

# **Gandhi's Critique of Modernity : An Analysis of 'Hind Swaraj'**

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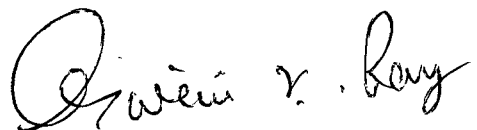
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**CERTIFICATE**

Certified that, the dissertation entitled "Gandhi's Critique of Modernity: An Analysis of 'Hind Swaraj'" submitted by Ivan Francis Lobo is in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy of this University. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this or any other University.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

  
DR. GURPREET MAHAJAN  
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Dedicated To

My Father and Mother

Who Through Their Untold Sacrifices Taught Me What I Must

Uphold in Life

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-- IVAN FRANCIS LOBO

## CONTENTS

	Introduction	.. 02 - 06
CHAPTER-I	British Rule And The National Movement	.. 07 - 33
CHAPTER-II	Gandhi's Views on Modernity	.. 34 - 80
CHAPTER-III	Debates Around Gandhi's Critique of Modernity	.. 81 - 103
	Conclusion	.. 104 - 107
	Select Bibliography	.. 108 - 118

## INTRODUCTION

From the time of Hegel to the present, modernity has been conceived most broadly as the new age. The Renaissance, the Reformations, and, above all, the beginning of capitalism are often taken as marking the origins of modernity. This new era of innovation, change, novelty and secularization has been characterized as a radical rapture from tradition and a static past.<sup>1</sup> While some theories of modernization present modernity as a purely positive force bound up with progress in science, industry and technology, others see it as a wholly negative force bound up with dehumanization, destruction of the environment, technology out of control and totalitarian political development.<sup>2</sup>

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- 1 Karl Marx radically characterizes this new epoch as, "constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social relations, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the *bourgeois* epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relationships, with their train of venerable ideas and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become obsolete before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned and men at last are forced to face with sober senses the real conditions of their lives and their relations with their fellow men." Karl Marx, Manifesto of the Communist Party (Moscow: Progress, 1952), pp.45-46.
- 2 Douglas Kellner, Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity (Oxford: Polity Press, 1989), pp.3-8. See also, David Frisby, Fragments of Modernity (Oxford: Polity Press, 1985), pp.11-37.

These complex historical processes generated by capitalism have challenged the explanatory enterprise of the philosophers and have led to major debates around the nature of modernity.<sup>3</sup>

Colonialism in India was an enterprise of introducing modernity in truncated forms. The unfolding of the various forces of colonialism set in motion the harmonious and barbarous, progressive and conservative processes within the different sections of Indian society. It marked a radical break from the past by altering the social, cultural and economic life of the society most profoundly. These processes generated multiple responses which run from total

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3 For example, concluding the clarificatory exercise about the nature of modernity Toqueville writes, "in the presence of so great a subject my sight is troubled, my reason fails....Although revolution which is taking place in the social condition, the laws, the opinions and the feelings of men is still far from being terminated, yet its results already admit of no comparison with anything the world has ever before witnessed. I go back from age to age to the remotest antiquity, but find no parallel to what is occurring before my eyes; as the past has ceased to throw light on the future, the mind of man wanders in obscurity". As quoted in Sudipta Kaviraj, "Marxism and obscurity of history" (Unpublished paper), p.1. See also, Jurgen Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) and Jamerson, "Post Modernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism", in New Left Review, no.146, July-August 1984, pp.53-93.

acceptance to total rejection of modernity. These processes were subjected to searching criticisms during the colonial rule itself. Within it, Gandhi's criticisms of modern civilization are the most powerful and lucid; indeed, Gandhi has been considered as one of the first and the best non-Western thinker to give a comprehensive critique of modernity. Despite the inconsistent, disingenuous and contradictory processes brought in by the imperial power, modern Indian state was marked by a deep attraction for modernity and continued the enterprise of introducing modernity without any hindrance. This modernity was supposed to be a re-enactment under admittedly different circumstances, of the classical line of European history; that is, a transition from an irrational tradition to a rational modernity, from obscurantism to science, from casteism to open society, from patronage to democracy, crafts to industry, illiteracy to education and discrimination to justice. This programme of re-enactment has run into deep crisis in its practice, causing astonishment and confusion.<sup>4</sup> The search for the reasons

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4 See, Sudipta Kaviraj, "Colonialism, Modernity and Political Culture" (Unpublished paper in Jawaharlal Nehru University Library, New Delhi), pp.1-5.



for this crisis and the construction of alternatives, has led to the revival of interest in Gandhi of *Hind Swaraj*. It is so because Gandhi was seized with some of the problems which are still the most crying problems of our age. It is not that Gandhi spoke the first and the last word on these problems, but he provided a centrality to these problems in his theory of social change. Therefore, one cannot afford to disregard his ideas.

Existing studies on Gandhi, with a few exceptions, tend to study Gandhi either ahistorically by depicting him as a perfect man or dismiss him as a politically useless *sadhu*, having no relevance to the contemporary needs. In this context, the following study sees Gandhi as a critical figure reacting and responding to the conditions that were shaping our present and future. The first chapter of this dissertation examines the impact of modernity on different aspects of the Indian society and the various responses to it. Within this framework, the second chapter examines Gandhi's views on modernity and studies the alternatives he suggests to the pathologies of modernity. The third chapter examines the debates around Gandhi's critique of modernity by classifying the participants in it into two groups: those

who project Gandhi as obscurantist indigenist and those who uphold Gandhi as a critical traditionalist. Concluding part of the study would assess the significance of Gandhi's critique of modernity.

## Chapter-I

### BRITISH RULE AND THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

#### 1. A Brief Historical Background:

British occupation of India, for nearly two centuries, brought about profound changes in almost all sectors of Indian society. Pre-British Indian society was based on a practically unalterable social order of the caste system which had lasted thousands of years. In this social order every caste had a grade, and, therefore, even a low caste derived some consolation in the fact that in the order of castes it is above some other caste.<sup>1</sup> The society looked at political power with perfect composure and indifference. It did so because the latter did not intrude into the everyday life processes of the communities. It did not take upon itself the right to legislate and restructure fundamentally social relations as long as its appetite for reasonable rent was

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1 Caste in the narrower sense applies primarily to the Hindus who make up 85% of India's population. Many features of caste are also found among non-Hindu groups. See, Marc Galanter, Competing Equalities: Law and the Backward Classes in India. (Delhi: Oxford, 1984) pp.7-17.

satisfied.<sup>2</sup> The Moghul rule, even though it was based on a different religious doctrine, did not alter this structure in any basic way. In moghul India, barring the highly specialized castes like Brahmins and barbers, most castes performed occupations that were integral to land cultivation or subsidiary to it.<sup>3</sup>

British rule primarily changed the structure of land control and agrarian class relations. The administrators of the British East India Company worked to enlarge the company's revenue. The upper orders of the Indian rural society helped the British in rehabilitating their raj and derived in turn rich dividends for their loyalty. It is of crucial importance to note that the combination of *Pax Britannica*, local landlords and moneylenders carried on

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2 Sudipta Kaviraj, "On the Construction of Colonial Power: Structure, Discourse and Hegemony", Occasional papers on History and Society, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, II Series, No.XXXV, 1991, p.23.

3 D.N. Dhanagare, Peasant Movement in India 1920-1950, (Delhi: Oxford, 1983) p.29.

exploitation in British India in a more profound way.<sup>4</sup> In other words, dominance in colonial India was doubly articulated. It stood on the one hand, for Britain's power to rule over its South Asian subjects and on the other, for the power exercised by the indigenous elite over the subaltern among the subject population itself.<sup>5</sup>

Development of transport and communication facilities linked the countryside to the coastal towns and ports, and the agricultural produce of the deep interior was now drawn into the world market. Commercial agricultural production of cash crops steadily increased. The changeover to commercial crops and higher priced foodgrains, due to revenue and rent pressures, meant a shift away from the poor

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4 For instance, after securing the Diwani rights of Bengal in 1765, the British administrators worked to increase the company revenue. Under the Permanent Settlement Act of Bengal, existing zamindars were declared full owners of the land with absolute property rights. This rule was also extended to other provinces. Between 1840 to 1857, the transfer of land from cultivators to non-cultivators, moneylenders, urban traders and so on increased considerably. Evictions, and imposition of levies and illegal taxes by corrupt revenue officials, had steadily built up tension, which finally culminated in the 1857 revolt. D.N. Dhanagare gives a detailed analysis of how British and native elite carried on exploitation of the subject population. See *Ibid.*, pp.30-40.

5 Ranajit Guha, "Discipline and Mobilize," in Partha Chatterjee & Gyanendra Pandey, ed., Subaltern studies VII: Writings on South Asian History and Society. (Delhi: Oxford, 1992) p.69.

man's food crops like *bajra* or pulses, and this often caused disaster in the famine years.<sup>6</sup> This shift from food crops to commercial crops needed credit facilities, for which peasantry naturally turned to moneylenders, who charged high interest and pocketed the vast surplus generated in the countryside. The peasants, unable to repay the credit, had to surrender their lands to the creditors. The new legal and judicial institutions that the British had introduced with the intention of distributing justice with equity helped ironically to reinforce the influence of the moneylenders.<sup>7</sup> As a result of all these processes, peasants

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6 Sumit Sarkar, Modern India 1885-1948. (Madras: Macmillan, 1983) p.32.

7 An appropriate example for this is the Deccan riots of 1857 in Maharashtra. Introduction of the *Raiyawari* system by the British in the Deccan region during 1835-1839, made landowners directly and individually responsible to the state for the payment of revenue. Due to the pressure of the landlords, *Kunbis* the caste of cultivators, (who also traditionally controlled village Panchayats, but lost this power due to the new courts, civil and criminal, introduced by the British) were forced to take credit from "*Vanis*", the caste of moneylenders in the Deccan region. They later charged high interest rates to the *Kunbis* which led to the antagonism between these two castes leading to riots. During the riots *Kunbis* attacked both their indigenous and foreign exploiters. Riots continued till 1875. During these riots British government took repressive measures against the *Kunbis*. Hundreds of them were arrested and *Kunbi* villages were collectively fined. see, D.N. Dhanagare, n.3, pp.37-41.

suffered and suffered for nothing.

During the British rule changes were taking place not only in the Indian economy, but also in the realm of culture. Bipan Chandra describes it hyperbolically when he says, "...whole world was lost and the entire social fabric was dissolved, and a new social framework came into being that was stagnant and decaying even as it was born"<sup>8</sup> As mentioned earlier, traditional society was based on an asymmetric social order of caste system. In this compartmental society, brahminical culture was at the top and culture of the untouchables was at the bottom; even as they varied from region to region, both cultures were easily identifiable.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Bipan Chandra, Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India. (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1979) p.7.

<sup>9</sup> Ainslie T. Embree, and to some extent M.N. Srinivas, trace the ideological content of brahminical culture to the literary tradition which was common to all brahmins throughout India. For instance, reciting "*Gayatri Mantra, Upanayana* or sacred thread ceremony, sacredness of the cow and Vedas were common to all Brahmins from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, irrespective of regional and linguistic barriers. See, Ainslie T. Embree, Imagining India: Essays in Indian History. (Delhi: Oxford, 1989) p.10; M.N. Srinivas, Caste in Modern India and Other Essays. (Bombay: Media promoters and Publishers, 1962) p.98. Even though all Brahmins everywhere share some cultural forms there are no all India castes and there is no nationwide hierarchy of castes. See, Marc Galanter, n.1, p.9.

