandhi viewed peaceful non-cooperation as beneficial not only for India but also for England.

Although Gandhi rejected the term "Gandhism," Chinese intellectuals treated "Gandhism" (Gandhi zhuyi) as inseparable from his personality and ideals (Hua 1922a). For them, it represented a quiet Eastern civilizational ethos rooted in Indian religious traditions. The non-cooperation movement was viewed as a profound political awakening of the Indian people (Hua 1922a). Chinese writers argued that Gandhi's reliance on spiritual force rather than violence was deeply Indian in character and contributed to the movement's rapid success (Huang 1923). He was praised as a political leader who mobilized the natural spirit of the Indian masses and whose words and actions inspired broad social awakening (Huang 1923).

Some Chinese writers also viewed Gandhi as an ascetic philosopher whose political outlook reflected moral discipline and simplicity (Fan 1923a). To explain his ideology in greater detail, translations and excerpts from works such as *Gandhi, the Apostle: His Trial and Message* by Haridas T. Mazumdar, articles from *Anand Bazar*, and books by Manabendra Nath Roy — *India in Transition* and *One Year of Non-cooperation: From Ahmedabad to Gaya* — were presented to Chinese readers (Fan 1923a).

CAN MAHATMA GANDHI SAVE CHINA?

Chinese intellectuals in the first half of the twentieth century closely observed global mass movements while seeking ways to rescue China from warlordism and imperialism. They recognised two broad paths of mass struggle — armed revolution and peaceful resistance — and Gandhi's methods became central to these debates (Hua 1923a).

Broadly, three views emerged: support for Gandhian nonviolence, opposition to it, and advocacy of a combined approach.

First, support for Gandhian methods.

Chinese commentator Hua (1923a) compared three contemporary mass movements — Fascism in Italy, Sinn Féin in Ireland, and the Indian Non-Cooperation Movement — to evaluate strategies suitable for China. While the first two were seen as successful, Hua argued that Gandhi's movement, though not yet victorious, had already shaken British authority. Gandhi's nonviolence, satyagraha, and non-cooperation were praised for undermining the economic foundations of colonial rule (Hua 1923a). Unlike Chinese mass movements, which often relied on meetings and petitions, Gandhi's strategy involved concrete actions, such as tax refusal and boycotts of British goods, schools, courts, and government institutions. These tactics became powerful when widely practiced.

Hua (1923a) insisted that the Non-Cooperation Movement was not passive but disciplined and organized. In his view, successful movements required military-like discipline, a clearly identified enemy, and a definite goal — all of which Gandhi's movement possessed through its focus on Swaraj. Hua (1923b) further argued that India's political split between advocates of armed revolution and supporters of nonviolence mirrored China's own situation. He suggested that Chinese people, like Gandhi, could draw upon traditional Eastern values of moral integrity and passive resistance to evil. Non-cooperation, he argued, meant preserving personal integrity and truthfulness while resisting oppression, making Gandhian methods worthy of attention by Chinese youth inclined toward violent revolution (Hua 1923b).

Second, opposition to Gandhian methods.

Not all Chinese intellectuals accepted Gandhian strategies. Jian (1923) argued that China's excessive tolerance and peacefulness had enabled imperial domination and prevented radical transformation. For him, China needed industrialization and modernization along Western lines rather than spinning wheels or economic boycotts inspired by Gandhi. Jian (1923) cautioned that China must address its own conditions rather than follow foreign prescriptions.

Some critics described the Non-Cooperation Movement as passive and lacking constructive elements (EM 1922). They believed it might achieve temporary success but could not sustain long-term transformation. Although Gandhi's sincerity was acknowledged, commentators argued that his strategy relied on gradualism and

compromise (EM 1922). They also expressed concern that the movement increasingly depended on untrained masses, which made it difficult for Gandhi to maintain control — as shown in the Bombay riots during the Prince of Wales's visit and the Chauri Chaura incident (EM 1922). Chinese observers noted that the movement initially intensified but weakened after Gandhi's arrest in March 1922 and divisions among Muslim factions (You 1926). Song (1924b) criticized Gandhi as a religious figure lacking political skills and blamed him for weakening the Indian movement.

Similarly, Dong (1929) observed that despite peaceful objectives, the movement's evolution became fierce and often violent, involving participants from all social classes. He argued that Gandhi could not control these forces, and after Chauri Chaura his leadership declined while hostility intensified. Some Chinese also questioned Gandhi's willingness to accept imprisonment. Mingyang Zhang argued that while revolutionaries should not fear jail, leaders should not surrender unless absolutely necessary (Zhang 1930). He suggested that Indian leaders weakened the struggle by going to prison and argued that successful revolution required stronger resistance and revised tactics (Zhang 1930).

Third, advocacy of a combined approach.

A third group sought a synthesis of passive and active methods. Zhuo (1923), discussing how to save China, argued that Gandhian passive resistance could be applied economically but not politically. Since China's primary issue was political warlordism, active resistance was necessary. While economic boycotts worked in colonial India, Zhuo believed China's circumstances differed fundamentally. He criticized Cai Yuanpei's resignation from Peking University on Gandhian grounds, arguing that if morally upright people withdrew from public roles, evil forces would dominate society. According to Zhuo, China's decay resulted from excessive passivity, which allowed corrupt elements to dominate; therefore, active resistance should precede passive resistance (Zhuo 1923).

Chinese intellectuals also compared Gandhian methods with the Russian Revolution. Fan (1923b) noted that the Russian model achieved rapid success through armed struggle but involved immense suffering and destruction, whereas India's peaceful approach emphasized self-sacrifice and minimized losses. However, the Indian path had yet to produce definitive results. Thus, Fan concluded that both violent and peaceful revolutions had advantages and limitations, and the appropriate strategy should be chosen according to a country's specific political and social conditions.

Praise and Encomiums

While the discussion about the efficacy of Gandhian methods continued in China, the columns of *The Eastern Miscellany* continued to shower praise on Gandhi. In his account of Gandhi's role in the Indian National Movement, Shi (1930) mentioned that the holy name of Mahatma Gandhi, once again shining bright in the East, was being watched by the entire world. For Shi, Gandhi was "a great man of the contemporary times" (*dangdai weiren*) and "a saint of the East" (*dongfang de shengjie*). Shi (1930) elaborated that Gandhi shook the entire world through his conduct. Delving into Gandhi's career, Shi (1930) mentioned that Gandhi despised materialism, overcame hardships, and was deeply religious. In South Africa, Gandhi advocated applying Christ's doctrine of love in politics, which troubled the British imperialists immensely. Even Gandhi's sworn enemy General Jan Smuts was so moved by his ways that he started to respect him. From his days in South Africa, Gandhi devoted himself to the struggle of the liberation of the Indian nation. But Gandhi's weapon of resistance was nonviolence because he believed that violence is evil, and that the evil depends on violence (Shi 1930).

Shi (1930) also highlighted the social aspect of Gandhi's movement, noting that he sought cooperation among various religions to remain united in the Indian cause. Shi (1930) emphasised that Gandhi had been agitating for reforming the traditional marriage system in India, promoting the modernisation of Indian society, and wanting to abolish pointless rituals. Gandhi was also the most fierce and influential advocate of the abolition of the caste system. His efforts led to the entry of people from lower castes into temples and schools. Though some resented Gandhi, the Indian masses worshiped him like a god, Shi (1930) noted.

Gandhi's successful miracle, Shi (1930) mentioned, was manifested through his "miraculous eccentricity" (*shenqi de guaipi*). His ability lay not in his methods but in his willingness to sacrifice himself. He knew that he must build a new India, and if needed, he was ready to sacrifice his life for this cause. Gandhi's ideas also manifested themselves through his sincere promotion of love. He firmly believed that love was the greatest strength in the world, and that it was shown by bearing suffering rather than taking revenge. Even when the masses did not understand his principles, they deeply trusted his behaviour of sacrifice, sympathy, and self-effacing modesty which made him so influential (Shi 1930). Touched by his personality and moved by his soul, common people started following him naturally.

Chinese praised Gandhi as a "soul mover" (*xinling de gandong zhe*). They mentioned that the institutions he led worked smoothly because

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he was a wise organizer and efficient manager. In Gandhi's observation of things, there was a complete absence of disappointment, he only requested everyone to be prepared to bear suffering because one could achieve success sooner or later through bearing suffering. Gandhi was very modest and felt unhappy when people addressed him as "mahatma", "religious guru" or "political leader." But he felt very happy when children addressed him as "bapu." For Chinese Gandhi was undoubtedly a great person with strong will and sincere self-confidence for they were amazed to see that such a frail person was challenging the most powerful empire in the world.

Outrage over Gandhi's arrest on the night of 4 May 1930, following the breaking of the Salt Law was also visible in the columns of *The Eastern Miscellany*. Xiuren (1930) wrote that the arrest of a great person like Gandhi, who was held in high esteem by all Indians, showed that the British government would keep resorting to oppressive measures to deal with the Indian revolutionary movement. However, the Chinese asserted that the awakening of the Indian nation was very inspiring, heroic, and soul-stirring. There was an unrelenting momentum in the revolutionary tide, surging ahead, making one feel that such a great revolutionary spirit would never succumb to the violence unleashed by British rule (Xiuren 1930).

Gandhi Critiqued (1931-40)

The ups and downs in the Indian National Movement continued through the 1930s. Of the three Round Table Conferences, Gandhi participated only in the second (September-December 1931) as the sole representative of the Indian National Congress. Gandhi opposed the establishment of separate electorates for minority communities and went on a fast until death to revoke the provisions for separate electorates for the untouchables, which led to the Poona Pact (24 September 1932). Gandhi resigned as leader and member of the Congress Party on 30 October 1934 to focus on the education and upliftment of grassroots in rural India. He became politically active only in the early 1940s, when Britain sought India's support in the Second World War.

Marxism-Leninism took root in China during the period under discussion and became popular among Chinese intellectuals and scholars. Many Chinese commentators were influenced by the Sixth Congress of the Communist International (1928), which reviewed the policy of communist parties forming alliances with the national bourgeoisie in colonial countries. Its assessment of "Gandhism" as "an ideology directed against the revolution of the popular masses" (Degras 1960:519) and calling Gandhi an "agent of Britain" (Degras

1960:528) influenced many Chinese, prompting them to study the Indian National Movement and Gandhi in light of class contradictions and material dialectics. A total of 24 articles discussing Gandhi appeared in *The Eastern Miscellany* between 1931 and 1940.

The tendency to use the Marxist paradigm to write about Gandhi and India was most visible in the writings of Zhi Yu, who, interestingly, had seen Gandhi's leadership in a positive light earlier. Yu (1931a) now went for an elaborate analysis of the Indian revolution to "provide useful lessons (to China)". Whereas earlier Chinese had discussed "Gandhi" as being central to the movements launched by him, Yu started using "Gandhism" and highlighted the internal contradictions of "Gandhism", evidently taking a Marxist approach.² He argued that the central elements of the Indian revolution were landlords and rural feudal classes, the newly emerging urban bourgeois class, small businesspeople and craftsmen destroyed by British business and industry, and the biggest problem in the path of the Indian revolution was the contradiction of class interests (*jieji liyi de chongtu*).

While discussing the political situation in India, Yu (1931b) considered the emergence of Indian National Movement as a natural outcome of the British occupation and India's industrialization. Yu believed that, though Gandhi worked for the revival of the Indian handicrafts industry and the boycott of British goods to relieve rural poverty, Gandhism couldn't suppress the tide of India's industrialization. Yu saw opposition to industrialization and machinery in the Indian revolutionary movement as a conservative tendency and blamed Gandhi for leading it. According to Yu (1931b), Indian opposition was rooted in the British origins of Indian industrialisation and the ascetic element in Hinduism, which was fundamentally contradictory to industrialisation.

