

Interpreting Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*

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Gandhi's Hind Swaraj is not rejection of the liberative contribution of modernity. Rather his effort can be interpreted as an attempt to integrate these positive elements with a liberating re-interpretation of tradition. With his critique from within the tradition, Gandhi becomes the great synthesiser of contraries within and across traditions.

GANDHI'S *Hind Swaraj* (HS) is surely a foundational text for any understanding of the man and his mission. In dialogue with the text in its context, with the author and among ourselves, we hope to locate the text within its own horizon of meaning and then interrogate it from within our own contemporary. For Gandhi's text is "a proclamation of ideological independence" [Dalton 1993:16] he never compromised, his "confession of the faith" [Nanda 1974:66] he never abandoned, "a rather incendiary manifesto" [Erikson 1969:217] to enkindle his revolution. No wonder it was banned by the colonial government in 1910 for fear of sedition.

I Gandhi's Critique of the Modern West

For Gandhi civilisation was by definition a moral enterprise: "Civilisation is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty" (HS, Ch 13). Hence it is the very basic ethos of this modern west that Gandhi sets himself against. For he finds two unacceptable and unethical principles at its very core: 'might is right' and the 'survival of the fittest'. The first legitimated the politics of power as expounded earlier by Machiavelli; the second idealised the economics of self-interest as proposed by Adam Smith. In the west "with rare exceptions, alternatives to western civilisation are always sought within its own basic thought system" [Saran 1980:681].

The three recurrent themes in *Hind Swaraj* which we will discuss here are: colonial imperialism, industrial capitalism, and rationalist materialism.

Colonial imperialism: Gandhi categorically insisted that "the English have not taken India; we have given it to them. They are not in India because of their strength: but because we keep them" (HS, Ch 7). He was one of the earliest to realise that colonialism was something to

be overcome in our own consciousness first [Nandy 1983:63]. Unless this 'Intimate Enemy' was exorcised and exiled, unless we addressed this 'Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism' (ibid), we would always be a people enslaved by one power or another, whether foreign or native. Certainly, Gandhi would not want to exchange an external colonialism for an internal one, a white sahib for a brown one, or compensate the loss of 'Hindustan' with 'Englistan' (HS, Ch 4).

British India colonialism was first justified by a supposedly Christianising mission, but very soon this was articulated in terms of a civilising one. In rejecting this modern civilisation, Gandhi is subverting the legitimacy of the colonial enterprise at its core. For there could be no colonialism without a civilising mission [Nandy 1983:11] since it could hardly be sustained in India by brute force.

Industrial capitalism: Gandhi sees capitalism as the dynamic behind colonial imperialism. Lenin too had said as much, and like Marx, Gandhi's rejection of capitalism is based on a profound repugnance to a system where profit is allowed to degrade labour, where the machines are valued more than humans, where automation is preferred to humanism.

It was this that moved Gandhi to his somewhat hyperbolic claim: "Machinery is the chief symbol of modern civilisation; it represents a great sin" (HS, Ch 19). However, by 1919 his views on machinery do begin to change right up to 1947, as he gradually comes to concede some positive aspects like time and labour saving, even as he warns against the negative ones of concentrating wealth and displacing workers [Parel 1997:164-70]. He was acutely sensitive to how machinery can dehumanise and technology alienate, and he extends his critique to the professions of medicine and law (HS, Chs 11, 12). The poor hardly benefit from these professional services, though they are often

their victims. He backs up his criticism of these professions in *Hind Swaraj* with a later suggestion for their nationalisation (CW, 68:97).

Rationalist materialism: Technology is but the expression of science, which in modern civilisation becomes an uncompromising rationalism. For Gandhi this is but a dangerously truncated humanism. His incisive remark is much to the point: "Just as dirt is matter misplaced, reason misplaced is lunacy! I plead not for the suppression of Reason, but for a due recognition of that in us which sanctifies reason itself" (CW, 6:106). Certainly, Gandhi is right in insisting on the unreasonableness of not setting any limits to reason.