Earlier invaders and conquerors of India had accommodated and eventually been absorbed into this culture. But the British were an exception to this. They came to India as traders and conquerors, not as social reformers. Therefore, they did not democratically organize the Indian social and cultural system. Their policy was to recognize and accommodate the Indian social order; it was as they termed it, a policy of non-interference. But the impact of British rule was such that it altered the social order profoundly.<sup>10</sup> Introduction of new transport and communication system, new economic activities, new kind of employment, a new legal system, new education and new ideas brought about fresh modes of mobility and a different set of values. The totality of all these changes and the values underlying these changes are referred to as 'modernity'.<sup>11</sup> In

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10 Marc Galanter, n.1, p.18; Sudipta Kaviraj, Colonialism Modernity and Political Culture. (Seminar paper presented at the Centre for Development Studies, New Delhi, 1990) pp.1-13.

11 We can get more details of colonialism and modernity in Sudipta Kaviraj's article, "Colonialism, Modernity and Political culture" ~~in~~. According to him, the historical peculiarity of colonialism was that it irredeemably changed the conceptual core of common sense on which social practices in traditional India were founded. He reaches this conclusion after analyzing the relationship between Sanskrit, vernacular and English languages. Sanskrit and vernacular were two different rendering of what was essentially the same conception of the world. But this was not true of the difference between English and vernaculars, because English did not admit of easy translatability into the vernacular languages of conceptual common sense. See Sudipta Kaviraj, n.10, pp.10-12.



other words, modernity is understood here as..." a view of life which considers politics solely as a science of coercive power; economics as an amoral science maximizing utilities of individuals and nations; technology as the right approach to nature and to question of satisfying human wants. Atheism is the metaphysics of modern humanism according to which man is seen not only as the measure of things, but also as his own maker. Historically, modernity has had its origin in the west but now it threatens the politics of every culture and every nation."<sup>12</sup> To India, the British were the harbingers of modernity and Gandhi its ultimate critic.

## II. Pre-Gandhian Responses To Modernity

Indian rulers confronted the British at the stage of their passage from commerce to imperial power. In dealing with the threat of the British, Indians were not merely politically inept, they were, at a more fundamental level, conceptually unprepared. In the encounter between British

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12 Anthony, J. Parel, "Mahatma Gandhi's Critique of Modernity" in Anthony J. Parel and Ronald, C. Keith ed., Comparative Political Philosophy: Studies under the Upas Tree, (New Delhi: Sage, 1992) p.163.

imperial power and traditional Indian society, there was a contact between two very different principles of construction of society and state. This led to the conceptual mistranslation of state and society, not only by the Indians, but equally by the British.<sup>13</sup> The British interpreted the unfamiliar Indian society through rationalist concepts, which came to dominate their society after enlightenment. This rationalism held that, "the basic laws of history could eventually be discovered and by their intelligent manipulation, humanity would be able to achieve over their own patterns of collective action a control and mastery comparable to its control over processes of nature."<sup>14</sup> In other words, rationalism is a doctrine in which reason based on merciless process of critical testing and unconditional doubt of all premises is given centrality. It is assumed that reason incarnate in the form of scientific thinking reveals to us the ultimate truth of nature. It enables the individual to harness the resources

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13 Sudipta Kaviraj, n.2, pp.20-25.

14 Sudipta Kaviraj, Marxism and the Obscurity of History, (paper presented in the workshop on rethinking emancipation concepts of Liberation, January 30-February 1, 1991. The Hague, The Netherlands) p.6.

of nature and provides simultaneously the principles for a more adequate social and political order. As a critical and reflective power embodied in human reason it enables the individual to differentiate between truth and superstition, dogma and free thinking. It shows further that history of humankind is the history of progress.

Observing the religious superstitions and social obscurantisms existing in Indian society, the British offered a rationalist critique of Indian culture. They characterized the latter as a stratified hierarchical society, deeply fragmented and inegalitarian in nature. However, they were gentle to observe its spiritual strength and cultural richness. On the whole, India came to be seen as a society that is spiritual or outwardly incompatible with the requirements of power in the modern world.<sup>15</sup> This representation of India along with the dissemination of the rationalist liberal culture led to an inevitable introspection about the strength and weakness of indigenous

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15 Partha Chatterjee, "The Constitution of Indian Nationalist Discourse" in Bhikhu Parekh and Thomas Pantham, ed. Political Discourse: Explorations in Indian and Western Political Thought. (New Delhi: Sage, 1987) p.252.

culture and institutions in the early nationalist consciousness. Most of the early nationalist leaders, through their encounter with enlightenment, came to accept and share the rationalist conception of the world. They came to accept the rationalist critique of India offered by the British, but their responses to colonial rule were varied. The induction of rationalist spirit in politics did not generate singular or monolith reaction; it contained pluralities of possibilities. For example, the radical demand for extension of democracy, for enfranchisement of the poor, and social justice were as much historical products of the rationalist project as the empowering discourse of technical knowledge, power, conquest and individuality. It was because of these diverse possibilities that the elites of the upper and lower castes developed different attitudes towards the colonial rule.<sup>16</sup> However, both of them recognized the need to reform the social and religious life.<sup>17</sup> The spirit of reform embraced almost the whole of India beginning with the efforts of Raja Ram Mohan Roy in Bengal and the subsequent formation of

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16 Sudipta Kaviraj, n.2, p.33; See also, Krishna Kumar, Political Agenda of Education: A Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas, (New Delhi: Sage, 1981) p.98.

17 Bipan Chandra, et. al India's Struggle for Independence, 1857-1947, (New Delhi: Penguin, 1989) p.83.

*Brahmo Samaj* in 1828. This was followed by *Paramahansa Mandali*, *Prarthana Samaj* in Maharashtra and *Arya Samaj* in Punjab. Backward castes also started the work of reformation with the *Satya Shodak Samaj* in Maharashtra and *Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Sabha* in Kerala. *Ahmadiya* and ALIGARH movements and *Rehnumai Mazdeyasani Sabha* represented the spirit of reform among the Muslims.<sup>18</sup>

None of the above mentioned movements were exclusively religious in character; they were strongly humanist in inspiration. They judged social relevance by a rationalist critique. Influence of rationalism on Rammohan Roy opened his eyes to the decadent practices of his society. He rejected the supernatural explanations offered in defence of some evil practices. He condemned *Sati* 'as murder according to every *shastra*'; he zealously defended the freedom of the press and pressurized the government to advocate educational reforms. Akshay Kumar Dutt went a step further and proclaimed that, 'rationalism is our only preceptor'. All natural and social phenomena, he held, could be analyzed and understood by purely mechanical processes. Further, the influence of rationality led

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18 Ibid.

Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar to defend widow marriage; in Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Vivekananda it led to the secular use of religion and the use of spirituality to take cognizance of the material conditions of human existence.<sup>19</sup> On the whole this perspective not only enabled them to adopt a rational approach to traditions, but also to evaluate the contemporary socio-religious practices from the standpoint of rationality and social utility. In the *Brahmo Samaj* it led to the repudiation of the infallibility of the *Vedas*, in Aligarh movement to the reconciliation of the teachings of Islam with the needs of the modern age. In the backward caste movements it led to the fight against brahminical hinduism. Acceptance of rationalism and an attack on religious superstitions and social obscurantisms was the basic feature of these early responses.

According to Bipan Chandra, even though the early responses to colonialism were deeply attracted by modernity, they did not totally reject religious practices and traditions. A blind imitation of the western cultural norms was never an integral part of their responses.<sup>20</sup> According

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19 Ibid., pp.83-90.

20 Ibid., p.88.

to Partha Chatterjee, the question of how India could become modern while retaining its essential cultural identity was the question that bothered the early nationalist consciousness. However, since most of them accepted Europe's rationalist critique of Indian culture, early nationalist consciousness thought of combining material superiority of the West with the spiritual superiority of the East to produce a perfect culture.<sup>21</sup>

The inherent desire of early nationalist consciousness aimed at political awakening culminated in the emergence of the Indian National Congress in 1885. In the years to come, the Congress became the platform, the organizer, the headquarters and the symbol of new national political spirit. The first twenty years of the Indian National Congress were dominated by moderate leaders. 'Moderates'

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21 Partha Chatterjee n.15. p.252; One can also get a good analysis of how the West represented the Orient, never permitting the latter to represent itself in Edward W. Said, Orientalism (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978) Edward Said has been criticized for popularizing an exaggerated construction of western rationalism, stressing the linearity in the rationalist discourse of otherness. See, Aijaz Ahmed, "Orientalism and After: Ambivalence and Cosmopolitan Location in the Works of Edward Said," Occasional Papers on History and Society Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Teen Murti, II series, No.XLIV, 1991 pp.29-157.

were the first to develop an economic critique of colonialism which was the most important contribution to the development of national movement. Three names stand out among the large number of Indians who initiated and carried out an economic analysis of the British rule. They are: Dadabhai Naoroji, Mahadev Govind Ranade and Romesh Chandra Dutt.

Dadabhai Naoroji made poverty his special subject and spent his entire life awakening the Indian and British public to the continuous impoverishment and economic exploitation of the country. He, along with others, highlighted the following aspects of economic exploitation: (i) decline and ruin of India's traditional handicrafts due to free trade; (ii) forcing the infant and underdeveloped modern Indian industries into a premature, unequal and hence unfair and disastrous competition with the highly organized and developed industries of the West; (iii) colonial pattern of finance under which taxes were raised as to overburden the poor.<sup>22</sup>

The focal point of the nationalist critique of colonialism was the drain theory. Dadabhai Naoroji was the

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22 Ibid., pp.95-96.



high priest of this theory; he argued that the British were draining and bleeding India.<sup>23</sup> According to the him , Indian capital and wealth was being transferred or drained to Britain in the form of salaries, pension for British civil servants and military officials working in India, interest on loans taken by the British capitalist in India and expenses of the Indian government in Britain. Feroze Shah Mehta and Gopal Krishna Gokhale, whom Gandhi declared as his political Guru, carried forward the critique of colonialism. Gokhale condemned the large expansion of the army. He demanded greater expenditure on education and industry. He linked the poor state of Indian finances and poverty of the people with the colonial status of the Indian economy and polity. Gokhale on the whole was a bitter critic of the British revenue system.<sup>24</sup>

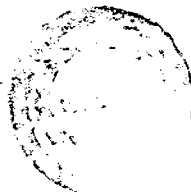
Based on the firm foundation of economic critique of colonialism, later nationalist leaders went on to stage powerful mass agitations and mass movements. Economic critique had the merit of being easily grasped by the nation

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23 Dadabhai Naoroji, Poverty and Un-British Rule in India, p.216. For details of publication, please refer to Bibliography.