Yu (1931b) posited that Gandhi's biggest mistake was not knowing the difference between an industrial society and an agricultural society. India, Yu suggested, had already begun to tread the path to industrialization, and reality no longer allowed it to revert to an agricultural society. The outcome of reverting to an agricultural society would be to make the working classes forever cling to the countryside. They will keep lacking in the organizational discipline of an industrial society and will never be able to forge themselves into a revolutionary force. Whereas the outcome of Indian industrialization would include the elimination of the residues of feudal forces, especially the caste system, from the Indian society. Since the Gandhian revolutionaries (*Gandi yipai de gemingzhe*) opposed industrialization, they could not destroy the feudal forces of the caste system, which were umbilically dependent on the agrarian economy. In this manner, it was difficult

for the Indian masses to create social and national consciousness to make their national movement successful.

Yu (1931c) located Gandhism within the dialectics of methods and goals, explaining the theory and practice of the Non-Cooperation Movement. Yu argued that, originally, the Non-Cooperation Movement and Gandhi's nonviolence were closely linked; however, their relationship remained ambiguous. To understand them clearly, Yu (1931c) argued, non-cooperation should be divided into two aspects: the goal and the method. Gandhism, Yu argued, was based on India's traditional thought. According to Yu (1931c:33), "*Gandhism believed that a person should totally sever ties with 'the evil', and since 'the evil' is built over violence, so one must sever links with violence and while dealing with violence, one must use peaceful resistance. The problem whether peaceful resistance can win over the violence of the adversary does not arise, because 'non-cooperation' is already a goal. As long as one can practice non-cooperation, one can do 'satyagraha', (and) performing 'satyagraha' itself means that one has reached the moral goal. As far as success or failure are concerned, the question does not arise.*" Yu continued that the point of consideration for Gandhism was totally personal, moral, religious, and not at all social. But when Gandhi made the Non-Cooperation Movement into a programme of social reforms, non-cooperation no longer remained just the goal; it became the method, "the method of reforming the society" (*shehui gaige de shouduan*).

According to Yu (1931c), however, two things showed the inherent weaknesses of the Non-Cooperation Movement. The first was Gandhi's stand that it should be nonviolent. The masses, nevertheless, saw non-cooperation as a method. So, when sentiments were on the boil, they resorted to violence without any concern for the correctness of the method. Though Gandhi made earnest appeals against violence, violent incidents continued in various places. The most notable was the Chauri Chaura incident, which exposed the weakness of Gandhism. The eruption of violence illustrated how difficult it was to carry out peaceful non-cooperation to the very end.

The second thing that posed difficulties in the path of the Non-Cooperation Movement was the contradictions between the interests of various classes, posited Yu (1931c). According to Yu (1931c), the point of departure for Gandhism was "*satyagraha*" for which it was even ready to sacrifice material interests. However, such a sacrifice could only be made by the upper classes, who were not worried about their food or clothing. It was impossible for the ordinary masses to sacrifice their material interests. A conflict of interests emerged between India's national bourgeoisie on the one hand and peasants and workers on the other with the spread of Gandhism among the

masses. This was because the Indian bourgeoisie had joined the Non-Cooperation Movement only to seek political self-rule and tax relief, whereas the peasants and workers were not interested in these goals. They had their own vital interests. Gandhism gained the support of workers and peasants because it supported non-payment of taxes. Common villagers saw government taxes, land rent, and debt interest as one and the same thing. They thought that not paying taxes meant not paying all these, and that it would eliminate all their financial burdens. Workers believed the movement would increase their wages and their freedom. So, when the movement gained popularity among peasants and workers in 1922, the landlord and bourgeois classes began to feel perturbed. The leadership of the Congress party, which mainly consisted of the bourgeoisie, declared that refusal to pay taxes did not include the land rent payable to landlords. Congress leaders made it clear to the peasants that the Non-Cooperation Movement aimed to oppose only the British government, not the landlords. But such announcements only negatively affected Gandhi's reputation among peasants and could not solve the conflict of interests between the bourgeoisie and the peasants and workers. According to Yu (1931c) this conflict of interest was the biggest reason for the failure of the Non-Cooperation Movement. The trend of nonviolent resistance inevitably leading to violence repeated itself when Gandhi launched the Civil Disobedience Movement as well. On this basis, Yu (1931c) posited that, as revolutionary forces spread among the peasants and workers, the Indian revolution took an unavoidable turn towards armed rebellion.

In view of the above criticism, it is pertinent to underscore that, first, some Chinese commentators lacked an in-depth understanding of Gandhi's views. As argued by Bipan Chandra (2012) and Anthony Parel (2009), Gandhi's thinking on machinery underwent gradual development, and he was opposed to the craze for machines, particularly when they displaced the labour of the many and enriched the few. He was wary of machines engulfing civilization, but he cherished every invention of science made to benefit all. He was not opposed to modern large-scale industry. Second, the Chinese failed to grasp that a major ideological dimension of the Indian National Movement was the overall social outlook of Gandhi and his followers. Gandhi never accepted a class analysis of society and the role of class struggle. He was also opposed to the use of violence, even in defence of the interests of the poor. His fundamental outlook was that of social transformation. He remained committed to basic changes in the existing economic and political power system. Moreover, he was constantly moving in a radical direction post-1930s. In 1933, he opined

that ‘without a material revision of vested interests, the condition of the masses can never be improved.’ He was beginning to oppose private property and repeatedly argued for the nationalization of large-scale industry. He condemned the exploitation of the masses inherent in both capitalism and landlordism (Chandra 2012: 536-7).

Gandhi and the Round Table Conference

The Chinese commentators eagerly followed Gandhi’s response to the British overtures made after the First Round Table Conference and his unconditional release from the prison in January 1931 (Yu 1931). However, Gandhi’s support for the Round Table Conference by signing the Gandhi-Irwin Pact appeared “very surprising” to many Chinese commentators. After scrutinizing the pact’s provisions, Mingyang Zhang (1931) argued that Gandhi did not take the demands of the Indian revolutionary masses into account when signing it. In another write-up, Zhang (1932) equated the discussions on drafting the federal constitution for India during the Second Round Table Conference without giving independence or dominion status to India with a writer who first wrote the notes and appendix of a book rather than the main content.

On the other hand, Songhua (1931) reported about Gandhi’s journey to London and the important speeches he delivered during the Second Round Table Conference.³ Mentioning that Gandhi pleaded the case of India’s downtrodden peasantry in London, Songhua (1931) lamented that there was no one to take the cudgels on behalf of the peasantry suffering from pain and hardships in the Eastern world (referring to China), whereas the Indian peasantry was fortunate to have Gandhi as their spokesperson. Songhua (1931) took a different standpoint from that of Mingyang Zhang and argued that based on Gandhi’s speeches and actions before and after his visit to London, one can see that he had been consistent in his spirit and actions all along. He never had high expectations for the conference and went to England to enhance understanding and awareness of India among British people.

The fact that the Chinese were paying utmost attention to Gandhi’s visit to London was also attested by a small write-up about the reaction of the maidservant of the house where Gandhi was going to stay in London. It was reported that the maidservant wanted to warn Gandhi about how inadequate his attire of a simple loincloth would be in the harsh winter of England. But before she could do that Gandhi started using woollen cloth to wrap himself after reaching England (Bu 1931).

TAN YUNSHAN'S ACCOUNT OF THE VISIT TO GANDHI

Tan Yunshan (1898-1983), the founding director of the *Cheena-Bhavana* at Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan, played an instrumental role in introducing Gandhi's appeal to Chinese readers through his first-person account which appeared in the *Eastern Miscellany* in 1932 (see: Tan 1932).⁴ Tan met Mahatma Gandhi at *the Swaraj Ashram in Bardoli* at the end of April 1931. Fulfilling his long-held desire to meet Gandhi, Tan discussed the situation in China and India with him and handed him a letter from the Dalai Lama.⁵ While discussing China and India, Gandhi told Tan that, since he was preoccupied with India, he did not have much time to study the situation in China. But he was aware that China had very old and rich culture and history. Chinese nation was great and peaceful. Such a great and peaceful nation will definitely shoulder the responsibility of world peace in the future. When asked which was the best method to save China, Gandhi replied that the best method was that of truth and peace.

While accompanying Gandhi to a village meeting, Tan was deeply touched by witnessing the affection that common villagers had for Gandhi. Gandhi, as Tan described, had no possessions or family property; his sons and wife were also wandering with him on the revolutionary path to save the country and the people. Tan wrote that when he had not met Gandhi, he used to only venerate him as "a *Mahatma*" and "a great spiritual personality," but after meeting him Tan felt that it was Gandhi's "ordinariness" along with being "a *Mahatma*" and "a great spiritual personality" which made him truly great. Tan called Gandhi "the embodiment of pure sincerity in the world." According to Tan, it was easy to speak about "sincerity", "love" and "peace", but not so easy to practice them. However, Gandhi was not only able to put these into practice, but he himself was composed of these three. The fusion of these three created his personality, thoughts, and doctrine, giving birth to his various movements.

CONCLUSION

The discourse on Mahatma Gandhi that unfolded in *The Eastern Miscellany's* columns was truly phenomenal. It covered almost every aspect of Gandhi's personality, methods, and ideas. The focus on Mahatma Gandhi that began with his emergence as the mass leader of the Indian National Movement continued through the movement's various twists and turns. Gandhi's nonviolent methods and ways of resisting the most powerful empire of the world bare handed aroused much interest among Chinese. While some Chinese found affinities

between the traditional spirit of resistance of the Chinese people and the ideas espoused by Gandhi, others were vehemently opposed to adopting Gandhian ideas and methods in China. Thus, the discourse traversed between encomiums, criticism and caution. Nonetheless, its most salient feature remained the scrutiny and attention bestowed on Gandhi by Chinese commentators and intellectuals even going to the extent of writing first person accounts of meetings with Gandhi. One of the reasons for this scrutiny and attention was the search by Chinese people to rescue China from the onslaught of feudalism, warlordism, and semi-colonialism. And being just across the Himalayas, Gandhi figured prominently in this search.

Notes

1. Chinese have used terms such as “revolutionary movement” and “national movement” interchangeably to describe the Indian National Movement. This article has retained the original terms used in Chinese writings.
2. Yu (1930a) did not elaborate about what he considered as Gandhism, or what exactly was Gandhism but went on to write on non-cooperation and non-violence. “Gandhism” as a set of ideas and actions was better explained in earlier writings in the magazine such as *Hua* (1922a).
3. See: CWMG (1971) “Speech at Federal Structure Committee”, Vol.48, pp. 13-20. CWMG (1971) “Speech at Meeting of Labour M.P.s”, Vol.48, pp.21-23. CWMG (1971) “Speech at Federal Structure Committee”, Vol.48, pp.26-38. CWMG (1971) “Talk with Representatives of Cotton Industry” (at Edgeworth and Darwen), Vol.48, pp.66-68.
4. Tan Yunshan also translated *Hind Swaraj* written by M.K. Gandhi into Chinese. See: Tan Yunshan “My first visit to Gandhiji” in Tan Chung ed. (1999) *In the Footsteps of Xuanzang: Tan Yun-Shan and India*. New Delhi: IGNCA.
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Gandhi and Art

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ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi's image is of an ascetic man among art critics and in the public mind. But Gandhi sincerely felt that there was enough Art in his life. He was well-connected with the world of Art. He had cordial relations with contemporary creative minds such as Leo Tolstoy, Romain Rolland, Rabindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Anand Coomaraswamy, and Dilip Kumar Roy. He had his stand on various debates related to Art. It will be interesting to explore Gandhi's views on Art in the context of colonialism and the struggle for independence. It will shed new light on an unexplored aspect of his multifaceted personality.