More recently a post-modern world has emphasised the aggressive and destructive march of this 'age of reason'. However, Gandhi would test his faith with his reason, but he would not allow his reason to destroy his faith. What makes such technological rationalism even more destructive in Gandhi's view, is its flawed materialism. That is, the negation of the spiritual, the transcendent, or in other words, the denial of a religious worldview.

For Gandhi truth, was much more than could be grasped by science or reason. For him there was a reality beyond that perceived by the senses. It is this transcendent reality that gave meaning and value to our present one. In this Gandhi is very much in the mainstream of Hindu tradition. Indeed, most religious traditions would be similarly sensitive to such a transcendent world, even when it is not perceived as wholly other-worldly. In a more secular world today we may not be sympathetic to such a worldview. And yet a materialism that is deterministic leaves no scope for human freedom and hope. Gandhi emphasises this reaching out to a beyond, that gives this freedom and hope its dynamism and a reach beyond its grasp.

II Relevance of Gandhi's Critique Today

Gandhi's critique of modern civilisation does overlook many of its strengths: its scientific and critical spirit of inquiry; its human control over the natural world; its organisational capacity. Such achievement would imply a certain 'spiritual dimension' that Gandhi seems to have missed [Parekh 1997:35]. However, the focus of his criticism is modern civilisation of a specific period; his condemnation of colonialism

focuses on its imperialistic inspiration; his rejection of industrialism derives mostly from its capitalist context; his apprehensions about rationality regard its truncation by materialism.

However, once the real limitations of Gandhi's critique are acknowledged, then we can better contextualise and interpret his relevance for us today, whether this be with regard to politics in our neo-colonial world, or technologies in our post-industrial times, or culture in our post-modern age. These will now be some of the issues on which we must allow Gandhi to interrogate us. For "the kinds of questions Gandhi asked nearly eight decades ago are the ones which now face both the underdeveloped and the post-industrial societies caught up in a deep upsurge of confusion and disillusionment" [Sethi 1979:3].

Neo-colonialism: Gandhi's rejection of the supposedly civilising mission of colonialism brings into question the whole legitimacy of colonial rule, at a fundamental ethical level. He would have India unlearn much that she has from the modern west. For if Indians "would but revert to their own glorious civilisation, either the English would adopt the latter and become Indianised or find their occupation in India gone" (HS, Preface to English edition).

Thus, he opens up a host of ethical issues between the coloniser and the colonised, the dominant and the dominated, the oppressor and oppressed. The post-colonial era brought such issues into sharper focus across the world. Now with globalisation leading to a unipolar world, such concerns with empowerment and disempowerment, dependency and inter-dependency, have gained, not lost their urgency. Moreover, closer home this widening divide bears down on us more decisively than ever before.

Our new economic policy increasingly represents a whole new vision of society, that takes for granted the internal colonialism we are experiencing today, as for instance between Bharat and India, the bahujan and the twice-born jatis, the avarna and the savarna castes, the toiling masses and the privileged classes, the oppressed people and the oppressor groups, the minority traditions and the majority one.

Thus, our post-colonial world can only be described as a neo-colonial one, internationally divided into developed and developing nations, as also intra-nationally between privileged and underprivileged citizens. Moreover, these divisions are mutually reinforced, not just economically and politically but culturally and socially as well.

Moreover, the west is still the centre of our world for we have not the self-respect, the self-reliance, the self-sufficiency to centre ourselves and so we condemn ourselves to remain on the periphery of someone else's centre. For the colonial masters had stripped our collective identity of any intrinsic dignity by denigrating us as a cowardly and passive people. Gandhi sought to reverse the damage to our collective psyche by his "redefinition of courage and effective resistance in terms of, or through non-violence" [Roy 1986:185].

The issue then of our identity as a nation and a people still remains to be resolved. Such identities are only viable in a genuinely multicultural world. Gandhi's urging in this regard is certainly relevant today in our own society where the propagation of a cultural nationalism is growing every day. Yet "nothing could be more anti-Indian than attempts to make an ideology of Indianness and to fight, instead of incorporating or bypassing non-Indianness" [Nandy 1980:112].