24 Bipan Chandra, n.17, pp.121-123.

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of peasants. Money being transferred from one country to another was the most easily understood aspect in the theories of economic exploitation.<sup>25</sup> But focus on economic exploitation under colonial rule also worked as an ideology, in the sense that the presence of the British rulers and the continued colonial exploitation of Indian economy enabled the Indian national movement to deflect the hostility of the peasantry and the working classes to an external target, namely the British rule. Colonialism was held responsible not only for its own cruelties but conveniently enough for ours too.<sup>26</sup>

Despite this reading of the exploitative nature of the British colonial rule, these leaders generally referred to as Moderates, felt that they could appeal to the liberal values of the British and make them realize the kind of injustice that was being perpetrated in India in the name of the British Parliament. At the ideological level they accepted that the Indian society, prior to the coming of the British, was steeped in dogma and superstitions. The encounter with

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25 Ibid., pp.85-86.

26 D.N.Dhanagare, n.3, p.43; see also, Aijaz Ahmed, n.21 pp.110-114.

modernity had initiated the process of change and transformation. It generated the position of material progress, while building a more just and egalitarian society.

Even though moderates were dominating the Indian National Congress till 1905, there were reactions to the moderate rule from 1890 onwards, leading to factional quarrels. Those who believed in political extremism and revolutionary terrorism rejected the moderate leadership openly in 1907 causing a split in the Indian National Congress. They pursued a new style of political movement for freedom based on violence and direct action by the masses.

The 'Extremists' pointed mainly to two limitations of the moderate leadership: (i) its politics of persuasion and petitions to the rulers to introduce economic and political reforms, did not yield any significant results. (ii) Its leaders lacked roots among common people and were elitist in

their social and political outlook.<sup>27</sup> The Extremists rightly emphasized the role of the masses and the need to go beyond propaganda agitation. Instead of prayers and petitions, self-reliance and constructive work became the new slogans: starting *swadeshi* enterprises, organizing what came to be called national education, emphasizing the need for concrete work in villages, use of vernaculars, utilization of traditional popular customs like the village fair, and increasingly, an evocation of Hindu revivalist mood, came to be regarded as the best ways of bridging the gulf between the educated and the masses.<sup>28</sup>

In Bengal, Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, Bankim Chandra, Aswini Kumar Dutt and Rabindranath Tagore popularized the spirit of extremism through their writings. Lala Lajpat Rai advocated technical education and industrial self help in place of the famous annual festival of the English educated elite, for

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27 Bipan Chandra, n.17, pp.135-136; Most of the moderate leaders shared a prejudice common to all elites in regarding any mobilization of the masses on their own initiative as indiscipline. For instance, Gokhale asserted that the educated were the "natural leaders of the people" and explained that political rights were being demanded not for the whole population but for such portion of it as has been qualified by education to discharge properly the responsibilities of such association. See, Sumit Sarkar, n.6, p.90; see also, Ranajit Guha, n.5, p.108.

28 Sumit Sarkar, n.6, p.97.

that was all that the Congress amounted to.<sup>29</sup> Bala Gangadhar Tilak was the most outstanding leader among the extremists. Tilak was a pioneer in many ways--in the use of religious orthodoxy as a method of mass contact (through his alignment against reformers on the Age of Consent issue, followed by the organization of the Ganapati festival from 1894), in the development of a patriotic-cum-historical cult as a central symbol of nationalism (the Shivaji festival, which he organized from 1896 onwards), as well as in experimenting with a kind of non-revenue campaign in 1896-97. The countervailing cotton excise of 1896 produced intense reactions in Western India on which Tilak tried to base something like a boycott movement the first trial use of a method which was to become the central nationalist technique from 1905 onwards. Tilak, who had pointedly declared that, "We will not achieve any success in our labors if we croak once a year like a frog" seemed to be groping his way towards the techniques of mass passive resistance or civil disobedience when in a speech in 1902 he declared: "Though down-trodden and neglected, you must be conscious of your

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29 Ibid., p.98; Lajpat Rai also argued that the Congress should openly and boldly base itself on the Hindus alone, as unity with Muslims was a chimera. Here one can see the chalking out of extremist themes and as also their limitations.

power of making the administration impossible if you but choose to make it so. It is you who manage the railroad and telegraph, it is you who make settlements and collect revenue."<sup>30</sup>

On the whole, extremists derived a spirit of self comfort by mobilizing the people against the British colonial rule mainly through glorification of the past by renewing faith in our own civilization. But unfortunately they had no clear analysis of what they wished to inherit and disinherit in the British modernist legacy.

In fine, moderates and extremists were opposite poles united on a common aim, that is, anti-colonialism. Moderates through their sharp critique of the system of revenue and expenditure and by articulating a desire for self government gave Indians a foretaste of home rule. Extremists filled Indians with the idea of nationalism, showed the need that petitions must be backed by force and people must be capable of suffering, to attain home-rule. Based on this solid foundation Gandhi launched powerful agitations against the British with a massive mass support.

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30 Ibid., pp.99-100.

### III Gandhi's Point of Departure

Gandhi (1869-1948) was the first non-western thinker of the modern age to develop a comprehensive critique of modernity and colonialism. He was totally disillusioned with modern Western society in South Africa. In fact, he saw it as being materialistic, indoctrinating false ideals of merit and wealth, and gripping its members in relations which were predominantly violent because they were competitive.<sup>31</sup> He articulated his critique of modernity in terms of the indigenous philosophical vocabulary of his country. Socio-religious traditions of East and West also played an important role in his critical understanding. He incorporated in his critique aspects of Hinduism's high literary traditions and cultural practices of common Indian people. Incorporation of Buddhism, and Jainism's *Ahimsa*, Islam's monotheism and christianity's love and forgiveness, brought a unique moral sensitivity to his critique.<sup>32</sup> He

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31 Judith M. Brown, Modern India, The Origins of an Asian Democracy (Delhi: Oxford, 1984) p.205.

32 Bhikhu Parekh, Colonialism, Tradition and Reform (New Delhi: Sage, 1989) p.13; Louis Fischer, The Life of Mahatma Gandhi, (London: Jonatan Cape, 1951) pp.30-45. Gopinath Dhavan, The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1946) p.189.

filled his critique of modernity with a strong social consciousness especially due to the influence of western liberal and socialist thought.<sup>33</sup>

Gandhi's experiences in South Africa were crucial in fashioning him into a potential national leader. It prepared him internally to take a public role in his homeland by giving him a new confidence in his ability to handle public issues; it taught him to deal with large numbers of Indians and to confront and co-operate with men in authority. South African experience simultaneously blinded him to the diverse interests working in his motherland.<sup>34</sup> However, the central point of his critique was more or less formed during this period.

By the time Gandhi entered the Indian National Movement, the Indian National Congress had established itself as the sole organization of Indian nationalist

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33 Bhiku Parekh, "Some Puzzles about Gandhi's Autobiography," in Ramashray Roy ed., Contemporary Crisis and Gandhi (New Delhi: Discovery, 1989), p.19; Raghavan Iyer writes that, Gandhi in his critique, "did not follow the paths either of messianic revivalist like Vivekananda, a patient reformer like Ranade, a militant realist like Tilak or a romantic universalist like Tagore. Gandhi's standpoint was peculiarly his own". Raghavan Iyer The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi (Concord Grove, 1983) p.38.

34 Judith Brown, Gandhi's Rise to Power Indian Politics 1915-1922. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972) p.11.



aspirations.<sup>35</sup> After a careful study of colonial Indian society, Gandhi chose the Indian National Congress as the appropriate arena for his anti-colonial struggle.<sup>36</sup> In *Hind Swaraj* he gives reasons for choosing the Indian National Congress; he writes, "The Congress brought together Indians from different parts of India, and enthused us with the idea of nationality... The Congress has always insisted that the Nation should control revenue and expenditure. It has always desired self-government after the Canadian model... All I have to show is that congress gave us a foretaste of home rule. To deprive it of the honour is not proper, and for us to do so would not only be ungrateful, but retard the fulfillment of our object. To treat the Congress as an institution inimical to our growth as a nation would disable

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35 Ibid., p.23. Judith Brown writes, "Congress was the mouth piece of Indian political demands, rulers had to listen to it, politicians had a place within it. It had a split dating back to 1907."

36 Gandhi has been criticized for over emphasizing the role of the Indian National Congress especially when the landless labourers, poor peasants, industrial workers and harijan movements threatened the dominance of the Indian National Congress. In such situations he tried to contain these subaltern movements into a supplementary role vis-a-vis national movement. See, D.N.Dhanagare, n.3, p.48; Madhu Kishwar, "Gandhi on Women", Economic and Political weekly, October 5, 1985, p.1700.

us from using that body."<sup>37</sup>

Gandhi analysed the responses of moderates and extremist to colonialism and credited them with due honour. However he planned out his own distinct strategies of anti-colonial mobilization. It is by understanding his differences with moderates and extremists that one can properly appreciate Gandhi's point of departure. Regarding the moderate leader Dadabhai Naoroji, Gandhi wrote "Had not the Grand Old Man of India prepared the soil, our young men could not have even spoken about home rule... He has dedicated his life to the service of India. We have learned what we know from him... Is Dadabhai less to be honoured because, in the exuberance of youth, we are prepared to go a step further? Are we, on that account, wiser than he? It is a mark of wisdom not to kick away the very step from which we have risen higher. The removal of a step from a staircase brings down the whole of it. When, out of infancy, we grow into youth, we do not despise infancy, but, on the contrary, we recall with affection the days of our childhood.... We must admit that he is the author of nationalism."<sup>38</sup> Gandhi shares a similar opinion about

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37 M.K. Gandhi, Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule. (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1938) p.22.

38 Ibid., pp.18-20.

Gokhale; he writes, "Professor Gokhale occupies the place of a parent. What does it matter if he cannot run with us? A nation that is desirous of securing Home Rule cannot afford to despise its ancestors. We shall become useless, if we lack respect for our elders. Only men with mature thoughts are capable of ruling themselves and not the hasty-tempered."<sup>39</sup> Gandhi appreciates the extremists view that petitions must be backed up by force and that the people must be capable of suffering in order to attain home rule. Gandhi writes, "Their Bravery impressed me, but I felt that violence was no remedy for India's ills, and that her civilization required the use of a higher and different weapon of self-protection..."<sup>40</sup> Gandhi asks extremists not to limit their fight only to drive out the British physically; he writes, "It means we want English rule without the Englishman. You want the tiger's nature, but not the tiger; that is to say, you would make India English. And when it becomes English, it will be called not Hindustan but Englishtan. This is not the Swaraj that I want."<sup>41</sup> Gandhi thus tried to transform the entire fight of

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39 Ibid., p.20.

40 Ibid., p.15.

41 Ibid., p.27.

anti colonialism into fight against modern western civilization. In this enterprise he finds "...the division between moderates and extremists not a good thing for the country."<sup>42</sup> Consequently, he tried to bridge even the most sanctified cultural barriers that divided the people in an immensely complex agrarian society.<sup>43</sup>

While Gandhi evolved new strategies of mass mobilization, resistance and civil disobedience, he also tried to transform anti-colonial struggle into a struggle against modern western civilization. He identified the Indian National Movement, led by the Indian National Congress, as an important social force to carry forward this enterprise of struggle against modernity. For this reason perhaps Gandhi did not encourage any movements which were trying to divide the national movement. But ironically the efforts of Gandhi, aiming at a total struggle against modernity, were manipulated by economically better off and socially more powerful followers of Gandhi. They corrupted

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42 Ibid., p.24.