Key words: *Art, Life, Rasa, Truth, Goodness, Beauty, Swadeshi Art, Victorian Values*

A CONTEMPORARY OF GANDHI, noted art critic Ananda Coomaraswamy once said that Gandhi was a moral saint but not an aesthetic one (Naravane 1977). Partha Mitter, in his landmark work, *Art and Nationalism*, writes that, in Gandhi's programme, there was no room for Art (Mitter, 1994, p. 379). Even today, not only among art critics but also in the public mind, Gandhi's image is that of an ascetic man. From his appearance, dress, and lifestyle, one would not think that he has anything to do with Art. But Gandhi sincerely felt that there was enough artistry in his life. Gandhi had confessed to Nandlal Bose, the principal of the Kala Bhavana in Santiniketan, that the fine arts, and especially music, were very close to his heart. He said that had he not been involved in the national movement, he would have dedicated his entire life to the Art of music.

Signs of interest in Art are evident in the articles published in *Indian Opinion*, the newspaper Gandhi edited in South Africa. He

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read Anand Coomaraswamy's *Essays on National Idealism* immediately after its publication and was quite impressed by the chapters on Indian Music. He also recommended this book to his friends in South Africa and India. He also read Tolstoy's *What is Art?*, which had a lasting impact on his views on Art. He even got this book translated into Gujarati (Parel 2018).

Nandlal Bose wrote an article on Gandhi titled *Bapuji* in 1940. In it, he expresses the following thoughts about Gandhi and Art:

From Mahatmaji's life-style artists may find inspiration and develop their own character. Mahatmaji is indeed an artist and his creativity finds expression in the building up of his own self, in his attempt to transform himself from a man into a divine being, as also guide others in that direction. It is common knowledge that through his contact a large number of people have reached divinity. His thoughts have definiteness and clarity, his heart is pure, and he is ready to boldly sacrifice his life for the love of others. Thus, he has conquered death. To dismiss his ideal is difficult because he first practices himself what he preaches to others. Here is a rare human being whose clear heart is open for all to look into. He has absolutely nothing to hide. Like clear sunlight, his words reflect his mind. Indian artists, if they want, may transform themselves by following the model of his character. Without having a strong character an artist produces work that lacks force or foundation (Bose, 1983-84, p.164).

Leading contemporary artists and writers such as Leo Tolstoy, Romain Rolland, Rabindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Anand Coomaraswamy, and Dilip Kumar Roy, had cordial relations with Gandhi. Gandhi used to have dialogue with them on Art. One objective of this article is to understand Gandhi's views on Art in the context of those of these stalwarts.

Art for Life

In the 19th century, the idea of Art for Art's sake, or Art for life, was debated in the art world. The French philosopher Victor Cousin said that Art should be judged on its purely aesthetic merits, not on its relationship to political, social, or moral values. At the end of the nineteenth century, a movement called Decadent began in the world of literature and Art in Western Europe. It also supported the ideology of Art for Art's sake. 'Art is against nature' was the main argument of that movement. It was against the accepted social values about morality and sexuality. *The Yellow Book*, published in London, was a mouthpiece of the Decadent movement. Aubrey Beardsley was its first art editor. This periodical challenged prevailing Victorian moral

values. Oscar Wilde used to write for this magazine. Wilde was later sentenced to prison for homosexuality. While studying law in London, Gandhi may have come across these developments in the field of Art.

Wilde was a leading literary figure in England and an ideologue for Art for Art. His famous novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and a book on literary criticism, *Critic as Artist*, were published during Gandhi's stay in London. In *Critic as Artist*, Wilde says that all Art is immoral because it does not fit into what society defines as moral (Wilde, 1997, p.98). He elaborates that emotion for the sake of emotion is the aim of Art, and emotion for the sake of action is the aim of the practical organization of life called society. He further writes, 'Art is out of the reach of morals, for her eyes are fixed upon things beautiful and immortal and ever-changing. To morals belong the lower and less intellectual spheres' (Wilde, 1997, p.127). Wilde gives aesthetics precedence over ethics.

In the debate between Art for Art's sake and Art for life, Gandhi expresses his commitment to the latter. Gandhi comments that 'Oscar Wilde saw beauty only in external form and successfully embellished immorality' (Tendulkar, 1951, p.209). Gandhi writes to Devi Prasad, a student at Santiniketan, that bread comes first, then embellishment (CWMG 79, p. 23). Gandhi says that life should be more beautiful than the beauty created by combining all the arts. Gandhi's contemporary musicologist, Dilip Kumar Roy, has stated that he is the Manasputra (a son born not of one's flesh but of one's spirit) of Tolstoy in this regard (Roy, 1945, p. 23). Interestingly, in the Appendix of *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi recommends *What Is Art?* for further reading. Tolstoy was one of the chief advocates of the party of Art for life.

In the book *What is Art*, Tolstoy writes that Art, like language, is a means of communication and thus aids in the human journey towards perfection. He considers human emotions ever-evolving, as does Art as its medium. He writes that universal Art is created when an intense urge to convey one's feelings to others arises in the artist's mind. He criticizes that the Art of the elite does not arise from such instincts, but only from the desire to seek pleasure. They are ready to pay a good amount to artists for that. Therefore, Tolstoy expresses his feelings in harsh terms, calling Art a prostitute in today's age (Tolstoy, 1899, p. 190).

Tolstoy writes:

The destiny of Art in our time is to transmit from the realm of reason to the realm of feeling the truth that well-being for men consists in being united together and to set up, in place of the existing reign of force, that kingdom of God, i.e. love, which we all recognize to be the highest aim of

human life...The task of Christian Art is to establish brotherly union among men (Tolstoy, 1899, p.211).

Tolstoy's views on Art greatly influenced Gandhi. Rabindranath Tagore thinks beyond the duality of Art for Art's sake and Art for life. According to him, 'the outer world has its own juices, having various qualities which excite our emotional activities. The outer juices have their response in the inner juices of our emotions.' This is called *Rasa* (aesthetic essence) in Sanskrit (Tagore, 1961, p.17). He further writes:

When sense organs regulate our sense of beauty, there is bound to be a sharp contrast between what and what does not appear to be beautiful. When sense is reinforced by sensibility, the distinction ceases to be so pronounced; then our mind may feel attracted by something that may not please the eye at first sight...Further, when our moral sense joins hands, the horizon of our mind extends to an extent where the conflicting notions of beauty and non-beauty fade away...When a piece of wood is rubbed against another, there is fire. Further friction becomes unnecessary. Similarly, when our sense of beauty, sparking out at every conflict of the pleasurable and painful, the good and the bad, finally bursts into flame, and all the contrast of separateness becomes consumed in it...Truth and Beauty become one. Then we perceive that in the realization of Truth, there is joy and quintessence of beauty (Tagore, 1961, p.7).

Tagore's views on Art are very close to those of Tolstoy and Gandhi due to his emphasis on sensibility and morality.

Meeraben (erstwhile Madeleine Slade), a follower of Gandhi once visited Santiniketan. She requested Tagore to explain to her the basic difference between the ideal behind Santiniketan and Gandhi's Ashram at Sabarmati and later Wardha. Tagore explained that the Mahatma's Ashram embodied his faith and practice of self-discipline which was the secret of his achievement, while Santiniketan stood for the fullness of expression which was the source of its joy. The Mahatma was the Prophet of *tapasya* (penance) while he was the poet of *ananda* (joy). Tagore then said that, together, penance and joy were the foundation of Indian philosophy and cultural heritage (Kripalani, 1983-84, p. 111).

Tagore considers all puritanism a reaction that does not represent truth in its normal sense. He comments, 'When enjoyment loses its direct touch with life, growing fastidious and fantastic in its world of elaborate conventions, then comes the call for renunciation which rejects happiness itself as a snare' (Tagore, 1961, p.24).

Nandalal Bose feels that there should be all-round development

of the individual. He thinks that since the individual is the basic unit of society, his actions cannot be evaluated irrespective of social values. Bose was a patriot and humanitarian. Art for life, humanity, and raising the quality of life was inspiring for him. That is why Gandhi said that as an artist Bose came very close to his ideals.

Like Tagore, Romain Rolland does not take sides in the debate of Art for Art's sake or Art for life. He does not agree with Tolstoy's extreme views. Tolstoy resented the heartlessness and ruthlessness. He did not like immersing himself in Art ignoring the surrounding problems. According to Romain Rolland, although those views appear to be humanitarian idealism, they were underpinned by a reactionary attitude (Roy 1945). He writes:

First of all, no true joy is essentially meaningless, and secondly because no personal joy when sincere and deep is self-centered in its play, far less in its repercussions. For, in the mysterious and wonderful scheme of things what brings deep joy to one cannot stop dead there. It is the nature of joy to radiate. Look deep and you can't but be struck by suggestion of this unity in the diverse rhythms of life (Roy, 1945, p.22).

Romain Rolland also comments that a single symphony of Beethoven is certainly worth half-a-dozen social reforms (Roy, 1945, p.13). He believes that the more downtrodden a society is, the more it has a spiritual need for Art. He gives example of Russia to support his argument. He says that there were explosions of splendor in arts and crafts under the imperial tyranny of Tsarist Russia because the spirit refused to be tamed by adversity. He also says, 'The more the soul is suppressed, the more it turns to its inner resources and expresses itself through art' (Roy, 1945 p.22).

Still, there is consensus between Tolstoy and Romain Rolland that the artist's artistic life is strengthened by the trials he quietly undergoes and the sufferings he endures cheerfully. They believe that no true artist could remain detached from the miseries around him. But Romain Rolland also adds that true Art elevates us, even if it is not explicitly embedded in moral values (Roy, 1945, p. 24).

Art and Spirituality

Hegel (1770-1831) defined art from a spiritual point of view. According to him, God manifests himself in nature and in Art in the form of beauty. He writes:

God expresses himself in two ways: in the object and in the subject, in nature and in spirit. Beauty is the shining of the idea through matter. Only the soul, and what pertains to it, is truly beautiful; and therefore,

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the beauty of nature is only the reflection of the natural beauty of the spirit - the beauty has only a spiritual content. But the spiritual must appear in sensuous form. Truth (idea) and beauty (manifested idea) are one and the same thing (Tolstoy, 1899, p.26).

Tolstoy and Gandhi also viewed Art from a spiritual perspective. During his conversation with Dilip Kumar Roy, Gandhi said:

I do maintain that asceticism is the greatest Art in life. For what is Art but beauty in simplicity and what is asceticism but the loftiest manifestation of simple beauty in daily life shorn of artificialities and make-believes? That is why I always say that a true ascetic not only practices Art but lives it (Roy, 1945, p.75).

Answering a question posed by Ramchandran, an art student of Santiniketan, Gandhi said that all true Art must help the soul to realize its inner self. He also asserted that productions of man's Art have their value only so far as they help the soul onward towards self-realization (Tendulkar, 1951, p.209).

When Ramchandran said that the artists claimed to see and find truth through outward beauty, Gandhi replied:

I would reverse the order. I see and find beauty in truth or through truth. All truths, not merely true ideas, but truthful faces, truthful pictures, or songs, are highly beautiful. People generally fail to see beauty in truth. The ordinary man runs away from it and becomes blind to the beauty in it. Whenever men begin to see beauty in truth, then true Art will arise (*Ibid.*).

Gandhi further elaborates on this point by saying that to a true artist, only the face is beautiful which quite apart from its exterior, shines with the truth within the soul. He emphasizes that there is no beauty apart from truth. He gives an example of Socrates to prove that truth may manifest itself in forms that may not be outwardly beautiful. He says that Socrates was the most truthful man of his time and yet his features are said to have been ugliest in Greece. When Ramchandran points out that the most beautiful things have often been created by men whose own lives were not beautiful, Gandhi replies, 'That only means that truth and untruth often co-exist; good and evil are often found together. In an artist also not seldom the right perception of things and the wrong coexist. Truly beautiful creations come when the right perception is at work. If these moments are rare in life, they are also rare in Art.' Gandhi concludes the conversation by highlighting that truth is the first thing to be sought

for, and, beauty and goodness will then be added unto the artist (Tendulkar, 1951, p.211).