Post-industrialism: With the new technologies there was much hope for a new freedom from degrading and monotonous work. However, what seems to have come in to replace this degrading monotony is not a new dignity of labour but rather a compulsive consumerist society, which is but dehumanising in newer ways. This should hardly surprise us since the ethic underlying post-industrialism is the same as that which underpinned industrial capitalism, namely, the profit motive and the market mechanism.

Gandhi's critique was precisely a condemnation of these. If we find his ideas of trusteeship a little naive and impractical, we still have no alternative answer to humanising a system that seems to have betrayed what possibilities it might have had of bringing freedom and dignity to the toiling masses. Moreover, technology has its own intrinsic dynamism, that instrumentalises our world and inevitably leads to a disenchantment that bring us to the 'iron cage', as Weber warned long ago.

Our environmental crises are surely a manifestation of this loss of innocence, even to the point when we want newer technologies to repair the damage already done by the older ones. Gandhi was precisely rejecting such a naive "nineteenth century optimism which sought for the positive sciences the liberation of humanity" [Nandy 1986:102]. But such anti-modernism then was ahead of its time!

Post-modernism: The excessive and aggressive rationalism of the age of reason,

now seems to have turned on itself with the post-modern revolt. But this has thrown up its own irrationalities. It seems to have lost the liberating project that was implicit in modernity. For the kind of relativising and subjectivising of ethics that post-modernism has led to, undermines the claims of any justice. For there can hardly be any mutually accepted legitimacy to arbitrate conflicting claims, when consensus irrevocably breaks down. So, might becomes right, and the power its own legitimation.

Gandhi's trenchant critique of modernity was focused on modernist rationalism, but it was equally opposed to a post-modern rejection of rationality. What Gandhi was pleading for is a richer concept of rationality and a meta-theory of rationalism [Parekh 1995:165-66]. He wanted to contain excessive rationality within reasonable bounds without an irrational revolt against reason itself, but he would emphatically reject any forced choice between totalising rationalism and relativising subjectivism.

III Gandhi's Affirmation of Indian Culture

Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* presents us with an idealised version of Indian culture that is completely counterpunctal to the 'modern west'. Here we pick out three seminal themes: swaraj, swadeshi and satya.

Swaraj: Gandhi radically re-interprets 'swaraj' and gives it a dual meaning. The original Gujarati text uses 'swaraj' in both senses. Gandhi's English translation makes the duality explicit: swaraj as 'self-rule' and as 'self-government'. The first as self-control, rule over oneself, was the foundation for the second, self-government. In this second sense, local self-government was what Gandhi really had in mind. Gandhi very decidedly gives priority to self-rule over self-government, and to both over political independence, swatantrata.

Essential to both meanings of swaraj, was a sense of self-respect that is precisely Gandhi's answer to colonial rule. For Gandhi freedom in its most fundamental sense had to mean freedom for self-realisation. But it had to be a freedom for all, for the toiling masses, and the privileged classes, and most importantly for the least and last Indian. In this sense, sarvodaya was precisely the patriotism that Gandhi espoused. It focused on people's welfare not on national pride: "By patriotism I mean the welfare of the whole people, and, if I could secure it at the hands of the English, I should bow down my head to them" (HS, Ch 15). So he could write:

“my patriotism is for me a stage on my journey to the land of freedom and peace” (*Young India*, April 13, 1924, p 112). And yet swaraj was not something given by the leaders, Indian or British, it was something that had to be taken by the people for themselves.

Clearly, the foundation of swaraj in both its senses had to be threefold: self-respect, self-realisation and self-reliance. This is what Gandhi tried to symbolise with the chakra and khadi, both much misunderstood symbols today. For Gandhi khadi “is the symbol of the unity of Indian humanity, of its economic freedom and equality and therefore ultimately in the poetic expression of Jawaharlal Nehru, the livery of India’s freedom” (CW 75:146-66). Today the chakra and khadi have not retained this powerful multivalent symbolism.