43 Partha Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World. Derivative Discourse. (Delhi: Oxford, 1986) p.110.

Gandhi's critique of modernity for their own benefits.<sup>44</sup>  
This historical process Ambedkar captured correctly, when he wrote, "...as a Mahatma, Gandhi may be trying to spiritualize politics. Whether he has succeeded in it or not, politics have certainly commercialized him."<sup>45</sup>

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44 Shahid Amin, Partha Chatterjee and Judith Brown have concentrated extensively on how Gandhi's critique of modernity was manipulated by elites for their own ends in the context of Indian National Movement. See, Shahid Amin, "Gandhi as Mahatma Gorakhpur District, Eastern U.P. 1921-22" in Ranajit Guha, ed., Subaltern Studies III: Writings on South Asian History and Society. (Delhi: Oxford, 1984) pp.2-44; Partha Chatterjee, n.45, pp.86-117; Judith Brown, n.34.

45 B.R. Ambedkar, Annihilation of Caste with a Reply to Mahatma Gandhi, (Aligarh: Anand Sahitya Sadan, 1989) p.116.

## Chapter-II

### GANDHI'S VIEWS ON MODERNITY

Why the British had come to India? What they had done to India? How Indians should respond to their rule? Reflections on all these questions led Gandhi to the analysis of colonialism, which was, in his view, as an outgrowth of modern Western Civilization. His analysis of colonialism, is therefore, at a deeper level, is an analysis of the evils of modern civilization and prescriptions for its cure. The first part of the following presentation concentrates on Gandhi's critique of modern civilization and the second examines the alternatives Gandhi put forward to modern civilization.

#### I. Critique of Modernity

For Gandhi, ending the direct political subjugation of India by the British was a small part of the larger struggle against modernity. He criticized modernity basically for alienating the people from its own culture and environment; in short, for alienating them from their own being and for

increasing poverty and misery of the people.<sup>1</sup> Gandhi wrote, "...this civilization makes bodily welfare the object of life",<sup>2</sup> and under it the resources of entire civilization are mobilized to promote bodily happiness. To elaborate it Gandhi gives some examples: "...the people in Europe today live in better built houses than they did a hundred years ago. This is considered an emblem of civilization and this is also a matter to promote bodily happiness... Formerly, in Europe, people ploughed their lands mainly by manual labour. Now, one man can plough a vast tract by means of steam engines and can thus amass great wealth... Formerly men were made slaves under physical compulsion. Now they are enslaved by temptation of money and the luxuries that money can buy..."<sup>3</sup> Possessiveness, coercive power and mechanization of every aspect of life are the pillars of this civilization. In trying to give an adequate conception of modern civilization" he calls it "Satanic Civilization"; drawing upon the teachings of Prophet Mohammed, <sup>based on</sup> Hinduism,

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1 Madhu Kishwar, "Symbols of Mental Slavery", Manushi, no.72, September-October 1982, p.2.

2 M.K. Gandhi, Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1938), p.31.

3 Ibid., pp.32-33.

he considers the modern civilization as the "black age".<sup>4</sup>

Gandhi cites most of the makers of modern civilization, such as democracy, science, technology and material progress. Among these he considers parliamentary democracy as one of the major achievement of modern civilization. Parliamentary democracy is attractive because under it people have the right and responsibility of taking the most significant decisions affecting their lives and formulate and enforce laws accordingly.<sup>5</sup> Gandhi did not disagree with these ideals of parliamentary democracy. He even worked for the attainment of parliamentary democracy in accordance with the wishes of the people of India.<sup>6</sup> Gandhi was only critical of parliamentary democracy as it was practiced in the West, where it stood for power, corruption, and personal gains. Gandhi writes, "...that which you consider to be the mother of parliament is like a sterile woman and a

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4 Ibid., p.31.

5 For example, ideally parliamentary democracy in India would mean asking everybody including widows, tribals and dalits their views on the matters affecting their lives. (Which is not done on a large-scale in India). See, Sudipta Kaviraj, "Political Culture in India: An Antiromantic View" in Teaching Politics, vol.II, no.3-4, pp.2-6.

6 M.K. Gandhi, n.2, p.4.



prostitute...that a parliament has not yet, of its own accord, done a single good thing. Hence I compared it to a sterile woman. The natural condition of that parliament is such that, without external pressure, it can do nothing. It is like a prostitute because it is under the control of ministers who change from time to time".<sup>7</sup> Gandhi calls the parliament, "a costly toy of the nation",<sup>8</sup> and highlights the gap between theory and practice of parliamentary democracy. He writes, "...its members are hypocritical and selfish because each thinks of his own little interest."<sup>9</sup> "It is without a real master";<sup>10</sup> under it the Prime Minister is more concerned about his power than the welfare of the nation. His care is not always that parliament shall do right. Prime Ministers are known to have made parliament do things merely for the party advantage".<sup>11</sup>

Critique of newspapers, in particular, and the free press in general, comes next. It is generally believed that

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7 Ibid., p.28.

8 Ibid., p.29.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., p.30.

the news papers understand the popular feelings and give expression to them. They arouse, among the people certain desirable sentiments and fearlessly expose the defects of governance. Gandhi did not disagree with these objectives of the press. He maintained, "...to a certain extent the people's will has to be expressed; certain sentiments will need to be fostered; and certain defects will have to be brought to light."<sup>12</sup> But according to Gandhi, "...free press is often dishonest because political events are interpreted by the press according to the financial and power interests of those who own and edit papers."<sup>13</sup> The views of those of the press, "swing like the pendulum of a clock and are never steadfast."<sup>14</sup> Media keeps the public in a state of perpetual misinformation and misrepresentation.<sup>15</sup> In making this assessment of the press and media he recognized the

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12 Ibid., p.18.

13 Ibid., p.30. Here recent examples of Mandal Commission and Ayodhya incidents can be cited to expose the role of some newspapers in spreading misinformation and communal propaganda, which has led to devastation.

14 Ibid.

15 Anthony J. Parel, "Mahatma Gandhi's Critique of Modernity" in Anthony J. Parel and Ronald C. Keith, ed., Comparative Political Philosophy: Studies Under the Upas Tree (New Delhi: Sage, 1992), p.166.

significance of the press in modern times in disseminating information and moulding popular opinion. Basically he wanted the people to reflect upon the economic context of the press that reveals the power of money; a context which is, in many cases, hidden from the consumer of the product.

Perhaps the most striking feature of this new civilization is its promise of better control which humanity would achieve over its own actions and mastery over the processes of nature. Essence of this promise is represented in *zweckrationalitat* - instrumental rationality -- "...which by an internal logic triggers historical processes which tend to depersonalize social relationships, to desiccate symbolic communication and to subject human life to the impersonal logic of rationalized, anonymous administrative systems -- historical processes in short which tend to make human life mechanized, unfree and meaningless.<sup>16</sup>

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16 Albrecht Wellmer, "Reason, Utopia and the Dialectic of Enlightenment" in Richard J. Bernstein, ed., Habermas and Modernity (Oxford: Polity Press, 1985), p.43; According to Weber, growth of instrumental rationality affects and infects the entire range of social and cultural life encompassing economic structure, law, bureaucratic administration and even the arts. This leads to the creation of an "iron cage" of bureaucratic rationality from which there is no escape. Weber writes, "...no one knows who will live in this cage in the

Moreover, under instrumental rationality, morality is disassociated from politics. One can understand the link between instrumental rationality and professionalism in a better way by examining Gandhi's views on modern justice and modern science.

The true end of law is the promotion of justice. The innocent should not be punished; this is the basic principle of all civilized systems of justice. Modern democratic state systems are based on securing justice to all its citizens. Under these systems, it is expected that the judges would not favour any one on the ground that he is rich and powerful, nor punish others merely because he is poor. Gandhi accepted the above ideals because they were in conformity with moral principles, in fact, he refused to believe everything that happens in the modern court of law

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future or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or if neither, mechanized pertification embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance. For the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said; "Specialist without spirit; sensualist without heart; this nullity imagines that it had attained a level of civilization, never before achieved." Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, translated by T. Parsons (New York, 1958), p.182. See also Richard J. Bernstein, ed., Habermas and Modernity (Polity Press, 1985) p.7.

as justice. Gandhi refused to separate legal justice which derives its legitimacy from the state and moral law which derives its legitimacy from religion and society. Gandhi criticized modern justice for separating itself from morality, subjugating morality and for attaining an oppressive power with a life of its own. He criticized modern law courts which administered justice like trade or economy. He wrote, "...the lawyers duty is to side with their clients and to find out ways and arguments in favour of their clients...Men take up that profession, not in order to help others out of their miseries, but to enrich themselves. It is one of the avenues of becoming wealthy, and lawyers interest exist in multiplying disputes".<sup>17</sup> "It is wrong to consider that the courts are established for the benefit of the people. Those who want to perpetuate their power do so through the courts. If people were to settle their own quarrels, a third party would not be able to exercise any authority over them."<sup>18</sup> The court system only perpetuate the grip of the lawyers and judges over the people. In other words, through his critique Gandhi points

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17 M.K. Gandhi, n.2, p.50.

18 Ibid., p.51.

to the danger of professionalization of the judicial system; an aspect that creates a powerful political elite alienated from its own culture but continually dominating the society.<sup>19</sup>

The critique of professionalization is carried forward in his analysis of modern medicine. He recognized that the modern system of medicine has achieved considerable success in curving dangerous diseases. Gandhi does not, in other words, discredit these achievements. Instead he reflects on the causes of modern diseases, the dangers of professionalization in modern medicine, and the dominant practice of modern science which totally separates itself from nature, resulting in unlimited exploitation of the latter. Gandhi writes, "...the business of a doctor is to take care of the body, or properly speaking not even that. Their business is really to rid the body of diseases that may afflict it."<sup>20</sup> Diseases often arise due to ones negligence or indulgence."<sup>21</sup> In other words diseases are

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19 Anthony J. Parel, n.15, p.167.

20 M.K. Gandhi, n.2, p.53.

21 Ibid.

caused due to the lack of personal discipline of the individual. Under the influence of modern medicine individuals become more and more self-indulgent, as well as dependent on medicine and doctors.<sup>22</sup> Explaining this, Gandhi writes, , "I have indulged in vice, I contract a disease, a doctor cures me, the odds are that I shall repeat the vice. Had the doctor not intervened, nature would have done its work, and I would have acquired mastery over myself, would have been freed from vice and would have become happy."<sup>23</sup> Further, "Hospitals are institutions for propagating sin. Men take less care of their bodies and immorality increases."<sup>24</sup> Profession of medicine, according to Gandhi, is not taken up for the purpose of serving humanity. He writes, "...people become doctors so that they may obtain honours and riches."<sup>25</sup> To Gandhi, the root of modern medicine is violence: "...for the sake of a mistaken care of the human body, they kill thousands of animals. They practice vivisection. No religion sanctions this. All say

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22 Anthony J. Parel, n.15, p.