Tolstoy gives precedence to goodness over beauty in Art and even considers them contrary to each other. He believes that beauty is the root of all human passions, whereas Goodness helps in overcoming them. For Romain Rolland, Art is the source of joy and a product of beauty. He gives precedence to beauty over truth. His idea of beauty is embedded in morality. He thinks that one can find joy in beauty, whereas truth is often hurtful and disruptive. On this point, Gandhi is at odds with Tolstoy and Romain.

Tagore gives equal importance to goodness and beauty. He writes:

The good is beautiful not merely because of the good it does to us. There is something more to it. What is good is in consonance with creation as a whole and therefore also with the world of men. Whenever we see the Good and True in perfect accord, the Beautiful stands revealed...Beauty is Good in its fullness as Beauty is Good incarnate...Like Beauty, Goodness too leads us towards renunciation...Beauty reveals God's majesty in the midst of his creation. Goodness does the same in the conduct of human living...The beauty of goodness is a thing of much wider and deeper significance. It endows man with Godliness...When we realize this, our whole being overflows with happiness like a river in a flood. We come to know then that nothing in the world can be more beautiful (Tagore, 1961, p.5).

Gandhi found music joy-giving and inspiring. After establishing the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad, Gandhi requested Pandit Vishnu Digambar Paluskar to send a righteous singer to the ashram, thinking that music could be used in the search for truth. Paluskar sent his disciple, Pandit Narayan Moreswar Khare. He started teaching music to the ashram students. He used to arrange prayer meetings in the ashram and sing hymns in them. Khare compiled bhajans sung in prayer meetings in a booklet titled *Ashram Bhajanavali*. He composed those bhajans into ragas. But the bhajans were given simple tunes that common people could sing. When Gandhi began the Salt March in March 1930, he included Khare in the contingent of eighty satyagrahis. Photographs of the Salt March show Khare with Gandhi in the foreground, holding a *tambura*. Singing bhajans to the accompaniment of *tambura*, satyagrahis marched.

On 21 March 1926, in the speech given at the Second Annual Function of the National Music Association, Ahmedabad, Gandhi highlighted the importance of music in life. He said that a person devoid of music was like a beast. He also said that music should be transferred to life so that it would become harmonious. He pointed

out that there could be no Swaraj where there was no harmony and music. If Indians brought music into their life and got rid of discord, there would be unity. Music would be the first step to Swaraj. He connected music with sanitation. He said that where there was filth, squalor, and misery, there could be no music. He brought to the audience's notice that, in the field of music, there was no Hindu-Muslim divide and wished for this harmony to permeate the wider society. He appealed to parents to send their children to the music class because it would help in national uplift. He also found music in the spinning wheel (CWMG 30, pp. 158-159).

Gandhi found Cardinal Newman's Christian hymn, "Lead, Kindly Light," very inspiring. He got it translated into Gujarati by poet Narsimharao Divathia. This Gujarati version *Premal Jyoti* was sung in the Ashram during the prayer on Friday. In 1932, Gandhi started a fast-to-death against the caste system in Yeravda Jail. Then Tagore came to Pune to meet Gandhi. Before breaking his fast after the Poona Pact, Tagore recited one of his poems in front of Gandhi.

Gandhi visited Santiniketan for the last time in December 1945. Rabindranath had passed away in 1941. Gandhi interacted with students and teachers of the Sangit Bhavan. Later, he wrote a letter to Rathindranath, offering vital suggestions on music education. It shows his broad vision of music. He writes, "Music in Santiniketan is charming, but has the professor there come to the conclusion that Bengali music is the last word in that direction? Has Hindustani music, i.e., music before and after Muslim period, anything to give to the world of music? If it has, it should have its due place at Santiniketan. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that Western music which has made immense strides should also blend with the Indian. Visva Bharati is conceived as a world university. This is merely a passing thought of a layman to be transmitted to the music master there" (CWMG, 82, p.251).

Later, in early 1947, Gandhi began a padayatra (walking tour) through the villages of Noakhali to help quell communal riots. It was the most trying period of his life. During the *padayatra*, he would ask his colleagues to sing Tagore's famous Bengali poem, "Ekla Chalo Re" (Walk Alone). He would hold prayer meetings in the village where he halted, and his followers would sing devotional songs. It had a very positive effect on the riot victims' minds. During normal times, Gandhi's public meetings always attracted mammoth crowds. He would make a point of beginning meetings with devotional songs. It pacified the excited people and helped with crowd management.

Tolstoy believes that the value of Art in a society is based on its perception of life and its spiritual understanding (Tolstoy 1899). He

writes that, by the standard of religious perception, the feelings transmitted by Art have always been evaluated (here, religious perception is distinguished from religious cult). He further writes that in every period of history and every human society, there exists an understanding of the meaning of life that represents the highest level to which men of that society have attained, and this understanding is the religious perception of the given time and society (Tolstoy, 1899, p. 157). 'The religious perception of our time, in its widest and most practical application, is the consciousness that our well-being, both material and spiritual, individual and collective, temporal and eternal, lies in the growth of brotherhood among all men-in their loving harmony with one another,' writes Tolstoy (Tolstoy, 1899, p.159).

According to Tolstoy, a real work of Art destroys in the consciousness of the receiver, the dualism between himself and the artist, and also between himself and all whose minds receive this work of Art (Tolstoy, 1899, p.153). Romain Rolland has also said that the deepest creative impulses of the artist lie in his realization of unity in apparent diversity. Nandalal Bose also believes that *Rasa* makes us perceive one thing as distinct from another, but it is *Rasa* that creates unity and harmony in diversity. As a result, duality is destroyed, and ecstasy is created (Bose, 1983-84, p.168). The idea of non-dualism, known as Advaita in Indian philosophy, runs as a common thread through the philosophy of Tolstoy, Romain Rolland, Tagore, Bose, and Gandhi.

Tagore writes that beauty cannot be created through unrestrained imagination and that restraint is essential if beauty is to be enjoyed. He believes that aesthetic awareness brings control over strong primal desires. So, we do not remain slaves to our passions (Tagore, 1961, p.2). He comments that the experience of beauty liberates us and this is essential to human life because, with our uncontrolled strong emotions, we create a virtual world that is at odds with reality. Tagore writes:

Our anger, our greed brings about such distortion that the great becomes small, and small the great; the ephemeral appears to be eternal and the eternal eludes our vision. The falsity we lust after is magnified to such an extent that it obscures for us the light of the great truths and thus our creations come into conflict with what Providence has created...The connoisseur does not present himself to be overcome by a loud display of colors. He looks for a harmonious whole taking the principal with the subsidiary, the central with the marginal, and the foreground with the background. The colorful may captivate the eye, but the beauty of harmony calls for understanding. The deeper the mind penetrates the deeper the joy of understanding...mere eyesight is not enough; it must be reinforced

by the insight of the mind in order that Beauty may lie revealed in its nobility. One must have the training to develop the insight. The mind again has many levels. The field of vision which is open to our reasoning and intellectual faculties becomes widened when emotions are brought into play. With moral discrimination added to them, the field is widened further. And once our spiritual insight lies open, infinitude becomes the limit... (Tolstoy, 1899, p.4).

According to Nandalal Bose, *Shanta Rasa* (aesthetic essence of tranquillity) is the beginning and end of all *Rasa*. He writes, 'Happiness or sorrow, love, hate or disgust, whatever the emotion or excitement, become the subject of art only when, within and above it, it attains to a state of steadiness or poise or impersonal balance' (Bose, 1983-84, p.205). He also points out that inspiration comes from a sense of suffering; the deeper the pain, the more dynamic the inspiration, and in the expression of that delight is Art's fulfilment (Bose, 1971, p. 123).

Bose further elaborates that faith, love, attraction, sense of unity, and harmony in diversity are the basic characteristics of Art. Creation is possible only on the path of love. The analysis part comes later. The basic purpose of Art is to realize the universal consciousness that pervades everywhere. He further writes that expression requires technique but technical knowledge alone does not inspire Art. He comments, 'An artist touches immortality through his Art. An artist's life is reflected in his Art. There is non-duality in the artist and his Art. They cannot be separated.'

Art for the Common Man:

As in Gandhi's other ideas, the common man is at the centre of his artistic thought. So, he believes that Art must be simple in its presentation and direct in its expression like nature (Roy 1945). In this regard too, the deep influence of Tolstoy on Gandhi is visible. Tolstoy does not agree with the notion that ordinary people lack the taste to esteem the highest works of Art. He asserts that they do recognize like the connoisseur the Art in the epic of Genesis, the Gospel parables, folk legends, fairy tales, and folk songs. For him, a peasant woman's song is true Art while the 101st sonata of Beethoven (composed towards the end of his career) was only an unsuccessful attempt at Art, containing no definite feeling and therefore not infectious (Tolstoy 1899). He asserts that being easily accessible and comprehensible to the common man is the secret of greatness in great works of Art. He prophesizes that brevity, clarity, and simplicity will be the hallmarks of future Art and that the artist of the future will

live the common life of man, earning his subsistence by some kind of labor and creating Art only when he has a strong urge for creative expression (Tolstoy, 1899, p.195). Romain Rolland also believes that great Art must appeal to everyone alike, as the absence of culture does not blind men to its beauty. He comments, '...there could be no salvation for culture if the masses were left out in cold' (Roy, 1945, p.18).

In the speech given at Gujarati Sahitya Parishad on 31st Oct., 1936, Gandhi asked the literary men to go to villages, study them, and give something life-giving to the villagers. He said he wanted Art and literature that could speak to the millions (CWMG 63, pp. 415-416).

In 1936, due to Gandhi's insistence, the annual Indian National Congress session was for the first time held in a rural area at Faizpur. Gandhi entrusted Nandalal Bose with the responsibility of decorating the convention venue. Gandhi instructed him to complete the task using only rural materials and employing country craftsmen. He also emphasized that the conception should be indigenous. Bose strictly followed that instruction and decorated the meeting place in a very artistic way. In his speech at the convention, Gandhi praised Bose and said that God had given him the sense of Art but not the organs to give it concrete shape, whereas Bose was blessed with both (CWMG 70, p. 212). Then, in 1938, Gandhi again asked Bose to decorate the venue of the annual Congress session at Haripura. He expressed his desire that the peasants passing by the meeting place should also see the Art. Bose and his disciples made more than 100 posters in indigenous colors depicting various aspects of rural life and occupations. Krishna Kripalani, who had spent many years in Santiniketan, writes:

In these posters, Nandalal's Art is at its maturest and best. Discarding all sophistication, he rediscovered the simplicity of folk art. These posters were all put up tastefully to fill the Congress campus at Haripura attracting thousands of visitors...Thus with Mahatma's blessings, Nandalal became the people's artist...What he did at Haripura was a colossal demonstration of the social value of Art (Kripalani, 1983-84, p.119).

Swadeshi Art:

The idea of *Swadeshi* (indigenous) Art emerged in India in the early twentieth century. According to the famous sculptor of Santiniketan, Ramkinkar Baij it was a strong revivalist movement with a dislike of Western Art. English Art Administrator and Art Historian from

Kolkata, E. B. Havell, Sister Nivedita, and Anand Coomaraswamy contributed to the development of the principles of *Swadeshi Art*. Nivedita writes in *Modern Review* in 1907 that Art's rebirth in India can only take place if it is consciously made the servant and poet of the mighty dream of an Indian Nationality (Mitter 1994). Havell writes that *Swadeshi* art is a state of mind and an act of faith that sees the quintessence of Eastern mentality in rural India and in its unbroken tradition. For Anand Coomaraswamy, *Swadeshi* was a spiritual struggle against the bureaucracy of the British Raj, which represented an alien ideal (Mitter, 1983-84, p.90). He writes that artists will play an important role in this struggle because their creative talent enables them to understand political injustice clearly. Coomaraswamy believes that a nation is built not by traders and politicians but by artists and poets (Coomaraswamy, 1909, p.i).