Yet the ethic that Gandhi was trying to introduce and inscribe into Indian political life was that “real swaraj will not be the acquisition of authority by a few but the acquisition of the capacity of all to resist authority when it is abused” [Prabhu 1961:4-5]. For Gandhi “Civilisation is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path duty” (HS, Ch 13). The basis then of his swaraj could not be just rights, it had to be duties as well. For Gandhi real rights are legitimated by duties they flow from, for both are founded on satya and dharma. The modern theory of rights reverses this priority and finds rights on the dignity and freedom of the individual. But comprehensive morality can never be adequately articulated or correctly grasped in terms of rights alone.

Swadeshi: Swadeshi is the means for Gandhi’s quest for swaraj. Fundamentally it meant ‘localism’. This was not an isolated localism of the “deserted village”, that Goldsmith romanticised, or the degradation of caste oppression that Ambedkar revolted against, but rather the local neighbourhood community, the village as the node in a network of oceanic circles that overlapped and spread out in its ever widening embrace. It is this commitment of the individual to his ‘desh’ that was Gandhi’s Indian alternative to western nationalism [Parekh 1995:56-57].

Gandhi perceived that power in India was inevitably monopolised by the urban elite, at the expense of village folk, and was trying to reverse this dependency to make the state serve the weaker sections. His was an egalitarian, not just a romantic, inspiration. Mao attempted as much in China. But the village Gandhi idealised was not just a geographic place, or a statistic, or a social class. It was an event,

a dream, a happening, a culture. As he used “the term ‘village’ implied not an entity, but a set of values” [Sethi 1979:23]. It brought together his three basic themes of swaraj: self-respect, self-realisation and self-reliance.

In privileging the rural over the urban, Gandhi was arguing for a minimal state, since he saw the state essentially as an instrument of violence. It was only in the communal cauldron at the time of partition, that he began to see the need of state power to contain and end the violence. And yet our experience of the post-colonial state in this country would bear out his apprehensions even as we seem to be careening into anarchy. Gandhi perhaps did not fully appreciate the role of the state as an agency for regeneration and redistribution, in planning and co-ordination. But he was acutely sensitive to the centralised state appropriating what belonged to the local community and the individual. He was deeply suspicious of power being used in the cause of freedom or to contain violence. His swadeshi was an attempt to address this complex dialectic on an ethical rather than a political foundation.

Satya: For Gandhi truth was not a matter of theory but of practice. His autobiography entitled *Experiments with Truth*, is surely an indication of this. But Gandhi’s truth has little to do with experimental science, concerned with external prediction. Rather his truth was an experiential one, a reflexive understanding of oneself very much in the tradition of the Buddha and the ancient rishis of this land. The whole of Gandhi’s life’s journey was not to predict the outcome of his life’s struggle, but rather to interpret and direct the struggles of the masses for what they themselves could legitimately claim.

For Gandhi satya, was an absolute reality that we could only partially grasp. Thus the many-sidedness of truth that we experience is nothing but a consequence of such relative knowledge. Overcoming these limitations of our ‘relative knowledge’ for a more comprehensive grasp of this ‘absolute truth’ could never be forced by violence. Only ahimsa, non-violence, could make the quest for such truth viable. Gandhi operationalised this quest in his strategy of satyagraha, or truth-force. Moreover, he makes no ethical separation between means and an end. Both must be morally good. For him “the goal did not exist at the end of a series of actions designed to achieve it, it shadowed them from the very beginning” [Parekh 1995:142].

Thus, satyagraha was not just a political strategy, it was both a means and an end.

It was basically a method of dialogue that would bring two disagreeing parties not just into mutual agreement, but into the realisation of a deeper truth together. The dichotomy between the oppressor and the oppressed is transcended in this ‘heightened mutuality’, but even beyond this “satyagraha ruptures the tricotomy among the oppressor, oppressed and emancipator” [Pantham 1986:179]. for it seeks to involve all three in this quest for greater self-realisation of the truth. From the satyagrahi as the initiator, this required a demanding discipline.