23 M.K. Gandhi, n.2, p.53.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., p.54.

that it is not necessary to take so many lives for the sake of our bodies."<sup>26</sup>

Gandhi's critique of modern medicine leads one to the question of modern science. Shiv Visvanathan points out that, "scientific experiment as a dominant method is based on the notion of scientific detachment. Without the notion of scientific detachment, the inhumanity of modern science cannot be understood."<sup>27</sup> Scientific detachment, in turn is closely related to the ideology of 'scientific rationality'. One can understand it in a better way in the light of Ashis Nandy's analysis of the ontology of modern science. According to Nandy, scientific rationality is the claim that the valid truth about the nature of reality can be attained

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26 Ibid., p.53; Regarding the attitude of western culture towards animals, Michel Foucault writes, "From the start, Western culture has not considered it evident that animals participate in the plenitude of nature, in its wisdom and its order -- animals rather belong to anti-nature, to a negativity that threatens order and by its frenzy endangers the positive wisdom of nature. See Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization, A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason (London: Tavistock Publications, 1967), p.77.

27 Shiv Visvanathan, "From the Annals of the Laboratory State", in Alternatives, Social Transformation and Human Governance, vol.XII, no.1, January 1987, p.47.



by using a particular method. This method induces a split between cognition and feeling, reason and passion, practice and ethics, means and ends. It separates man off from the object of his enquiry emotionally. It gives primacy to reason which is the core of modern scientific world view.<sup>28</sup>

Gandhi in his life rejected the all-embracing role of reason. In Gandhi one finds an understanding of reason which is situated in culture, which gains its distinctive power always within a living tradition.<sup>29</sup> For example, keeping in mind the conditions of poverty in which majority of people lived, Gandhi conducted experiments with food, with a view to finding out the most wholesome meal and the most sensible way of preparing it. Similarly, when he argued in favour of eating unpolished rice, that is rice which is hand pounded rather than polished in mills, Gandhi emphasized not just

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28 Ashis Nandy, Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias: Essays in Politics of Awareness (Delhi: Oxford, 1987), p.131.

29 This kind of understanding can be found in Gadamer's works. For Gadamer reason is historical or situated reason which gains its distinctive power always within a living tradition. This is not limitation or deficiency of reason, but rather the essence of reason rooted in human finitude. See, Richard J. Bernstein, Beyond Objectivism and Relativism (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1983), p.37.

the nutritional advantages but also the fact that if the rice can be pounded in the villages after the old fashion, the wages derived from it will fill the pockets of the rice pounding sisters -- since hand pounding of rice is traditionally considered a woman's occupation. The same can be said about Gandhi's experiments with 'Charka'-spinning wheel -- too. "It is important to point out that Gandhi", writes Madhu Kishwar, "never recommended any diet reform which he had not tried on himself over a period of time. This area of Gandhi's activity reveals him at his scientific and rational best."<sup>30</sup> In Gandhi's *weltanschauung* reason did not subjugate non-reason, but tried to make it own way with a continuous dialogue with tradition.<sup>31</sup>

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30. Madhu Kishwar, "Gandhi on Women", Economic and Political Weekly, vol.XX, no.41, October 12, 1985, p.1754.

31 For instance, when an earthquake hit Bihar in 1934, Gandhi described it as a punishment for the practice of untouchability. This view went against the rationalist forms of explanation and reasoning. For this Rabindranath Tagore criticized him for spreading superstitious beliefs and asked Gandhi to see natural catastrophe on rational grounds. But Gandhi argued that, morality and superstition are two different things. A physical phenomena can produce results both physical and spiritual. Therefore, one can use a physical catastrophe into a social good by taking a firm moral attitude towards it, and strengthen one's resolution to fight at those things which are evil in human life, see, Pravesh Jag Chander, ed., Gandhi and Tagore Argue (Lahore: Indian Printing Works, 1945), pp.169-92.

In fine, what Gandhi has said about lawyers and doctors is applicable in principle to every modern profession. In the modern age practical knowledge is in danger of becoming an instrument of power and domination; as interpreted by modernity and its predominantly utilitarian culture, it has

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This is not to undermine the importance of rationality. "Certainly we value rationality", writes Alasdair MacIntyre, "because it is by rational methods that we discover truth; but a man may be rational who holds many false beliefs and a man may have true beliefs and yet be irrational. What is crucial is that the former has the possibility of progressing towards truth, while the second not only has no grounds for asserting what he believes, even though it is true, but is continually liable to acquire false beliefs. What is to be rational? It is a necessary condition of rationality that a man shall formulate his beliefs in such a way that, it is clear what evidence would be evidence against them and that he shall lay himself open to criticism and refutation in the light of possible objection. But to foreclose on tolerance is precisely to cut oneself off from such criticism and refutation. It is to gravely endanger one's own rationality by not admitting one's own fallibility." MacIntyre further writes, "institutionalization of rationalization is one of the great achievements of bourgeois society. Of course the very fact of institutionalization can be used to isolate the practice of rational criticism and so prevent it being exercised upon the social order; and there is a continuous pressure upon universities and other institutions to make the practice of rational enquiry merely instrumental to the purposes of government. These assaults upon rational enquiry in the interests of the established social order have to be resisted". See, Alasdair MacIntyre, Marcuse (London: Fontana, 1970), pp.90-91.

ceased to be a means of service and human fellowship.<sup>32</sup>

Gandhi gives a critique of new civilization at the technocratic level by examining its chief symbol--modern machinery. Gandhi writes, "machinery is the chief symbol of modern civilization, it represents a great sin".<sup>33</sup> Here Gandhi's attack is not directed against machinery as such, but against the 'machinery craze' and the resulting slavery. In replying to a question whether he was against all machinery, Gandhi said, "...how can I when I know that even this body is a most delicate piece of machinery? The spinning wheel is a machine...what I object to is the craze for machinery not machinery as such. The craze for what they call labour saving machinery. Men go on saving labour till thousands are without work and thrown on the open street to die of starvation..."<sup>34</sup> "I would favour", Gandhi said in 1921, "the use of the most elaborate machinery if thereby India's pauperism and resulting idleness could be

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32 Anthony J. Parel, n.15, p.167.

33 M.K. Gandhi, n.2, p.83.

34 Ibid., pp.7-8.

avoided."<sup>35</sup> Due to the evil results of machinery, "...workers in the mills of Bombay have become slaves. The condition of the women working in the mills is shocking....If machinery craze grows in our country it will become an unhappy land..."<sup>36</sup> Gandhi was critical of the craze for machinery for its immorality. Explaining this Anthony J. Parel writes, craze for machinery is the perversion of man's natural technical capacity. A natural human capacity becomes a craze when it is not directed towards its proper end, which is, ultimately, the good of the species. But when the natural capacity becomes a craze, technology becomes an instrument of benefit to some and harm to others, it becomes an instrument of power, domination and inequality among humans."<sup>37</sup> Gandhi writes, "Today machinery merely helps a

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35 In a discussion in London in 1931, Charlie Chaplin asked Gandhi, "Supposing you had in India the independence of Russia, and you could find other work for your unemployed and ensure equitable distribution of wealth, you would not then despise machinery? You would subscribe to shorter hours of work and more leisure for the worker?" "Certainly" replied Gandhi. See, C. :Rajagopalachari and J.C. Kumarappa, ed., The Nation's Voice (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1932), p.129.

36 M.K. Gandhi, n.2, p.83.

37 Anthony J. Parel, n.12, pp.167-68.

few to ride on the backs of millions. The impetus behind it all is not the philanthropy to save labour but greed. It is against this constitution of things that I am fighting with all my might."<sup>38</sup> How the mills of Manchester destroyed the traditional cloth mills of India is a historical example for this fact.<sup>39</sup>

Gandhi compares "machinery to a snake hole which may contain from one to a hundred snakes."<sup>40</sup> The snake he takes for vivisection is large scale industrialization by specially concentrating on railways. Large scale industrialization involves every kind of machine in the production process and creates new conditions of work. It leads to the growth of large centres of production by

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38 M.K. Gandhi, n.2, p.8.

39 Gandhi writes, "It is difficult to measure the harm Manchester has done to India. It is due to Manchester that Indian handicraft has all but disappeared....We wore manchester cloth and this is why Manchester wove it....It were better for us to send money to Manchester and to use flimsy Manchester cloth than to multiply mills in India. By using Manchester cloth we only waste our money; but by reproducing Manchester in India, we shall keep our money at the price of our blood, because our very moral being will be sapped, and I call in support of my statement the very mill-hands as witness." Ibid., pp.82-83.

40 Ibid., p.84.

ruining all traditional modes of production. Industrialization not only means factory production but also industrialization of agriculture which leads to the growth of large farms, use of larger and more efficient machinery, breaking down of small fields and rationalization of crops. Apart from generally criticizing large scale industrialization by concentrating on the miseries of the labourers under it, he gives a critique of it keeping in mind the conditions of India, its culture and environment. While he recognized that industrialization created a new spirit of nationalism by integrating people to a common economy, and the forced migration of the people to the urban industrial centres created the conditions for launching a fight against imperialism, yet, large scale industrialization, he felt, destroyed the agricultural production in the villages which was specially geared towards the needs of the collectivity. Further, it compelled people to migrate to the large urban centres, which apart from uprooting the people from their own culture and environment, enslaved them to a new culture which had nothing in common with the culture of this country. It also created large urban centres with large disparities of wealth. They are inhabited, on the one hand, by small

wealthy elites who live in large, well furnished houses, and on the other, there exist large number of people who migrate from the villages to the urban centres due to the pressures of life; they contribute their everything to the growth of urban centres by engaging in all kinds of hazardous and immoral jobs including prostitution, but in return, get nothing except a small place in the slums, where they helplessly try to imitate the alienated culture of the elite in the midst of their poverty stricken life. Most of all, Gandhi is critical of industrialization for causing environmental damage by mercilessly exploiting natural resources, dumping poisonous gases into the open air and industrial waste into rivers and seas. Such exploitative misuse of the environment, he argues, affects every living creature depending on air and water for survival.<sup>41</sup>

One can understand the dangers of large-scale industrialization better by separately examining Gandhi's

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41 Claude Alvares in his recently published book, Science, Development and Violence: The Revolt Against Modernity (Delhi: Oxford, 1992), pp.1-30 points out various examples which show the dangers of large scale industrialization, such as the Bhopal Gas Tragedy, the Case of Kabini Paper Mills in Karnataka, the industrial estates at Patanacheru and Bollaram in A.P., the Orient Paper Mills in M.P. and the Narmada Valley Project.



views on railways.<sup>42</sup> According to Gandhi, "...but for the railways, the English could not have such a hold on India as they have. The railways too have spread the bubonic plague. Without them, the masses could not move from place to place. They are the carriers of plague germs....Railways have also increased the frequency of famines, because owing to facility of means of locomotion, people sell out their grain and it is sent to the nearest markets. People become careless and so the pressure of famine increases. Railways accentuate the evil nature of man...."<sup>43</sup>

By criticizing railways, Gandhi draws our attention to the phenomenon of speed in modern communication.<sup>44</sup> He writes, "...formerly, men travelled in wagons. Now they fly through the air in train at the rate of four hundred and more miles per day. This is considered the height of civilization...men will not need the use of their hands and feet. They will press a button, and they will have their clothing by their side. They will press another button, and

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42 Anthony J. Parel, n.15, p.168.