According to Partha Mitter, an academic art introduced by the British in India was closely associated with imperial triumphalism, and it was believed that an authentic national expression could not be painted while associated with the Raj (Mitter 1994). Coomaraswamy comments that the deepest values of life are found in Art. The true ideal of Indian culture is unity, and knowing this spiritual heritage is the main motivation behind Art. Shortly, he writes, this strong sense of self-sacrifice and self-realization will manifest itself in nationalism, rooted in spiritual values. The Art of living can be realized again through the unity of national and spiritual ideals. He thought that only by becoming artists and poets, can one achieve the highest ideal of nationality which is the will and power to give. Both Nivedita and Coomaraswamy considered the spirituality of Indian Art as the antithesis of Renaissance naturalism (Mitter 1994).

Nivedita said that Art was no longer a vocation but a spiritual mission whose central message was nationhood. Both Coomaraswamy and Nivedita believed that decorum was the greatest national ideal. Nivedita condemned Varma's paintings as debased Art that did not possess spirituality or nobility. She found Varma's paintings, Shakuntala lying on the floor, and Arjuna courting Subhadra, as devoid of the morals and ethics of India. She did not like such a public display of intimacy (Mitter 1994). Coomaraswamy commented that the helpless Sita, bullied and abducted by Ravana, in Raja Ravi Varma's painting could not be a national ideal. Instead, he said that calm, composed, and confident Sita, who preserved her own identity even in Ravana's captivity in Abanindranath Tagore's painting, was a symbol of the national ideal. Nivedita said that Abanindranath's painting *Bharat Mata* (Mother India) was a symbol of India's spiritual and cultural heritage and art students should emulate its ideal. Nivedita eulogised Bharat

Mata because she appeared like the virgin mother rather than a temptress, unlike the women portrayed in Varma's paintings. For her, Abanindranath's Bharat Mata was like a decorum personified. While criticizing academic Art, Havell, Coomaraswamy, and Nivedita were still influenced by Victorian art values. Emphasizing the moral dignity of Art Nivedita felt compelled to suggest a ban on life study classes in which nude painting was taught (Mitter 1983-84). But she did not realize that it was like striking at the very roots of teaching in art schools. Even Abanindranath, who respected the students' creativity, would lose his temper whenever he found any student secretly practising nude painting (Mitter 1994). For him, *bhava* (idea) was the soul of painting, not the depiction of a beautiful body. There was also the influence of Victorian moral values on Gandhi.

According to Mitter, the ideologues of swadeshi Art believed that the British Empire rested on cultural rather than military superiority. They criticised the revolutionaries for ignoring the British cultural dominance (Mitter 1994). After the advent of Gandhi, there was a radical change in the philosophy of the freedom struggle. The power base of politics shifted from the urban to the countryside. Gandhi bridged the divide between cultural nationalism and political activism. Under his leadership, nationalism became inclusive, bridging rifts along lines of gender, caste, and religion. According to Partha Mitter, Abanindranath was influenced by *Swadeshi* art for some time before but he had always cherished freedom and creativity in Art. Now he realized that the doctrinal approach of Swadeshi was too restrictive, and its obsession with the past was too deadening. The revivalist approach made the Art lose touch with reality. Instead of reflecting everyday life, it became a museum object. He also realized that 'artistic creation was the outcome of devoted cultivation, not simply a reiteration of national sentiment' (Mitter, 1983-84, p.94). It brought a qualitative transformation in his works of Art.

Nandlal Bose was a disciple of Abanindranath. Bose writes about the effect of this transformation in the paintings of his guru. He finds them calm, gentle and non-aggressive. He writes, 'They are soundless like dawn or the opening of a flower or sprouting of a seed (Bose, 1983-84, p.198). But the influence of nationalism and pride in *Swadeshi* art remained on Bose also for a long time. During this phase, when Gandhi began his salt march, it was like a miracle for Bose. He writes, 'The entire country was roused with confidence in some unique strength. Glory filled my heart. I felt blessed and life became meaningful' (Bose, no date, p.164). Bose immortalized this episode with a linocut of Gandhi marching with a bamboo staff. Krishna Kripalani writes that it was a simple drawing but an inspired one,

capturing in a classic pose the essential feature of Mahatma's heroic struggle (Kripalani, 1983-84, p. 119). The lines in this drawing reflect the spirit of nationalism. They appear powerful and even harsh. Abanindranath was worried about this aggressiveness in Bose's technique. Bose was determined to prove the superiority of Indian Art. But later he also realized the limitations of this spirit of challenge. He writes, 'I now know that with such a spirit you lose on the side of *Rasa*...I pray now to *Visvakarma* that he may give me access to the *Rasa* of all great Art from everywhere...' (Bose, 1983-84, p.198). Late in his career, Bose came to the conclusion that nationalism, or a Swadeshi approach to Art, creates barriers to the creation of *Rasa*.

Tagore's opposition to exclusive nationalism is well known. He did not consider a country greater than humanity's ideals. Gandhi was also opposed to narrow nationalism. In 1921, when the Non-cooperation Movement was at its peak, Tagore and Gandhi engaged in a public discourse on this issue through newspaper articles. When the spirit of non-cooperation reverberated across India, Tagore was on a tour of Europe to foster greater cooperation between the East and the West. He expressed concern that the call for non-cooperation and boycott should not foster a narrow-minded mentality among Indians. Gandhi assured him that he was also as great a believer in free air as the great poet. He writes, 'I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any...' He further writes, 'For me nationalism and humanity are equivalent...Narrowness, selfishness, and limited nationalism are the curse of modern nationalism. It is a sin.' Gandhi's outlook was universal but he believed that nationalism could establish unity among the diverse elements of India and help in the achievement of independence. But he also expected India's independence to be a stepping stone in establishing universal brotherhood. Gandhi sought to strike a balance between nationalism and universalism. Hence, he never seems to have supported the idea of *Swadeshi art in the sense the promoters* expected.

Conclusion:

Gandhi's views on Art continued to evolve, as did his other thoughts, but the foundation of his views on Art had been Tolstoy's analysis of Art from a moral and spiritual point of view. Although Tagore and Romain Rolland found Gandhi's and Tolstoy's views on Art to be orthodox, there seems to be much in common in their philosophies of Art. Like Tagore, Gandhi evaluates the beauty of Art based on *Satya* (the truth) and *Shiva* (the good) of Indian philosophy. The idea of *Advaita* (non-dualism) is expressed in the artistic thoughts of Gandhi,

Tolstoy, Romain Rolland, Rabindranath Tagore, Anand Kumaraswamy, and Nandalal Bose alike. Gandhi and Tolstoy insisted that Art should reach common people. Tagore did not insist on it, but folk art had a place of honor in the art world of Santiniketan. Romain Rolland and Bose also supported the democratization of Art. Gandhi and Tagore had differences on the issue of nationalism. Even though Gandhi was the supreme leader of the national movement, he did not try to limit the field of Art in the name of nationalism. His views in this regard are as universal as Tagore's.

Notes

1. Santiniketan is situated in the Bolpur subdivision of Birbhum district, West Bengal. Here, in 1901, Rabindranath Tagore established a school aiming at the holistic development of students. He also started Visva-Bharati University as a center for the confluence of Eastern and Western cultures. A division of Santiniketan, Kala Bhavana, offered courses in painting, murals, and sculpture.
2. Vishnu Digambar Paluskar (1872—1931). was a great guru and exponent of Hindustani classical music. In 1901 he established Gandharva College in Lahore and opened its branches across India. Through this institution, he sought to foster a musical inclination in society and to confer social prestige on the Art of music. Also, by designing a systematic curriculum, various examinations in music subjects were created for students, and accordingly, music degrees were awarded. The institution is still active.
3. Tambura is a plucked drone instrument used to accompany instrumental or vocal performances.
4. Sister Nivedita (1867 - 1911) was an Irish-born schoolteacher who was a follower of the Indian spiritual leader Swami Vivekananda and became an influential spokesperson promoting Indian national consciousness, unity, and freedom.
5. Tagore delivered lectures on nationalism in the background of World War I during his tour to the USA and Japan. They were compiled and published in 1917 under the title *Nationalism*.

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Notes & Comments

Gandhi, The Jews and Palestine

Pascal Alan Nazareth

GANDHI'S VIEWS ABOUT the Jews and Palestine were as clear and emphatic as they were prophetic.

When Hitler was brutally oppressing the Jews, he wrote in his paper 'Harijan' in November 1938: *"My sympathies are all with the Jews. They have been the untouchables of Christianity. The tyrants of old never went so mad as Hitler. If ever there could be a justifiable war in the name of humanity, it would be against Germany to prevent the wanton persecution of a whole race. But I do not believe in any war. Besides, my sympathy for the Jews does not blind me to the requirements of justice. It is wrong and inhuman to impose the Jews on the Arabs. What is going on in Palestine today cannot be justified by any moral code of conduct. The mandates have no sanction but that of the last war. The nobler course would be to insist on a just treatment of the Jews wherever they were born and bred. Those born and bred in France are French precisely as Christians born in France are French. Every country is their home, including Palestine, not by aggression but by loving service..."*

Many reputed Jewish scholars have acknowledged that the "requirements of Justice" have not been met in Palestine.

Tom Segev, in his book 'One Palestine Complete', has exposed the falsehood about Palestine being "A land without people for a people without land" and quoted British General Walter Congreve "We might as well

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declare that England belongs to Italy because it was once occupied by the Romans”.

Avi Shlaim, in his book *'The Iron Wall'*, has stated “Conflict accompanied the Zionist enterprise long before Hitler came on the scene... There is no denying that the establishment of the State of Israel involved a massive injustice to the Palestinians.”

Henry Seigman, in the February 8, 2001, New York Review of Books, has urged Israel to recognise its “sacred obligation to a people that has been greatly wronged, a wrong compounded by keeping the West Bank and Gaza under occupation since 1967.”

Gerald Kauffman, former British Labour Minister, wrote in the Spectator of April 24, 2004: “What the Egyptian Pharaoh did to the Jews, the Jews have now done to the Palestinians who have no Moses to bring them salvation and no Red Sea will part for them”.

In sharp contrast to the above truthful and scholarly comment, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel’s most belligerent and controversial leader, is fixated on the thesis and policy enunciated in his May 2011 address to the US Congress: “In Judea and Samaria, Jewish people are not foreign occupiers. We are not the British in India. We are not the Belgians in the Congo. This is the land of our forefathers to which Abraham brought the idea of one God, where David confronted Goliath, and where Isaiah saw a vision of eternal peace. No distortion of history can deny the four thousand year old bond, between the Jewish people and this land”. This is the root cause of the tragic history of Palestine in the last 75 years.

President Jimmy Carter, architect of the 1978 Camp David Accord, in his “Peace Not Apartheid” book, has written “, Since the 1979 Israeli–Egyptian peace treaty was signed, much blood has been shed and repeated efforts for a negotiated peace between Israel and its neighbours have failed. The bottom line is this: Peace will come to the Middle East only when the Israeli Government is willing to comply with international law, with the Roadmap for Peace, with official American Policy, and honors its own previous commitments, by accepting its legal borders. The United States is squandering international prestige and goodwill and intensifying global anti- American terrorism by unofficially abetting Israeli colonization of Palestinian territories”.

President Nelson Mandela, in response to Thomas Friedman’s March 27, 2001 New York Times article on Israel’s security concerns, wrote: “Today the world, black and white, recognizes that Apartheid has no future. In South Africa it has been ended by our own decisive mass action. In Palestine the political and cultural relationships between Israelis and Palestinians is an Apartheid system. Palestinians are struggling not just for a “state” but for freedom, liberation and equality, just like we were in South Africa. In recent years, Israel has shown that it is not even willing to return

what it occupied in 1967 and that Palestinians would have to be under Israeli domination with its borders, land, air, water and sea controlled by it, so as to ensure that Palestinians never become a majority, for that would force Israel to either become a secular democratic, bi-national state, or an Apartheid state, not only de facto, but also de jure."