But satyagraha was also a political strategy. In *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi defines ‘passive resistance’ as he called it then, as “a method of securing rights by personal suffering” (HS, Ch 17). Clearly, “Gandhi’s satyagraha then was an ingenious combination of reason, morality and politics; it appealed to the opponent’s head, heart and interests” [Parekh 1995:156].

This was a “vernacular model of action” [Parekh 1995:211] that the people understood. But it was Gandhi who first used it so effectively to mobilise them and to appeal to their oppressors. In fact he was the first leader to bring non-violence to centre stage in the struggle for freedom with the British. He was well aware that adopting “methods of violence to drive out the English” would be a “suicidal policy” (HS, Ch 15). And his *Hind Swaraj* was precisely intended to stymie such a soul-destroying venture.

Gandhi’s re-interpretation: Gandhi locates himself as an insider to mainstream Hinduism, the ‘sanathan dharma’. Hence, the radicality of his re-interpretation goes unnoticed. Gandhi does not reject, he simply affirms what he considers to be authentic, and allows the inauthentic to be sloughed off. For “Gandhi’s Hinduism was ultimately reduced to a few fundamental beliefs: the supreme reality of God, the ultimate unity of all life and the value of love (ahimsa) as a means of realising God” [Nanda 1985:86]. His profound redefinition of Hinduism gave it a radically novel orientation. In sum, “Gandhi’s Hinduism had a secularised content but a spiritual form and was at once both secular and non-secular” [Parekh 1995:109].

Thus one of the most remarkable and yet unremarked re-interpretations of Hinduism that Gandhi effected was that of the Gita, a text intended to persuade a reluctant warrior on the legitimacy and even the necessity of joining the battle. Gandhi reworks its ‘nishkamakarma’ to become the basis of his ahimsa and satyagraha!

We have only to contrast Gandhi's Hinduism with V D Savarkar's hindutva to see how starkly contrapunctal they are! Hence, in spite of its pretensions to be nationalist and modern, its militant chauvinism and authoritarian fundamentalism make hindutva the very antithesis of Gandhi's Hinduism. Hindutva is in fact but a contemporary synthesis of brahmanism! This is why in the end the Mahatma is vehemently opposed by the traditional Hindu elite, who felt threatened by the challenge he posed.

But precisely because he presents himself as a Hindu in his interpretation of Indian culture, he was seen as too inclusive by traditional Hindus, and at the same time as not ecumenical enough by contemporary non-Hindus. Hence his appeals for Hindu-Muslim unity were rejected, by the Muslims as being too Hindu, and questioned by the Hindus for not being Hindu enough.

Gandhi's failure to bridge the religious divide between Hindu and Muslim, was matched in many ways by his failure to bridge the caste divide between dalits and others. He never quite understood Jinnah, or his appeal to Muslim nationalism. One could say the same in regard to Ambedkar and dalits, who have never forgotten or forgiven Gandhi for the imposition of the Pune Pact. We can only wonder now whether separate electorates for dalits then would have made reservations for them unnecessary now. What we do know is that the caste divide has only deepened with increasing conflict and indeed the same can be said about the religious divide and religious conflict in this country.

Yet for Gandhi the unity of humankind was premised on the oneness of the cosmos, which was a philosophical principle that was ontologically prior to diversity. Once the legitimacy of religious diversity is rooted in the fundamental Jaina principle of 'anekantavada', the many sidedness of truth, then religious tolerance is a necessary consequence – not a negative tolerance of distance and coexistence, but rather one of communication and enrichment [Heredia 1997].

In cultural matters, Gandhi wanted all cultures to be enriched by each other without losing their identity. But such cultural assimilation, was opposed by political revivalists and religious nationalists. Yet for Gandhi open and understanding dialogue must precede, not follow, a free and adaptive assimilation. Thus, an enriched diversity would then contribute to a more invigorated pluralism and an enhanced unity. This was precisely Gandhi's understanding of Indian culture and civilisation, and he had, indeed,

grasped its fundamental strength and the secret of its survival.