43 M.K. Gandhi, n.2, p.42.

44 Anthony J. Parel, n.15, p.168.

they will have their newspaper....Everything will be done by machinery..."<sup>45</sup> Here one finds modernity making phenomenon of speed as a modern value.<sup>46</sup> To show the limitations of this value Gandhi goes back to the roots. What does our natural constitution intend and what does our technological craze compel?<sup>47</sup> Gandhi writes, "...man is so made by nature as to require him to restrict his movements as far as his hands and feet will take him. If we do not rush about from place to place by means of railways and such other maddening conveniences, much of the confusion that arises will be obviated. Our difficulties are of our own creation. God set a limit to a man's locomotive ambition in the construction of his body. Man immediately proceeded to discover means of overriding the limit. God gifted man with intellect so that he might know his maker. I am so constructed that I can only serve my immediate neighbours, but in my conceit I pretend to have discovered that I must with my body serve every individual in the universe."<sup>48</sup> Gandhi evaluated the value of

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45 M.K. Gandhi, n.2, pp.32-33.

46 Anthony J. Parel, n.12, p.169.

47 Ibid.

48 M.K. Gandhi, n.2, p.44.

speed in the light of the notion of the good of man. But here he faced a difficulty. The good in question, the good of character, is acquired by habituation which takes time and cannot be speeded up. Speed in achieving moral development is not possible. Development of good habits can be achieved only over a long period of time.<sup>49</sup> Gandhi writes, "...goods travels at a snail's pace...those who want to do good are not selfish. They are not in a hurry, they know that to impregnate people with good requires a long time...."<sup>50</sup>

In the final analysis, Gandhi's approach to science, technology, art, governance, aesthetics, wealth and power was all guided by his overriding moral concern. He saw all these as a blessing only if it promotes the happiness of all, not just those who have access to it.

## II. Gandhi's Alternatives to Modernity

Gandhi did not look at modern civilization as an incurable disease.<sup>51</sup> He argued for a change in the hitherto

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49 Anthony J. Parel, n.12, pp.169-70.

50 M.K. Gandhi, n.2, p.42.

51 Ibid., p.34.

dominant values and conceptions on the basis of which the common interests are fused. He suggested truth (*Satya*) and non-violence (*ahimsa*) as the basic alternatives. On the basis of *satya* and *ahimsa* he developed a technique for political action, known to everyone as *Satyagraha*. This political action extends beyond *satyagraha* or passive resistance and reaches *sarvodaya*, the improvement of mankind as such.<sup>52</sup>

Truth or *Satya*, in Gandhi's usage, is a many sided concept. At the most abstract level it means 'being'. Gandhi writes, "...the word *satya* means 'to be', 'to exist'. It is ever the same through all time. I have been striving to serve that truth. I have, I believe, the courage to jump from the top of Himalayas for its sake."<sup>53</sup> In the ordinary meaning truth refers to honesty in human affairs. Truth as honesty becomes clearly visible when Gandhi says, "...if I appear today before the British public in my loin-cloth, it is because I have come as the sole representative of those half-naked, dumb millions."<sup>54</sup> At a formal level truth means

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52 Anthony J. Parel, n.15, p.170.

53 V.V. Ramana Murthi, Selected and ed., Gandhi: Essential Writings (New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1970), p.70.

54 Ibid., p.310.

practical wisdom, knowing what to do in a given situation. Truth as practical wisdom has to be in conformity with *dharma*, the moral law.<sup>55</sup> For example, "...to allow crops to be eaten up by animals in the name of *ahimsa*, while there is a famine in the land is certainly not truth."<sup>56</sup> In a still restricted sense truth means 'Reality', the Absolute, the foundation of all empirical reality. Gandhi writes, "There is orderliness in the universe, there is law governing everything and every being that exists and lives. Power that creates and dissolves. In the midst of death life persists, in the midst of untruth, truth persists, in the midst of darkness light persists. Hence I gather that God is truth, life, light. He is love."<sup>57</sup> This is the sense in which truth

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55 Anthony J. Parel, n.15, p.170; In Aristotle too the notion of truth is referred as practical wisdom, and truth is equated with politics. Explaining this Habermas writes, "Politics was understood to be the doctrine of the good and just life. It was continuation of ethics which proceeded pedagogically and not technically. The old doctrine of politics referred exclusively to praxis in the narrow sense of Greeks. It had nothing to do with *techne*, the skillful production of artifacts and expert mastery of objectified tasks". See, Jurgen Habermas, Theory and Practice, translated by John Viertel (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1974), pp.41-49.

56 V.V. Ramana Murthi, ed., n.53, p.135.

57 Ibid., p.72..

is discussed in the philosophy of *Vedanta*. Finally, when the absolute is understood as a person, truth means, what in ordinary language one means by God. Gandhi writes, "...even in ordinary affairs we know that, people do not know who rules and why he rules and yet they know that there is a power that certainly rules. In my last year tour in Mysore (1927) I met many poor villagers, and I found upon enquiry that they did not know who ruled Mysore. They simply said God ruled it..."<sup>58</sup> From the above discussion it becomes clear that, for Gandhi, there is no one single manifestation of truth, no one interpretation of truth, no one name for God, and no one scripture. Gandhi writes, "...the Vedas are as divinely inspired as the Bible, Koran...among all religious texts."<sup>59</sup> Inevitably, this pluralism of modes and -structures of perceiving God, as Rustom Bharucha points out, defies the monolithic categories of fundamentalist discourse where there is one God, one scripture and one truth that is unequivocally upheld.<sup>60</sup>

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58 Ibid.

59 V.B. Kher, compiled and ed., Mahatma Gandhi. What is God? The Essence of Hinduism (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1987), p.31.

60 Rustom Bharucha, The Question of Faith (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993), p.74.

Gandhi's concept of *Ahimsa* or non-violence is another basic alternative to the violence of modernity. Gandhi refers to non-violence in different terms, such as, truth-force, love-force and soul-force. He considers non-violence as the highest moral value. It means not merely abstention from harming others, but also absence of malice or hostility to all living beings in every way and at all times.<sup>61</sup> The source of *Ahimsa* is the soul, and it is distinguished by Gandhi from brute force or physical force, whose source is the body.<sup>62</sup> In modernity brute-force has an autonomous existence. At the societal level brute-force expresses itself in the form of pointless accumulation of wealth, extensive cultivation of land, large scale industrialization, environmental pollution, unrestrained use of insecticide, eating more than necessary for survival, constructing large houses, wearing silk, sporting pearls and so on.<sup>63</sup> At the state level, brute force expresses itself in the form of gigantic and all pervasive state-machinery which

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61 Bhikhu Parekh, Colonialism, Tradition and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhi's Political Discourse (New Delhi: Sage, 1989), p.139.

62 Anthony J. Parel, n.15, p.171.

63 Bhikhu Parekh, n.61, p.131; Vandana Shiva, n.33, p.255.

becomes the guardian and bestower of everything, keeping its watch on all nerves and sinews of society; it expresses itself in the rapidly growing armament race, guerrilla wars, wars of aggression and so on.<sup>64</sup>

To Gandhi, while all violence was bad and must be condemned in abstract, it was important to distinguish between its different forms and contexts. Defensive violence was morally superior to offensive, as it was largely reactive and provoked by the opponent. Spontaneous violence was a result of accumulated frustration and superior to premeditated violence.<sup>65</sup> Gandhi distinguished between different forms of violence, because he knew that in life it is impossible to eschew violence completely. For example Gandhi writes, "...meat eating is sin for me. Yet for others who eat it always it is not a sin, to give it up simply in order to copy me will be a sin."<sup>66</sup> In the same way Gandhi writes, "...agriculturists have to use minimum violence,

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64 Valerian Rodrigues, "Conception of Revolution Marx and Gandhi: Converging Perspectives", in V.T. Patil, ed., New Dimensions and Perspectives in Gandhism (New Delhi: Inter India, 1989), p.271.

65 Bhikhu Parekh, n.61, p.134.

66 V.V. Ramana Murthi, ed., n.53, p.135.



that is they have to kill birds and insects which destroy the crops".<sup>67</sup>

According to Bhikhu Parekh, Gandhi rejected violence on four grounds; first, based on ontological ground he argued that life is a manifestation of *Brahman* and therefore divine, destroying it is a sin; second, epistemological ground, it was a fundamental and inescapable fact of human life that all knowledge was partial and corrigible. Differently endowed and situated, men saw the world differently, each grasping only a specific aspect of it. But violence denied these fundamental facts. In order to harm or kill, one justified that he is absolutely right and opponent totally wrong. Therefore violence rested on false epistemological foundation; third, on moral ground, violence by not allowing to change the opponents perception of truth, created untruth. Fourth, on practical ground, violence cannot achieve lasting results.<sup>68</sup>

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67 Ibid.

68 Bhikhu Parekh, n.61, pp.155-56; Prakash Chandra Upadhyaya reviewing Parekh's analysis of Gandhi's notion of violence writes, "Parekh does not attempt to discuss the sociology of violence and Gandhi's understanding (or otherwise) of it. Violence is not .../-

*Ahimsa* meant for Gandhi, the largest love the greatest charity and the greatest courage. Gandhi writes, "...the fact that there are so many men still alive in the world shows that it is based not on the force of arms, but on the force of truth or love."<sup>69</sup> Moreover *ahimsa* is based on the law of self suffering, Gandhi writes, "...a mother suffers so that her child may live..."<sup>70</sup> "Passive resistance is a method of securing rights by self-suffering; it is the reverse of resistance by arms. When I refuse to do a thing that is repugnant to my conscience, I use soul-force....Everybody admits that sacrifice of self is infinitely superior to sacrifice of others. Moreover, if this kind of force is used in a cause that is unjust, only the person using it suffers. He does not make others suffer

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discussed as a product of particular kinds of social institutions (for instance, the caste system in India). Like Gandhi, Parekh appears not have considered the question as to whether capitalism (or even for that matter industrialism), landlordism and colonialism (with a few exceptions) created socially violent institutions." See, Prakash Chandra Upadhyaya, "A Celebration of the Gandhian Alternative" in Economic and Political Weekly, December 2, 1989, p.2660; See also Ashok Rudra, "Against Feudalism", Economic and Political Weekly, December 26, 1981, p.2145.

69 M.K. Gandhi, n.2, p.70.

70 V.V. Ramana Murthi, ed., n.53, p.138.

for his mistakes."<sup>71</sup> "*Ahimsa* sees another human being not as a potential competitor, but as a potential co-operator".<sup>72</sup> Further, Gandhi writes, "a helpless girl in the hands of a follower of *ahimsa* finds better protection than in the hands of one who is prepared to defend her only to the point to which his weapons carry him."<sup>73</sup> This brings out an important aspect of *ahimsa*; "*ahimsa* is more than not injuring others; it is also a capacity to accept suffering voluntarily in the name of justice."<sup>74</sup>

Gandhi's concept of *ahimsa* is related to the question of the relationship between means and ends in morality. In *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi deals with a question regarding the relationship between means and ends. The question is: "What does it matter what means they adopted? Why should we not obtain our goal which is good, by any means, even by using violence."<sup>75</sup> Gandhi, in his answer to this question, writes:

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71 M.K. Gandhi, n.2, p.71.