75 years after its creation, Israel, despite having the world's 7th strongest military power and only nuclear state in West Asia, still harps on "existential threats" to it. Its paranoid security concerns have triggered its preemptive strikes against Egypt and Syria in 1967, made it destroy Iraq's Osirak Nuclear reactor in 1981, and clandestinely arm itself with nuclear weapons (which its nuclear scientist Mordechai Vanunu revealed in 1986), invade and occupy southern Lebanon for 18 years (1982 – 2000) and construct the 350 kilometre long, fifteen foot high "security barrier", which confines Palestinians to 16 disconnected enclaves comprising only 27% of their land which International Court of Justice (ICJ) has ruled is "contrary to international law". After the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack, Israel has destroyed almost 90% of Gaza's housing and civilian infrastructure and killed over 50,000 of its inhabitants. Since October 1, 2024, it has been ceaselessly bombing not only Hizbollah strongholds in southern Lebanon but also Beirut and Damascus. They have even attacked the UNIFIL office in Lebanon and injured some of its members.

Gaza and the West Bank today are much like the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto, but on a much bigger scale. The Jewish armed uprising (their arms were secured from the Polish resistance) in the Warsaw ghetto is hailed by Jews and many others worldwide as an act of great courage and heroism. Yet Hamas' October 7, 2023 armed uprising against seven decades of Israeli brutalities and incarceration of Palestinians in the "world's largest open air prison" and destruction of their homes and sources of livelihood (over 500,000 of their olive trees have been uprooted/burnt) and killing of over 42,000 of them, is denigrated as "terrorism".

It is pertinent to recall here that Israel's creation was "midwived" by the Irgun and Stern terror outfits. Encyclopaedia Britannica's information about them is as follows:

Irgun Zvai Leumi, founded in 1931, committed acts of *terrorism* against the British after the publication of its 1939 White Paper, which severely limited Jewish immigration into Palestine. On July 22, 1946, Irgun blew up *the King David Hotel in Jerusalem*, killing 91 British soldiers and civilians. After *Israel's* creation, its armed units joined the Israel Defence Forces (*IDF*). Its political wing founded the *Herut* (Freedom) Party, which later merged with the Liberals to form the *Ga'alon* Party.

The Stern Gang, founded in 1940 by Avraham Stern after a split

with the Irgun, repeatedly attacked British personnel in Palestine. The British killed Stern in February 1942, and soon thereafter arrested many Stern Gang members. Nonetheless, in November 1944, two of them assassinated *Lord Moyne*, British minister of state for the *Middle East*, at *Cairo*. After *Israel's* creation, the *Stern Gang* units joined the *IDF*. Unlike Irgun, it neither created nor joined any *political party*.

Prime Minister Menachim Begin was an Irgun member, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir a Stern Gang member *Israel's* belligerence and adoption of "assassination of enemies" as its security policy since its creation emanate from its Irgun and Stern Gang antecedents.

Ronen Bergman, in his book 'Rise and Kill First: The Secret History of *Israel's* Targeted Assassinations', has revealed that since its creation, *Israel* has assassinated 2,700 of its "enemies" all over the world. He has accused *Israel* of "seeking to stop history without engaging in diplomacy and statesmanship."

No UN member state has been as belligerent, scornful of the UN Charter, international law and the sovereignty of other states as *Israel*. Yet it has never been censured by the UN Security Council, which is mandated to ensure world peace and security, for any of its grossly criminal acts. This is because the US has cast 57 vetoes to prevent this.

Why has the US been so protective of *Israel*? John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt in their "The *Israel* Lobby and US Foreign Policy" book have written : "*For the past several decades the centre piece of US Middle Eastern policy has been its relationship with Israel. The combination of unwavering support for Israel and related effort to spread 'democracy' has inflamed Arab nations and jeopardized US security. This jinx has no equal in American political history. This remarkable level of diplomatic support the US provides. Israel derives almost entirely from the 'Israel Lobby. No other lobby has managed to divert the US so far from its national interests and convince Americans that US interests and those of Israel are essentially identical.*"

Jeffrey Sachs, a renowned Columbia University Professor, in a January 2024 article titled "Saving *Israel* by Ending Its War in Gaza", has written: The *Israeli* government argues that it is in a vital fight for survival and therefore must take every measure, including the destruction of Gaza. This is false. There is no ethical, legal or geopolitical case for killing tens of thousands of civilians, and uprooting 2 million people, to protect *Israel* against the threats Hamas actually poses. In all the years Hamas has ruled Gaza since 2007, it has never captured *Israeli* territory, nor remotely threatened its existence. Hamas has around 30,000 fighters; the *IDF* has more than 600,000. Moreover, Hamas has neither an air force, armoured units, nor a military-industrial base.

The American people need to understand that Israeli politics is now dominated by extremists who mix religious fervour with murderous violence against Palestinians. This ultra-violent side of Israel is still largely unknown to Americans. The Grayzone has compiled a *shocking compilation* of its soldiers and politicians celebrating Palestinian killings.

Supporting Israel's genocide in Gaza is antithetical to Israel's long-term security and perhaps even its survival. The Arab and Islamic states have repeatedly declared their readiness to normalise relations with Israel within the context of the two-state solution.

Israel has haemorrhaged political support worldwide. In a recent UN General Assembly vote, 174 countries, representing 94% of the world population, voted in favour of Palestinian political self-determination. In comparison, only 4 countries, representing 4% of the world population – Israel, the United States, Micronesia, and Nauru – voted against. 15 countries abstained. Israel's hardline militarism has united the world against it.

US open-ended support for Israel has seemed to be unstoppable in American politics. The Israel lobby—a powerful constellation of Israeli politicians and wealthy Americans—has played a huge role in building this strong support. The Israel lobby gave \$30 million in *campaign contributions* in the 2022 Congressional election cycle, and will give vastly more in 2024. But the lobby is up against the public's growing opposition to Israel's brutality in Gaza.

Many zealous religious Israelis strongly resist a Palestinian state, based on ancient biblical texts. Judaism's vision is not to rule over Palestinians or ethnically cleanse them. It is to use reason and goodwill to find peace. As Hillel the Elder declared, 'Whatever is hateful and distasteful to you, do not do to your fellow man. and Prophet Isaiah (2:4), urged that 'nations beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: and no nation lift sword against nation, nor learn war anymore.' So may it be."

What are the outcomes for Israel and Palestine, of the last eighteen months of ceaseless violence, hostage taking, bombings, death and destruction?

Israel has not achieved its proclaimed prime objective of destroying Hamas. On October 7, 2024, when Israel was having its memorial service for the soldiers and civilians who had died in the previous twelve months, Hamas fired missiles at it. Every assassination of a Hamas, Hezbollah, or Houthis leader by Israel has only intensified their drone, rocket and missile attacks on Israel.

Israel's aura of invincibility has been severely dented. Its much-touted "Iron Dome" and "David's Sling" protective shields have been

unable to protect all of its strategic sites from the frequent barrage of missiles and drones which Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis and Iran have fired at it in the last eighteen months. One of them hit Prime Minister Netanyahu's residence recently!

Israel's security scenario has greatly deteriorated. It is now battling on five fronts: Gaza, Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and 845 soldiers and 69 police officers killed since October 7, 2023, is the highest figure for any of its wars since 1967. The 8 soldiers killed on October 2nd 2024, in southern Lebanon is its largest single-day loss during the same period. On October 10, a missile strike on its Golani Brigade training centre killed four soldiers and injured 49 others. Besides, it has lost 363 of its land armour assets - Merkava tanks, armoured vehicles and bulldozers.

Israel has also haemorrhaged political and diplomatic support worldwide and is now widely regarded as a "Rogue" or Pariah State". In a recent UN General Assembly vote, 174 countries, with 94% of the world population, voted in favour of Palestinian political self-determination. In comparison, only 4 countries, representing 4% of the world's population – Israel, the United States, Micronesia, and Nauru – voted against. 15 countries abstained.

Even more damaging for Israel are the financial and economic costs of its multi-front wars of the preceding twelve months. In May 2024, the Bank of Israel revealed that these had cost \$65 billion. Its Eilat port has declared bankruptcy. Its CEO, Gideon Gilbert, indicated that Yemeni Houthi attacks had reduced ship arrivals at it by 85 per cent and plummeted its revenues. Exports of Israel's most high-value item, polished diamonds, had plummeted by 33 per cent in the first seven months of 2024. Tourist arrivals have also plummeted. All this has resulted in a sharp decline in Israel's export earnings, credit rating, and the value of the shekel. This has necessitated the temporary closure of some of its ministries.

Palestine has suffered mammoth losses. Its official figures indicate that 62,614 Palestinians have died. The reputed Lancet journal gives this figure as 186,00. The destruction of housing, civilian infrastructure, and livelihoods exceeds 80%. However, these enormous losses have secured substantial global sympathy for them and their "cause" has progressed more in the last year than in the preceding three decades.

Pro-Palestinian rallies have been held in over 100 cities, college campuses and sports stadia from Canberra, Manila and Jakarta to Cairo, Cape Town, Madrid, Paris, London, New York, Los Angeles, Mexico, Caracas and Sao Polo.

As most of these rallies in European and US cities have been led by 'Jewish Voices for Peace' (JVP) and 'Rabbis for Palestine', which

have denounced “Zionist Israel”, the vital fact that Israel is a Zionist and not a Jewish State, as it claims, has been amply clarified. JVP’s most widely reported protest was on October 14, 2024, when 500 of its members, wearing T-shirts with “Not in our Name’ and ‘Stop Arming Israel’ printed on them, staged a sit-in “ in front of the New York Stock Exchange. In a post on X, they wrote, “As Gaza is bombed, Wall Street booms. Stock prices of weapons manufacturers have skyrocketed. The U.S. economy is profiting from genocide.”

On 29 December 2023, South Africa notified the International Court of Justice that Israel’s indiscriminate bombing of the Gaza Strip was a contravention of the 1948 Genocide Convention. Spain, Belgium, Bolivia, Ireland, Turkey, Egypt, Libya, Chile, Colombia, Nicaragua, the Maldives and Mexico subsequently joined it in this case.

On May 24, 2024 ICJ ruled that: “The State of Israel shall, in conformity with its obligations under the Genocide Convention and in view of grave conditions faced by civilians in Rafah immediately halt its military offensive, keep open the Rafah crossing for unhindered entry of humanitarian assistance; and submit a report on measures taken on this Order, within one month from its date. of this Order”

On July 19, 2024, the ICJ ruled that “Israel’s occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem are unlawful”.

The UN Security Council (*UNSC Resolution 2334*) has unequivocally declared Israel’s settlements in occupied Palestine to be in flagrant violation of international law, All these are major legal gains for Palestine.

Palestine now has top rung supporters in the United States, which is Israel’s strongest supporter. Professor Jeffrey Sachs has already been mentioned. Senator Bernie Sanders in a recent speech declared “ The US should stop funding Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s war in Gaza, This week 19 people have been killed and scores injured in a strike in its humanitarian zone An American has been shot in the West Bank and school bombed, killing 14 people, including 6 UN aid workers” In an earlier speech he had described Netanyahu as a “war criminal”

Palestine has also received significant support from Russia, which has invited it to attend the 2024 BRICS summit in Kazan, October 22-24.

Israel today is in the same strategic, diplomatic, financial and economic situation that Apartheid South Africa was before its collapse in early 1990 and Nelson Mandela was released on February 11, 1990. The big question is what will happen in Israel. If it wishes to adopt the South African example (which is unlikely), it should release Marwan Barghouti, leader of the two Palestinian Intifadas, the first

(1987 – 1993) and the second (2000 -2005), whom Palestinians respect much more than Palestine Authority Chairman Mahmud Abbas. Some of them have described him as 'Palestine's Nelson Mandela'!

The great tragedy for the Israelis is that after centuries of slavery in Egypt and wanderings, discrimination and massacres in many other lands, when they finally secured a "Homeland" their leaders brought them into it clothed not with the ennobling tenets of Judaism but shackled with the racist neocolonial ideology of Zionism because of which they have been embroiled in a ceaseless cycle of wars. .