IV Our World Today

We must now situate ourselves with regard to the critical issues of our world today to enter into dialogue with him. Here we have chosen three such issues as being the most fruitful for this encounter: the collapse of socialism and the crisis of capitalism, globalisation in an inter-dependent world, and the unresolved violence of our atomic age.

Post-socialism: In our present world, the socialist ideal is being discredited as a god that failed, when it is rather the once socialist states that have collapsed. Moreover, today the crisis of capitalism is everyday more apparent, with the collapse of the much acclaimed Asian tigers as the new model for the cornucopia of development and progress; and the growing unemployment in the west cannot but presage further crises there as well. With liberalisation and privatisation as accepted policy in our country today, the Bharat verses India divide, that Gandhi had intuited long ago, is, if anything, rapidly and disastrously growing. Only now the elite of Bharat seems to have been co-opted by the privileged of India, even as the refugees of India have been forced into an urbanised Bharat.

Much has been made about the disagreements between Gandhi and Nehru. But in the exchange of letters in 1945 [Parel 1997:149-56], it is quite clear that the axis of their reconciliation was precisely around this quest for equality. Their paths may have been different but Nehru's socialism and Gandhi's swaraj were both oriented to this quest for equity and equality across all the divides, of caste, class, region, etc.

Gandhi was quite radical in urging equality, even more so than the communists. He would have equal wages and bread labour for all. In his 'Constructive Programme' (CW, 75:146-66). Gandhi's concept of equality is not grounded in impersonal and competitive individualism, as it seems to be in the west, but in co-operative and compassionate non-violence, on 'fraternity' not just 'liberty'. In the beginning, he saw no contradiction between such fraternal equality and the idealised hierarchy of varna. But in his later years he reversed himself to urge that "classless society is the ideal, not merely to be at aimed at but to be worked for" (*Harijan*, February 17, 1946, p 9). By now he was promoting inter-caste marriages and hoping "there would be only one caste

known by the beautiful name Bhangi, that is to say the reformer or remover of all dirt" (*Harijan*, July 7, 1946, p 212).

But if Gandhi's quest for equality is something that our complex world cannot accommodate, we seem to have given up not just this ideal of equality, but even the quest for equity in the distribution of the rewards and burdens of our society. And yet today Gandhi's proletarian 'levelling down' certainly seems to be much more viable than Tagore's elitist 'levelling up'. In such a scenario the relevance of Gandhi's idea of sarvodaya as the goal of swaraj is something we need to re-examine. Certainly, a decentralised participative democratic and humane society, is a more attractive, and one may dare say, a more viable ideal today, than the kind of consumerism and inequitable divisions that the new economic policy in our country seems to welcome.

Indeed, the principle of subsidiarity seems to be the only viable solution to national governments that are too large to address local problems, while being too small to cope with global ones. Today the 73rd and 74th amendment to the Constitution once again affirm panchayati raj and tribal self-rule. We are coming back to a devolution of powers that Gandhi had urged in his ideal of swaraj and had tried to have written in to our Constitution. Hopefully this will be a presage of more to come.

Globalisation: Globalisation and the alienating homogeneity that it must inevitably promote, is the very opposite of the localism and the celebration of diversity that Gandhi's swadeshi was meant to encourage. However, Gandhi's principle of swadeshi, "simply means that the most effective organisation of social, economic and political functions must follow the natural contours of the neighbourhood," thus affirming "the primacy of the immediate community" [Roy 1985:114]. Gandhi's "goodness politics" as it has been called [Saran 1980:691], could only really operate on such a scale. For "Gandhi decentralisation means the creation of parallel politics in which the people's power is institutionalised to counter the centralising and alienating forces of the modern state... Thus the Gandhian decentralised polity has a built-in process of the withering away of the state" [Sethi 1986:229].

But before this is dismissed as too naive or impractical for our sophisticated and complicated world, we might pause to think of the kind of politics our centralised states have in fact spawned. The very hegemonic homogeneity it promotes

succeeds less at obliterating difference than at alienating minorities and enkindling their resentment. On the contrary, to take a lesson from ecology, micro-variability is needed for macro-stability in political and economic systems as well.