72 Anthony J. Parel, n.15, p.172.

73 V.V. Ramana Murthi, ed., n.53, p.137.

74 Anthony J. Parel, n.15, p.172.

75 M.K. Gandhi, n.2, p.63.

"...we reap exactly as we sow...If I want to deprive you of your watch, I shall certainly have to fight for it; if I want to buy your watch I shall have to pay for it; and if I want a gift, I shall have to plead for it; and according to the means I employ, the watch is stolen property, my own property, or a donation. Thus we see three different results from three different means."<sup>76</sup> Means are as sacred as the ends and soul-force, according to Gandhi, is superior to brute force.<sup>77</sup> The thief is moved to change his habit by techniques of love-force; an unjust ruler or a rapacious industrialist is moved to change their ways, on their own on the basis of the enlightenment that soul-force generates. We are so accustomed to identifying the social effectiveness of coercive power in terms of fear of punishment," writes Anthony Parel, "that we find it difficult to see that soul-force can be even more effective than brute force."<sup>78</sup>

*Satya* and *ahimsa* can be pursued as alternatives through the cultivation of following dispositions like, chastity or

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76 Ibid., pp.64-65.

77 Ibid., pp.65-67.

78 Anthony J. Parel, n.15, p.172.

*Brahmacharya*. Gandhi writes, "...chastity is one of the greatest disciplines without which the mind cannot attain requisite firmness. A man who is unchaste loses stamina, becomes emasculated and cowardly. He whose mind is given to animal passion is not capable of great effect...when a husband and wife gratify the passions, it is no less an animal indulgence on that account. Such an indulgence, except for perpetuating the race, is strictly prohibited..."<sup>79</sup> Gandhi's position on chastity is related to the larger question of sexuality. Modernity taps sexuality for purposes of financial gains, as an extension of brute-force, Gandhi taps sexuality as a subordinate ally of soul-force for purposes of respecting and serving the other as the other, with no hidden agenda for control or sexual exploitation.<sup>80</sup> Gandhi uses sexuality as a positive source of non-violent social and political behaviour.

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79 M.K. Gandhi, n.2, p.75.

80 Anthony J. Parel, n.15, p.173; Bhikhu Parekh criticizes Gandhi's views on sexuality for the following reasons: (i) for discussing sexuality entirely from the masculine point of view. Gandhi's pre-occupation with semen leads Bhikhu Parekh to the above conclusion. (ii) Gandhi like most ascetics saw sexuality as an impulse or a passion, rather than as a relationship. See Bhikhu Parekh, n.61, pp.190-205.

Like chastity, Gandhi stresses the need of voluntary poverty. Pecuniary ambition and passive resistance cannot well go together. Those who have money are not expected to throw it away, but they are expected to be indifferent about it."<sup>81</sup> Voluntary poverty can be practiced only by those who had a sufficiency of material possessions and it had nothing to do with involuntary poverty of the large masses of the Indian people. Excess of wealth was within Gandhi's conception of trusteeship, potentially for the benefit of others.<sup>82</sup> Gandhi saw voluntary poverty, first, as a means of bringing about economic justice, and second, as a process of identifying with the hungry and poverty stricken countrymen.<sup>83</sup> He believed that the spirit of voluntary poverty had to be nourished by daily manual labour, *swadeshi*, and decentralization of industries. Manual labour was must for one who took *swaraj* seriously. To Gandhi, "...just as physical exercise was good for the body, so

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81 M.K. Gandhi, n.2, p.76.

82 Anthony J. Parel, n.15, p.173.

83 For example, once Gandhi had reprimanded Lohia for being addicted to cigarettes, coffee and tea. He likened Lohia's bad habits to the practice of socialism itself. How could Lohia justify cigarette smoking in India, which debarred him from completing a process of identification with the mass of his hungry and poor countrymen? See, Rustom Bharucha, n.60, p.67.

manual labour was good for the soul."<sup>84</sup> He, therefore, he gave primary importance to manual labour in his theory of life.

Gandhi considered *swadeshi* to be of great importance to the progress of the country. Gandhi writes, "...*swadeshi* is our primary obligation, because it is natural to us. *Dharma* is bound up with it...our economic well-being is bound with *swadeshi*. It is the only way to employ the enforced idleness of millions."<sup>85</sup> For example, "...it is sinful to eat American wheat and let my neighbour, the grain dealer, starve for want of customer. Similarly, it is sinful for us to wear the latest finery of Regent Street, when I know that if I had but worn the things woven by the neighbouring spinners and weavers, that would have clothed me and fed and clothed them."<sup>86</sup> Gandhi's use of spinning wheel, *khadi*, burning of foreign clothes, salt *satyagraha*, show clearly how much Gandhi valued *swadeshi* in his life. It is through *swadeshi* that he fought the modern industrial

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84 Anthony J. Parel, n.15, p.173.

85 V.V. Ramana Murthi, n.53, p.210.

86 Ibid., pp.213-14.

civilization.<sup>87</sup> He was ready to pay any price for the sake of *swadeshi*. Gandhi writes, "...anything would be better than this living death of a whole people. This satanic rule has ruined this fair-land materially, morally and spiritually."<sup>88</sup> Gandhi derived his root of *swadeshi* from the *Gita*, which says, "...it is better to die performing one's duty or *swadharma*, since *paradharma* or another's duty is fraught with danger."<sup>89</sup> Gandhi considered *swadeshi* as *swadharma* when applied to one's immediate environment.

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87 For instance, Gandhi considered spinning wheel, as Ashis Nandy points, out morally superior to technoeconomically more effective machine because (i) it did not supplant human beings, (ii) it symbolized the dignity and the autonomy of the individual resisting the demands of modern collectivities, and (iii) it symbolized pre-modern technology and non-alienated labour. See, Ashis Nandy, n.28, p.139; Madhu Kishwar, regarding Gandhi's salt *satyagraha* writes, "...in the past people could pan their own salt or pick it up out of natural deposits. The British tried to acquire a monopoly over this item of everyday consumption. The only legal salt was government salt from guarded depots. The price had a built in levy. Thus, the government was able to tax everyone, even the poorest of the poor. But Gandhi choosing salt the essential item of daily living fought colonial rule. See, Madhu Kishwar, n.30, p.1696.

88 V.V. Ramana Murthi, n.53, p.210.

89 *Ibid.*, pp.213-14.



Swadeshi as interpreted by Gandhi harmed no one and under it there was no room for selfishness. Gandhi writes, "let no one suppose that the practice of *swadeshi* through *Khadi* would harm the foreign mill-owners. A thief who is weaned from his vice or is made to return the property that he has stolen is not harmed thereby."<sup>90</sup>

Gandhi saw large-scale industries in alliance with modern technology, centralizing wealth, social and political power concentrated in the hands of a few people. In India, where the majority of the people were poor and spread over various regions, Gandhi believed that it was better for industries to be decentralized. He writes, "independence must begin at the bottom. Every village should be a republic or *Panchayat*, self-sustained, capable of managing itself against the whole world....In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be an ever-widening, never-ascending circle, life will not be a pyramid, with the apex sustained by the bottom, but will be an oceanic circle."<sup>91</sup> Gandhi points out, "we may not be deceived by the wealth to

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90 Ibid., p.230.

91 Ibid., p.247.

be seen in the cities of India....It comes from the blood of the poorest....I know village economics. I tell you that the pressure from the top crushes those at bottom. All that is necessary is to get off their backs."<sup>92</sup> Gandhi wanted "concentration of wealth, not in the hands of a few, but in the hands of all".<sup>93</sup> Therefore, he argued for decentralization.

Fearlessness or courage is another disposition that *swaraj* required. Gandhi writes, "...strength lies in the absence of fear, not in the quantity of flesh and muscle we have on our bodies."<sup>94</sup> "Those alone can follow the path of passive resistance who are free from fear, whether as to their possessions, false honour, their relatives, the government, bodily injuries or death."<sup>95</sup> "The mice which helplessly find themselves between the cat's teeth acquire no merit from their enforced sacrifice".<sup>96</sup> At the most

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92 Quoted from Madhu Kishwar, "Cutting Our Own Lifeline", *Manushi* no.73, November-December 1992, p.7.

93 M.K. Gandhi, n.2, p.8.

94 Ibid., p.40.

95 Ibid., p.76.

96 Ramana Murthi, n.53, p.214.

fundamental level fearlessness has to be exercised against the fear of death. It also has to be exercised against tyrants, unjust laws, unfair economic and social conditions.<sup>97</sup> The strength of courage lies in the capacity for endurance rather than the capacity for attack.<sup>98</sup> Gandhi writes, "What do you think? Wherein courage is required, in blowing others to pieces from behind a cannon or with smiling face to approach a cannon and be blown to pieces? Who is the true warrior -- he who keeps death always as a friend, or he who controls the death of others? Believe me that a man devoid of courage and manhood can never be a passive resister."<sup>99</sup>

Finally, *swaraj* required the practice of the virtue of religion. Religion was a vital reference point for the entire framework of Gandhi's thought and action. Gandhi writes, "...religion is dear to me and my first complaint is that India is becoming irreligious."<sup>100</sup> Religion, like

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97 Anthony J. Parel, n.15, p.174.

98 Ibid.

99 M.K. Gandhi, n.2, p.73.

100 Ibid., p.38.

truth, had several meanings for Gandhi. At the most ordinary level, it meant the organized religions, such as Judaism, Islam, Christianity, etc. Religion in this sense divided human beings culturally and sometimes even socially. At a more restricted level, religion meant religious beliefs and doctrines, such as *karma*, incarnation, resurrection, prophecy etc. Religion in this sense also divided human beings, albeit intellectually rather than socially. When Gandhi writes that "religions are different roads converging to the same point,"<sup>101</sup> he refers to religion in the ordinary and restricted sense. At a third level, religion meant to Gandhi, the virtue or the virtues of religion. Religion as moral, not theological virtue.<sup>102</sup> For example, kindness, respect, humility and charity are the moral virtues. Religion in this sense is indistinguishable from ethics and it can unite people in such areas of activity as economics, politics, social service and works of charity.<sup>103</sup> When Gandhi refers to, "religion which underlies all religion,"<sup>104</sup> or when he says, "my religion has no

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101 Ibid.

102 Ibid., p.45.

103 Anthony J. Parel, n.15, p.176.

104 M.K. Gandhi, n.2, p.38.

geographical limits, if I have a living faith in it, it will transcend my love for India herself",<sup>105</sup> he uses religion in the third sense. It is religion seen as a moral force that underlies Gandhi's politics. As Anthony Parel points out, "it was his conviction and also his practice that religion as ethics could bring about the political unity of a multi-religious entity."<sup>106</sup> It was on the basis of religion in this sense that he could work with the British or any other nation. Religion in this sense did not pose a false alternative between God and man; indeed men were better treated by humans if an ethic of religion was universally practiced.<sup>107</sup>

Gandhi clearly distinguished between religion and nationality, and his meaning of religious tolerance revolves around this. Gandhi writes, "...if the Hindus believe that India should be peopled only by Hindus, they are in dreamland. The Hindus, the Mohammedans, the Parsis and the Christians who have made India their country are fellow

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105 Louis Fischer, The Life of Mahatma Gandhi (London: Jonathan Cape, 1951), p.216.