There is no animosity between Judaism and Islam. They are both "Religions of the Book". The two golden ages of the Jews in the post-King Solomon (970 – 780 BC) period were in Moorish Spain (710 – 1498 AD) and in the Ottoman Empire (1453 – 1918). During these periods, the rulers were Muslims, but the philosophers, physicians, financiers, pharmacists, translators and composers were mostly Jews.

The Jews have suffered most in Christian lands where they were denigrated as "Christ Killers". Martin Luther, in his 'Jews and Their Lies' book vilified them as "public enemies" and urged Christians to "destroy their homes and synagogues". Hitler did this, and much more!

When I visited Israel in April 1992, I was deeply impacted by Jerusalem's sacredness to the three great religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Their holiest places are within walking distance of each other in this revered city. If Israel would adopt the noble precepts of Judaism's Prophets, particularly Hillel the Elder and Isaiah and discard its vitriolic Zionism, Jerusalem could become the world's prime venue for religious pilgrimage, inter-religious harmony and universal brotherhood. I great hope, and pray that auspicious day will dawn before long.

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Volume 47 Number 4

Why AI Needs Gandhi and Why Gandhi is not the Stagnation Antichrist

Michael Allen

IN MY RECENTLY published book, *Gandhi's Popular Sovereignty of Truth*, I presented an alternative vision of populism, *Panchayat Populism*, and explored its implications for tech and AI, in the *Techno-Raj*. Indeed, I argued, quite provocatively, that AI needs Gandhi.

'*Panchayat Populism*' corrects populism's tendency to blur the lines between the 'fake' and the 'real,' the false and the true. It does so by returning to an ancient panchayat ideal of local communities devoted to everyday practices of nonviolence (*ahimsa*) and nonpossession (*aparigraha*). According to this alternative populist vision, Truth is not a function of demagogues claiming to represent the 'real' people in their own person or self. Neither is it a function of elite technocrats determining for the people their own good, which they cannot see for themselves. Nor is it a function of a liberal ideology of rights, each holds against the others or against the state. In the national system of *panchayats*, Truth is rather a function of each devotee representing the fundamental interest of everyone else throughout the larger *Panchayat Raj* in not suffering the coercive force of violence and of greed.

When each devotee represents the other's fundamental interest in Truth through devotion to *ahimsa* and *aparigraha*, then the people speak God's voice, Truth being God. This is a spiritual Truth realizing in nonviolent, nonpossessive practice *only the whole people can speak*; hence, the popular sovereignty of Truth, a Gandhian version of *Vox Populi Vox Dei*. What, though, does this have to do with the *Techno-Raj*? I argued that tech and AI could serve an instrumental purpose for the *Panchayat Raj*, collating and coordinating the various inputs of devotees throughout the dispersed system of local *panchayats*. Technocrats, managers, and administrators of the *Techno-Raj* play no role in determining what Truth is or setting the future course of the *Raj*. Their role is limited strictly to facilitating every devotee's input,

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perspective and contribution, to the people's voice of 'Truth that is God.' The people's voice the remains sovereign. This popular sovereignty of Truth is necessary to divert tech and AI from the 'lights out' scenario feared by Sam Altman, the CEO of Open-AI; that is, the scenario in which superintelligent but emotionally dumb, and spiritually void, bots end humanity.

Shortly after the release of *Gandhi's Popular Sovereignty of Truth*, a *New York Times Opinion* interview with the venture capitalist and Trump 'tech bro,' Peter Thiel, reinforced my provocation that AI needs Gandhi. Thiel distanced himself from his earlier association with MAGA's populist movement to restore greatness to the American people. Here the 'G, in MAGA, that is, 'great' appeals to the capacity of the American people to project power, cultural, economic, and military. This is a comparative idea, 'great' meaning 'greater than.' Hence, the American people are 'greater than' other peoples in each respect in an international competition of national peoples.

That said, Thiel was drawn to MAGA by his concerns about stagnation and decadence. As he sees it, America stopped taking risks and innovating in the 1970s. Since then, the only notable exceptions have been the internet and AI. On every marker of greatness, from industrial manufacturing to fashion, movies, and music, American innovation has sharply declined. In other words, stagnation is loss of greatness for the American people; they no long obviously 'greater than' their international competitors, notably China.

At the birth of MAGA populism in the 2016 Presidential election, Thiel saw stagnation and the decline of national greatness as primarily a cultural problem of moribund institutions. MAGA promised to restore greatness to the American people by disrupting underperforming elite scientific and academic institutions, like the reviled Harvard. Nevertheless, slightly more than a decade later, stagnation and decadence prevail in America, despite the populist ascendancy of MAGA with the second Trump presidency. Disrupting sclerotic institutions might help somewhat to reinvigorate innovation. But mobilizing populist resentment over relative decline towards decadent elites cannot be expected to reverse stagnation. It cannot be expected to reverse this general process of decline any more the narrow range of elite tech innovations from Silicon Valley, from which Thiel himself emerged onto the political scene.

Increasingly pessimistic about America's future, Thiel now analyses its stagnation and decline from greatness in terms of a dilemma. This dilemma has both an atheistic and a religious, Christian framing. The atheistic framing is 'One world or None,' while the religious framing is 'Antichrist or Armageddon.' Both versions of the dilemma — atheist

and religious – presuppose a dystopian narrative of innovation leading to increased existential risk. From the atheist perspective of ‘One World or None,’ runaway scientific innovations and progress from 1750 to 1970 culminated in the threats of nuclear war and environmental catastrophe. To avoid ‘None,’ humanity must commit to ‘One.’ Only ‘One world governance,’ a UN with ‘real teeth,’ is capable of regulating accelerating global existential risks. But this amounts to a totalitarian globalist regime of ‘peace and safety,’ a regime of ‘universal stagnation.’

The religious version of the ‘One World or None’ dilemma introduces the figure of the Antichrist who falsely impersonates Christ leading to Armageddon prior to the Second Coming. Here Thiel’s framing of ‘Antichrist or Armageddon’ is a bit misleading. Impersonating Christ, the Antichrist does try to not take over the world to stop Armageddon but instead hastens its arrival. Nevertheless, this religious figure helps to plug a ‘plot hole’ in the dystopian narrative of a civilizational decline from innovation to stagnation. The Antichrist is not a mad scientist figure like Dr. Strangelove, but rather Greta Thunberg. Indeed, blurring the line between global environmental activist and apocryphal child saint falsely impersonating Christ, Antichrist Thunberg saves humanity from Climate Armageddon by hastening in the new era of One World Totalitarian Stagnation.

That said, the *NYT* interview caused rather a sensation when the interviewer, Ross Douthat, turned Thiel’s analysis of today’s Antichrist of stagnation totalitarianism back onto him. Rather than Thunberg, the Antichrist is more likely to be someone like Thiel himself. The Antichrist turns out to be a capital investor in AI technologies of surveillance and control, along with military drone technologies enabling security interventions at any time anywhere across the globe. Trading on the same dystopian narrative of accelerating existential risk, this techno-savvy Antichrist uses these new technologies to take over the world. The genius of such an Antichrist is to recognize that civilization’s one remaining area of innovation provides the ‘tools’ to make ‘permanent’ a stagnant One World order of ‘peace and security.’

Of course, Thiel emphatically denied he was handing the tools for permanent stagnation totalitarianism to the Antichrist. However, he was also clearly shaken by Douthat’s suggestion that he was doing that and struggled to formulate a response. I do not wish to formulate a response on his behalf, as capital investor in AI surveillance and military technologies. Instead, I now return to the vision of populism and AI I developed in *Gandhi’s Popular Sovereignty of Truth*. I ask how Douthat’s nightmare scenario of the Antichrist’s ‘*demonium Ex-Machina*,’

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as facilitated by the one remaining area of innovation, bear upon my Gandhian vision? Indeed, how does this scenario reinforce my conviction that AI needs Gandhi?

First, I point out that Thiel and Douhat both get something right. Thiel is right to observe that runaway progress slowed down about fifty years ago in the 70s, that it is popularly seen as posing existential risks to civilization, and that tech is the only significant area of innovation left. Douhat is right that this one remaining area of innovation could be used by the Antichrist as a demonic tool for making stagnation permanent; or, at least, normalizing a stagnant form of civilization prior to Armageddon, the final battle of good and evil, and Christ's Second Coming. That said, from a Gandhian perspective, Thiel gets something fundamentally wrong, while Douhat fails to engage the deeper issue concerning what his interviewee gets wrong. Thiel assumes wrongly that a global stagnation of innovations, across the spectrum of civilizational markers, is *necessarily bad for civilization*. Rather than explicitly challenging the civilizational value of broad-spectrum innovation, Douhat simply challenges Thiel's pessimism, suggesting optimistically that human freedom will 'resist' the Antichrist and find a 'middle way.'

Gandhi's Popular Sovereignty of Truth bears upon the techno-savvy Antichrist scenario by openly embracing Thiel's stagnation thesis. Contrary to Thiel, however, it envisions the slow-down of progress and innovation over the last fifty years not as cause for lamentation but exhalation. Gandhi is an ardent critic of modern civilization and its potential to wreak destruction across the globe, politically, environmentally, and spiritually. Progress is driven materialistically by greed, not need. Rapacious innovation motivates violence to others and to the planet, accelerating the existential risks of warfare and environmental catastrophe. Gandhi thus sought to slow down progress. Borrowing Thiel's language, Gandhi sought to *stagnate civilization for the good of humanity and the planet*. Slowing down, stagnating civilization is accomplished by returning to the ancient *panchayat* ideal of popular devotion to *ahimsa* and *aparigraha*.

To clarify, returning to this devotional ideal does not mean that stagnation is absolute, a complete dearth of innovation, or that civilization is defined by moribund, ossified elite institutions. Instead, it means that innovation is conditioned by popular devotion to nonviolence and nonpossession, whereby the people speak God's voice of Truth. Innovations risking civilizational extinction violate moral and spiritual Truth realized by the people. Moreover, *panchayats* are the opposite of elite institutions, protecting only the values and interests of a privileged minority, whether from Harvard or, for that

matter, Silicon Valley. In the *Panchayat Raj*, Truth is realized by the people, not experts and technocrats.

This reinforces my original provocation in *Gandhi's Popular Sovereignty of Truth* that AI needs Gandhi today. MAGA populism is especially vulnerable to the ministrations of the Antichrist who falsely promises an impossible restoration of national greatness based on continued technological progress and innovation. They are vulnerable to its ministrations because such an Antichrist tells them what they want to hear. It tells them that they can be great again, despite embracing the stagnation thesis. As for the one remaining area of innovation, this favors not the sovereignty of a great people as much as a great person, an autocrat of supreme technological acumen, efficiently operating the new technologies of surveillance and military drones to establish global dominium.

The contrast with the Gandhian ideal of *Panchayat* populism in the context of a *Techno-Raj* could not be starker. If it appeals to any ideal of national greatness at all, this is not greatness based on projecting power, derived from constant innovation, guaranteeing the people stay *greater than* its competitors; a competition producing *ever greater* existential risks. Instead, the people's 'greatness' consists of its capacity to speak God's voice of Truth through relearning ancient devotional practices. Such Truth is not spoken through technological innovation but ancient devotional practices such as *ahimsa* and *aparigraha*. Consequently, the popular voice of God that is Truth cannot be falsely impersonated by the techno-savvy Antichrist imagined by Douthat, gleefully employing the tools developed by Thiel.

One might object, even he is not that kind of Antichrist, Gandhi is still another kind of Antichrist. Far from techno-savvy, this is a technophobic Antichrist, stoking fear of technology, and pretending to be the people's savior, while seeking worldly dominium. This Gandhian as opposed to Thielian Antichrist reduces everyone to a stagnant, spiritually supine condition, devotedly accepting his various dictates on how to resolve conflicts, which environmentally friendly *Khadi* technologies to use, and so on. On this rather cynical reading of Gandhian philosophy, the Gandhian Antichrist projects not economic or military power but rather spiritual power, gaining legitimacy by persuading the people they are speaking God's voice, not his.