Gandhi's swadeshi could never mean ethnocentrism. Unlike some Hindu and Muslim 'nationalists' Gandhi never used 'nationalism' for narrow sectarian purposes. He mobilised his people as 'Indians' not as Hindus or Muslims. His nationalism was anti-imperialistic not chauvinistic, a struggle for political justice and cultural dignity [Nandy 1994:3]. He was a patriot who wanted "Indian nationalism to be non-violent, anti-militaristic and therefore a variant of universalism" [Nandy 1995:14]. He was only too aware of the number of 'nationalities' that could be mobilised in India, once the genie was out of the bottle!

An ecological understanding is now propelling us to a new and deep realisation of our interdependence. We have only one earth, we must learn to share and care. We are but a contingent part of the cosmos, debtors born, whose proper response to life must be the 'yagna', service-offering of our lives for others [Parekh 1995:88]. Thus, with regard to the economy and polity, Gandhi would have the village as his world; but with regard to culture and religion, it was the world that was his village! Surely, here we have a viable example of thinking globally and acting locally. Indeed, our global ecological crisis has begun to press on us anew the relevance of Gandhi's paradoxical ideas. For the institutional individualism that seemed to be the very foundation of the democratic quest in the west seems quite inadequate to the ecological crises of today. For it privileges individual rights over the common good. But even enlightened self-interest has no answer to the 'tragedy of the commons' except an external coercion.

However, for Gandhi, "individuality" must be "oriented to self-realisation through self-knowledge... in a network of interdependence and harmony informed by ahimsa" [Roy 1986a:84]. Nor was this to be an interdependence of dominant-subservient relationships so prevalent in our local communities and global societies. His swadeshi envisaged a more personalised and communitarian society on a human scale, yet extending to include both the biotic and even the cosmic community. This was the logical extension of the Jaina doctrine of 'syadvada', that everything is related to everything in the universe in 'a great chain of being'.

However, the Gandhian ideal was a community modelled on the joint family and on varna as a non-competitive division of labour. Later in his life his own promotion of inter-caste marriages testifies to a change in his views. Yet even as we critique such Gandhian ideas, we must discover in dialogue what value and relevance they have for us today. For ultimately Gandhi insists on both: that the community is not a mere means for the self-interest of the individual and that the individual in not a mere resource for the concerns of the community. And this would go for the community of communities, that our global community must be.

Violence: There can be no negating the liberation that modernity has brought in our post-modern world to vast masses of people. But for all its much vaulted 'rationality' some would rather say because of it, modernity has failed to cope with this endemic irrationality of violence. If Gandhi's ahimsa seems impractical, what are the alternative we have trapped ourselves in? If Gandhi was right that "to arm India on a large scale is to Europeanise it," (HS, Ch 15) then what would nuclear arms do? Americanise us? And this is an initiative being pushed by our cultural nationalists! But then in a globalised world it is surely only the elite that will get to strut and fret upon this global stage, while the masses of our people are a passive and manipulated audience to this theatre of the macabre.

The whole effort of the modern world in dealing with violence has been to control the other. But mastery over others has not meant less violence for ourselves. Only now we become the perpetrators, not the sufferers of violence. Gandhi's attempt begins with controlling oneself – as the first source of violence one must master in order to fearlessly and non-violently win over the violent others. His concern was with "socialising the individual conscience rather than internalising the social conscience" [Iyer 1973:123]. Certainly Gandhi has much relevance to our present need to once again bridge this dichotomy between rights and duties, and integrate both in a more comprehensive freedom of choice and the obligation of conscience, in a humanist worldview and a more genuinely humane world-community. This is our only real chance for peace in our now globally interdependent world.

Gandhi's synthesis: Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* is not a rejection of the liberative contribution of modernity: civil liberties, religious tolerance, equality, poverty alleviation. Rather his effort can be

interpreted as an attempt to integrate these positive elements with a liberating re-interpretation of tradition, even as some see him as radical and others as reactionary. With his critique from within the tradition, Gandhi becomes the great synthesiser of contraries if not of contradictions, within and across traditions.

His 'purna (comprehensive) swaraj' would harmonise rights and duties, head and heart, individual and community, faith and reason, economic development and spiritual progress, religious commitment and religious pluralism, self-realisation and political action. He brings together philosophical discourse and popular culture in enlightened renewal and social reform. Not since the time of the Buddha, some have argued, has such a synergy between the philosophic and the popular in our traditions been experienced. Thus, Gandhi integrates the Upanishad and the Tulsi Ramayan in his religious synthesis. When it comes to bridges across traditions, Gandhi brings the Gita together with the 'Sermon on the Mount' and reads one into the other. In fact, if he has Christianised Hinduism he has certainly also presented us with a Hinduised Christian spirituality.

Precisely as a re-interpretation from within, Gandhi can so much to more effectively and authentically integrate into his synthesis elements from without. Thus he reconciles meaningful faith and reasonable modernity. In the best traditions of this land he combined both faith and reason, for each is implicated in each other. Gandhi would constantly critique faith to ascertain whether it was meaningful and reasonable in terms of basic human value commitments. And so too he would demand of reason the same fidelity to these values as well.

However, the ascetic dimension of Gandhi's integration at times loses the aesthetic one. A criticism of Gandhi's ashrams was that it grew only vegetables not flowers [Parekh 1995:209]. Growing vegetables represented more than the Gandhian pre-occupation with vegetarianism and bread-labour. But in rightly emphasising the need for renunciation, certainly a message that our consumerist and self-indulgent world needs more than ever today, the Gandhian ashram seemed to miss out on the need for celebration, which our tired and alienated, dis-spirited and pessimistic world needs almost as much.

A re-interpretation of Gandhi would precisely allow such a celebration. While Gandhi's understanding of 'moksha' as service is a seminal breakthrough, even this can be enriched by affirming, not

negating the other dimensions of life. It is only thus that we will be able to bring some wholeness to, in Iris Murdoch's unforgettable phrase, the "broken totality," of our modern world.

VI

Conclusion: Partners in Dialogue

Gandhi's life was a continuing series of controversies and contestations with those in power on behalf of the powerless. He never lacked opponents, among the British and even the Indian elites, and often found himself isolated and alone particularly at the end of his life, which was far from being one long triumphant procession. Yet one of the great contributions of Gandhi was precisely his centring of the periphery: in politics with 'anthyodaya'; in religion by de-brahmising Hinduism, de-institutionalising practice and personalising belief; in education by his proposal for 'nai talim' or basic education as it came to be called; in the economy by symbolically urging khadhi. Not all of these efforts were successful or perhaps even practical, but they did make a contribution which is still valid today. And all Gandhi's original ideas can be found seeded already in his *Hind Swaraj*.

Today we need a new developmental model, and increasingly people are beginning to see that, it has to begin by "Putting the Last First" [Chambers 1983], to come back to the last Indian that Gandhi would have as the talisman of our social planning. No one can claim that Gandhi's reformist appeal has fulfilled the 'revolution of raising expectations' of our masses. This only underscores the need for a more fine-tuned analysis and a wider dialogue in our society for constructive change given the limits of reformism and the constraints on revolution. If we are looking for a new synthesis for a counter-culture, we must take Gandhi as a dialogue partner in this project but first we must redefine and re-interpret him. Such an encounter will help us to re-examine and reconstruct ourselves as well.

Gandhi has been severely criticised as impractical, as someone who took out an impossible overdraft on human moral resources. But this is to claim that human beings are not capable of a metanoia, a radical change of heart, that can open up new perspectives, not just for individuals and groups, but for entire societies and whole cultures as well. We need organic intellectuals and transformative activists who can articulate and precipitate such a social movement. The cascading crises that our society and our world is experiencing, only underlines more em-

phatically the need to find new ways of redefining ourselves and understanding our problems, before we can begin to respond to the situation.

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