This is by no means an absurd objection. Is there an answer? I say yes. The answer is an appropriate use of advanced tech. Contemporary Gandhian thought emphasizes, as devotees of *ahimsa* and *aparigraha*, the sovereign people speaking God's voice of Truth should live with traditional values but not shy away from new technologies. My position in *Gandhi's Popular Sovereignty of Truth* is consistent with this

emphasis on not shying away from all technological innovations. Innovations should be assessed from the standpoint of whether they facilitate the voice of the whole people across the system of *panchayats*, and not just that of an apocryphal individual, whether Gandhi or Greta.

If appropriately constructed to combine the traditional values of nonviolence and nonpossession with advanced communications technologies, the *Techno-Raj* is a plausible conceptual answer to the Antichrist problem. However, this presupposes that technocrats, managers, and administrators of the *Raj* outright repudiate some of the tools developed by Thiel, such as military drones. It would also presuppose technocratic administrators of the *Raj* limit how they use other tools, such as superintelligent communication technologies. They could not use – or rather abuse – these tools to surveil and algorithmically manipulate devotees' inputs from across the system of *panchayats* to their own liking and interest. Were they to do so they would thoroughly undermine the *Techno Raj* project of not shying away from technology to facilitate the capacity of a people living with traditional values to realize Truth?

Is it, though, realistic to suppose that the administrative trustees of the *Techno Raj* would stay righteous? Several reasons may be given for supposing this is not an entirely unrealistic proposition. Understood as a people's aspiration to innovate its way beyond stagnation, greatness in projecting power is a fool's dream for the reasons articulated by Thiel. This is why Thiel was originally drawn MAGA populism and why it is vulnerable to the ministrations of a techno-savvy Antichrist, as conceived by Douhat. By contrast, living with traditional values, the people in *Panchayat* populism are less vulnerable to the ministrations a techno-phobic Antichrist, as in my objection above.

The political ideal I developed in *Gandhi's Popular Sovereignty of Truth* is one of radical devotional democracy. Truth is a function of participation by all devotees throughout the system of *panchayats*, each devotee of *ahimsa* and *aparigraha* representing the interest of the others in together speaking God's voice of Truth. Such Truth therefore cannot be represented to the people by anyone purporting to be the people's savior. Any technocratic administrators of the *Raj* who deviate from their limit role facilitating this 'voice of the people' would necessarily expose themselves as false prophets, as Antichrist. AI needs Gandhian devotional democracy for it to be a tool used in the service of the people and Truth.

It emphasizes the radical extension of equality and liberty, challenging existing power structures and promoting greater citizen

participation in decision-making. It's characterized by a commitment to inclusivity, continuous improvement, and a redefinition of the political sphere.

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Articles

John S. Moolakkattu: Editorial • Nishikant Kolge: A Discourse on Swadeshi During Colonial Period and its Continuous Relevance in the Global Age • Thomas Weber & Robin Jeffrey: Gandhi Preludes to Swachh Bharat • Deepti Tiwari: Gandhi and Zionism: A Critical Evaluation • Thomas Menampampil: Making Ancient Values Address Modern Problems: The Role of Intellectuals • John S. Moolakkattu: Arts and Peacebuilding: A Conceptual Overview • P.T. Subrahmanyam: Mahatma Gandhi and the Sermon on the Mount

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Book Reviews

Karthik D.: Nishikant Kolge, Gandhi Against Caste

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Book Reviews

Manoranjan Mohanty and Mannika Chopra eds. *Satyagraha: A Global Force for the Twenty-First Century*, Askar Books, New Delhi: HB, PP.252, ISBN: 978935002900. Price: 1295.

SATYAGRAHA: A GLOBAL Force for the Twenty-First Century, edited by Manoranjan Mohanty and Mannika Chopra, is a timely and significant contribution to contemporary Gandhian scholarship. Positioned at the intersection of political theory, peace studies, and global social movements, the volume seeks to reinterpret satyagraha not merely as a historical technique associated with India's anti-colonial struggle but as a living, adaptable ethical and political framework relevant to contemporary global challenges. The collection brings together diverse scholars and activists, including well-known ones such as Mark Juergensmeyer, Beatriz Bissio, Ramin Jahanbegloo, Vinay Lal, Medha Patkar and Vandana Shiva, who collectively argue that satyagraha remains a dynamic force capable of responding to authoritarianism, ecological crisis, social inequality, and democratic erosion in the twenty-first century.

The central strength of the volume lies in its attempt to move beyond conventional Gandhian historiography. Rather than treating satyagraha as a fixed doctrine rooted exclusively in Gandhi's biography, the editors frame it as an evolving moral practice shaped by changing socio-political contexts. This interpretive shift is crucial because much of earlier Gandhian literature tended either toward hagiography or narrowly national narratives. By contrast, this volume situates satyagraha within global political developments, examining how its principles have been translated, adapted, and reinterpreted across regions and movements. The work thus contributes to the expanding body of scholarship that views nonviolence not simply as a moral stance but as a strategy of transformative politics.

A notable feature of the book is its interdisciplinary and international character. Contributions from scholars and activists

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engage with experiences from India, South Africa, Latin America, and other regions, demonstrating the transnational relevance of Gandhian methods. Through these comparative perspectives, the volume argues that satyagraha has moved beyond its original anti-colonial setting to become an ethical framework for addressing structural violence, inequality, and ecological degradation. The emphasis on global applicability reflects a broader trend in peace and conflict studies, where nonviolent resistance is increasingly studied as a viable alternative to militarised or coercive political action.

The conceptual framing of satyagraha as a synthesis of truth, dialogue, and moral persuasion constitutes another intellectual contribution of the volume. Several essays emphasise that Gandhi's understanding of nonviolence was not passive resistance but an active engagement with injustice through self-suffering, ethical persuasion, and constructive programmes. This distinction is important in contemporary debates where nonviolence is often misunderstood as mere avoidance of conflict. By highlighting satyagraha's proactive and transformative dimensions, the book reinforces the idea that ethical politics can coexist with effective political action.

The inclusion of contributors who bridge academic and activist worlds strengthens the volume's relevance. Essays linked to environmental movements, grassroots struggles, and civil society initiatives demonstrate how satyagraha continues to inform real-world activism. These chapters broaden the discussion beyond theoretical reflection and underscore the relevance of Gandhian principles to ecological justice, sustainable development, and local resistance movements. In this regard, the book successfully situates satyagraha within contemporary debates on climate change, democratic participation, and social equity.

Nevertheless, the volume is not without limitations. One critical issue concerns conceptual clarity. While the editors emphasise the evolving nature of satyagraha, the broad applicability attributed to the concept sometimes risks conceptual overstretch. At points, almost any nonviolent or ethical form of protest is interpreted as a variant of satyagraha, raising questions about analytical boundaries. Greater engagement with critiques from strategic nonviolence literature or political realism could have strengthened the theoretical rigour of the discussion.

A second limitation relates to empirical evaluation. Although several chapters discuss contemporary movements influenced by Gandhian ideas, the volume occasionally prioritises normative aspirations over critical assessment of outcomes. A more sustained analysis of cases in which nonviolent movements faced limitations,

internal contradictions, or state repression would have enriched the volume by providing a more balanced appraisal. Such critical engagement is vital in an era where authoritarian governments increasingly respond to nonviolent dissent with sophisticated forms of surveillance and coercion.

Additionally, while the book succeeds in globalising satyagraha, it sometimes underplays the tension between Gandhian ethics and modern political realities. Questions such as the role of digital activism, populist politics, and economic globalisation receive relatively limited treatment. A deeper engagement with how satyagraha adapts to technologically mediated political spaces could have further strengthened the claim of twenty-first-century relevance.

Despite these limitations, the volume's overall scholarly contribution is substantial. It effectively demonstrates that satyagraha should be understood not only as a historical phenomenon but as a continuing intellectual resource for global political imagination. By linking moral philosophy with social movements, the book bridges disciplinary divides between political theory, peace studies, sociology, and development studies. Its emphasis on constructive action alongside resistance also revives Gandhi's lesser-discussed insight that social transformation requires building alternative institutions rather than merely opposing existing power structures.

From the perspective of contemporary peacebuilding and conflict transformation studies, the book offers valuable insights. It reframes nonviolence as a process that integrates ethical self-transformation with collective political engagement, thereby challenging purely instrumental or strategic understandings of resistance. This interpretive approach aligns with recent scholarship that emphasises the relational, dialogical, and transformative dimensions of peace processes.

In conclusion, *Satyagraha: A Global Force for the Twenty-First Century* is a significant and thought-provoking addition to contemporary Gandhian studies. The volume succeeds in repositioning satyagraha as a global ethical and political methodology relevant to pressing contemporary crises. While specific conceptual and empirical gaps remain, the book's interdisciplinary scope, comparative orientation, and engagement with activism make it a valuable resource for scholars of political theory, peace studies, social movements, and human rights. Ultimately, the volume reaffirms the enduring relevance of Gandhian thought while opening new avenues for reimagining nonviolent transformation in an increasingly turbulent world.

John S. Moolakkattu

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Articles

John S Moolakkattu: Editorial • Shimon Lev: "Can the Jews resist this organized and shameless persecution?" - Gandhi's Attitude to the Holocaust • Kuruvilla Pandikattu: Practising Global Citizenship Today: Gandhian Challenges and Opportunities • Adeoye O. Akinola, Ufo Okeke Uzodike: The Threat of "Boko Haram" Terrorism and Niger Delta Militancy to Security and Development in Africa: From Myth to Reality • Teresa Joseph, Anila Michael: Gandhian Approach to Alcoholism: Trends and Determinants in Kerala

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Book Reviews

Usha Thakkar: Douglas Allen: Mahatma Gandhi • Siby K Joseph: Ram Chandra Pradhan, Integrating Body, Mind and Heart: The Gandhian Way

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Information for Authors

Gandhi Marg is the premier quarterly journal of the Gandhi Peace Foundation having a standing of more than half a century published from New Delhi in the months of March, June, September and December every year. Original contributions on themes of national and international importance falling under the broad area of Gandhian Studies are invited from scholars and practitioners. Articles submitted to Gandhi Marg are refereed. It is presumed that an article submitted to Gandhi Marg is original, and has not been under the consideration of any other journal. In general, the articles should not exceed 8000 words including notes and references. Periodically, we also bring out special issues on selected themes.

We also invite provocative shorter essays (1500-2500 words) for inclusion in the notes and comments section. Review articles assessing a number of recent books on a particular subject and book reviews are also solicited.

All articles should have an abstract of not more than 150 words and five key words. The name of the author, institutional affiliation and complete address including email and telephone/fax should be supplied. A short biographical statement of the author containing information about the area of specialisation and principal publications is also necessary. British spellings should be used throughout the manuscript. All the authors will be informed about the status of the submissions within three months. Author-identifying information including acknowledgement should be placed on the title page and not on any other page.

When an abbreviation is used, it should be spelt out in full the first time. All notes and references should be numbered consecutively and placed at the end of the article rather than on each page. References to books should include author, title (italicised), place of publication, name of publisher, year, pp. (in that order). Place of publication, publisher and year should be within brackets. In subsequent references to the same work, *ibid*, and *op.cit.* can be used. References to articles should include author, title of article in double quote, title of the journal (italicised), number of volume and issue, year of publication, pp. (in that order). All short quotations are to be included in the text with double quotation marks. Longer quotes are to be indented. All quotations should be accompanied by full references.

Examples

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Internet Citations: Apart from name of author and article, include also the URL and date of download. For example: www.un.org accessed on 10 May 2006.

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List of Gandhi Peace Foundation Publications

- | | |
|---|------------|
| 1. Mahatma Gandhi an American Profile
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