106 Anthony J. Parel, n.15, p.176.

107 Ibid.

countrymen, and they will have to live in unity if only for their own interest. In no part of the world are one nationality and one religion synonymous terms; nor has it ever been so in India."<sup>108</sup> Again, he writes, "The Hindus flourished under Moslem sovereigns and Moslems under the Hindu. Each party recognized that mutual fighting was suicidal, and that neither party would abandon its religion by force of arms. Both parties therefore decided to live in peace. With English advent quarrels recommenced."<sup>109</sup> "India cannot cease to be one nation because people belonging to different religious live in it. The introduction of foreigners does not necessarily destroy the nation they merge in it. A country is one nation only when such a condition obtains in it."<sup>110</sup>

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108 M.K. Gandhi, n.2, p.45.

109 Ibid.

110 Ibid., p.45. Based on these insights Ashis Nandy reformulates Gandhi's non-western concept of secularism. Nandy writes, non-western concept of secularism revolves around equal respect for all religions. It implies that while public life may or may not be kept free of religion, it must have space for a continuous dialogue among religious traditions and between religious and the secular. Ashis Nandy, "The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance", Alternatives, vol.XIII, no.2, April 1988, p.180.

Satya, ahimsa, and the virtues of chastity, voluntary poverty, courage or fearlessness and religion can become practical only when we learn to rule ourselves.<sup>111</sup> Therefore, self rule or *swaraj* is not a dream which automatically becomes true. It has to be experienced by every individual for himself.<sup>112</sup> Therefore, it required the assistance of an appropriate type of education and appropriate community environment.<sup>113</sup>

Gandhi was one of those who sensed early the danger of colonial education, under which school related knowledge got isolated from everyday reality and cultural milieu or *lebenswelt* of a child.<sup>114</sup> Gandhi writes, "...a peasant earns his bread honestly. He has ordinary knowledge of the world. He knows fairly well how he should behave towards his parents, his wife, his children and his fellow villagers. He understands and observes rules of morality. But he cannot

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111 M.K. Gandhi, n.2, p.58.

112 Ibid., p.59.

113 Anthony J. Parel, n.15, p.178.

114 Krishna Kumar, Political Agenda of Education: A Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas (New Delhi: Sage, 1991), p.98.

write his own name. What do you propose to do by giving him a knowledge of letters? Will you add an inch to his happiness? Do you wish him to make discontented with his cottage or his lot?"<sup>115</sup> For Gandhi, the primary aim of alternative education should be character building<sup>116</sup> and such education should have primacy over technical education. Gandhi writes, "I have learnt Geography, Astronomy, Algebra, Geometry etc...Why I have learnt these things?...I have never been able to use them for controlling -my senses...It is not required for the main thing...It does not enable us to do our duty."<sup>117</sup> To Gandhi, knowledge of sciences and letters has its place only when we have brought our senses under subjection and put our ethnics on a firm foundation.<sup>118</sup> Therefore, the need for an appropriate community environment, for the acquisition and development of the spirit of inner improvement was recognized by Gandhi early in his career. That was why he established several *ashrams* both in South Africa and India to instruct the people in *satya*, *ahimsa* and other virtues.

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115 M.K. Gandhi, n.2, p.78.

116 Ibid., p.79.

117 Ibid., p.78.

118 Anthony J. Parel, n.15, p.178.



To sum up, Gandhi rejected the centrality given to the individual by making material and bodily welfare the object of life, at the cost of ignoring social and moral needs of the individual. He rejected parliamentary democracy as it was practiced in the West because it stood for maximum corruption, selfishness and power politics. He was skeptical of those elements in the print media that manipulated the popular sentiments in favour of particular financial and power interests by spreading misinformation and untruth. Gandhi also rejected 'machinery craze' because under it machinery, instead of serving the humanity, becomes an instrument of benefit to some and harm to others. Above all, Gandhi rejected large scale industrialization and modern professions on two counts: (i) for emphasizing instrumental rationality and (ii) for promoting technocratic control. While each of them promised men better control over one's own actions, environment and nature, in actuality they created a system of depersonalized social relations where men were subjected to the impersonal logic of bureaucratic rationality. Within this framework, ethics was subordinated to technical education. Gandhi particularly rejected modern law courts because under them, the lawyers and the judges, instead of serving justice and truth, administered justice

like trade or economy. Similarly the practice of modern medicine has also become a way of gaining wealth and social power. It is no longer interested in the service of the sick. Modern professions in general resulted in creating a powerful social and political elite, who dominated the society. Gandhi rejected large-scale industrialization because it destroyed traditional industries and agriculture, causing people to migrate to the urban centres, recruited people to new culture which had nothing in common with their being. It caused great income disparities between regions and growth of large urban centres of production. Its logic caused emergence of slums, regional conflicts, terrorism and such other social problems making the task of achieving socio-economic equality and democracy difficult. Gandhi also attacked large scale industrialization for perpetrating environmental degradation which threatened the future of the entire globe. However, when large scale industries were inevitable, he argued that such industries should be nationalized or state controlled.<sup>119</sup>

Thus, Gandhi's views, based on ethical and moral grounds, were critical of individual, social life and

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119 M.K. Gandhi, n.2, p.8.

society that was being formed under modern civilization. Civility and civilization, in his view, were, acquisition that come from habitual following of a moral and ethical code, where material well-being and profit making are not an end in itself.

Modern civilization sees the individual in itself isolated from all other people. For Gandhi, the important thing is to go beyond such individualism that only speaks of individual good and atomized self. He recognized the responsibility social life entails, where our actions and their appropriateness must be judged in terms of the effect they have upon others. Therefore, he upheld among many means, *swadeshi*, *charkha*, voluntary poverty and *sarvodaya*.

Gandhi was an early environmentalist who foresaw the dangers of modernity on the future of mankind. Therefore, he developed a moral outlook in which human species and its interests were placed above those of the other species, but by taking into account the claims of the future generation, the poor and the downtrodden.

Gandhi, accepts the progress we have made, but recognized that it is not possible to accept some aspects of this civilization and reject others. Therefore, he was

looking for an alternative, one that begins with moral and ethical understanding, where dignity of human life is respected and man is seen as a social and moral being.

Thus, we have Gandhi's notion of *satya* and *ahimsa* as the basic alternatives which can be realized in economic terms through handicrafts, small scale industries, primacy to agriculture and, above all, low consumption keeping in mind the collective needs of the society. Politically, it can be realized by establishing village *panchayats* aimed at active participation of the people in the matters affecting their lives. Socially these alternatives can be realized by living a free and bold life based on moral and ethical outlook, honesty, courage, social responsibility, respect for other ways of life and *dharma*.

### Chapter-III

#### DEBATES AROUND GANDHI'S CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY

Gandhi's critique of modernity has given rise to a major debate; indeed it has communicated contradictory messages to those who try to understand it. This Chapter tries to probe into some aspects of this debate, by classifying the participants in it into two groups: (i) those who maintain that Gandhi's critique of modernity was based on 'obscurantist indigenism', and (ii) those who feel that Gandhi's critique of modernity was based on and part of 'critical traditionalism.'

##### I. Gandhi as Obscurantist Indigenist?

Two questions will be examined in this section: First, why was Gandhi's critique of modernity projected as obscurantist indigenism? and second, what aspect of Gandhi's critique are overlooked in this kind of analysis, and what sort of problems does that pose?

Gandhi has been criticized by scholars and labelled as an obscurantist indigenist primarily for glorifying tradition and the traditional way of life. More specifically, critics maintain that he ignored the social

and historical processes of oppression connected with caste, class, gender, ethnicity and religion that existed in our society.<sup>1</sup> But that is not all. He was equally opposed to progress and instruments of scientific and technological development. In *Hind Swaraj* he wrote "...we have managed with the same kind of plough as existed thousands of years ago. We have retained same kind of cottages that we had in former times and our indigenous education remains the same as before...It was not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that if we set our hearts after such things we would become slaves and lose our moral fibre...They further reasoned that large cities were a snare and a useless encumbrance and that people would not be

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1 Some scholars hold Gandhi responsible for the tendency of glorification of the Indian culture which still lives today in the movement for cultural nationalism in India. Prabha Dixit, for example, writes: "Gandhi's idolization of the caste system, popularization of Hindi, protection of cows and his idea of trusteeship were more effective in mobilizing the orthodox Hindus, Zamindars and capitalists than Savarkar's call for Hindu *Sangathan* and Hindu *Raj*". Prabha Dixit, "Hindu Nationalism", Seminar, August 1977, p.34; Prakash Chandra Upadhyaya, "The Politics of Indian Secularism", Modern Asian Studies, vol.26, part-IV, October 1992, pp.819-837; Sadas Shiv Bapat Narayan, Nationalism Versus Communalism (Poona: G.S. Bapat, 1943), pp.47-48. See also, Gail Omvedt, "Hinduism and Politics", Economic and Political Weekly, April 7, 1990, p.727.

happy in them, that there would be gangs of thieves robbers, prostitution and vice flourishing in them and that poor men would be robbed by rich men. They were, therefore satisfied with small villages..."<sup>2</sup> Gandhi's appreciation of the changelessness of Indian society as radical, his neglect of the fact that antiquated system of production in India did not allow education, agriculture and industries to change, bear evidence to his obscurantist beliefs. Besides, his claim that our forefathers in their superior wisdom have decided that the system of production should be so, and his denial that there were no cities, no waste of agrarian surplus, no thieves, no prostitutes and division between rich and poor in pre-colonial India, coupled with the picture of idyllic village communities based on moral fibre, was a way of glorifying and justifying the traditional way of life while closing the doors upon change and progress that came with modernization.<sup>3</sup>

Gandhi, according to these critics, resisted structural

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2 M.K. Gandhi, Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1938), pp.55-56.

3 Aijaz Ahmad, "Orientalism and After: Ambivalence and Cosmopolitan Location in the Work of Edward Said," Occasional Papers on History and Society, II Series, Number XLIV (Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Teen Murti, New Delhi, 1991), pp.96-97.

changes in the Indian Society,<sup>4</sup> Gandhi's defence of the *varna* system as immutable law of nature rather than a human invention<sup>5</sup> and his notion of trusteeship,<sup>6</sup> are cited as

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4 Gandhi has been severely criticized by Indian communists feminists and Dalit intellectuals on this ground. for this reason primarily M.N. Roy calls Gandhi an agent of the Indian *bourgeoisie*. See, M.N. Roy, Origin of Radicalism in the Congress (Calcutta: Renaissance, 1942), pp.6-10; E.M.S. Namboodripad also endorses this view. See his, The Mahatma and the Islam (New Delhi: Peoples Publishing House, 1958), pp.110-118; Madhu Kishwar writes, "Gandhi tried to contain and fit women's movement into a supplementary role *vis-a-vis* national movement....Gandhi's notion of equality did not extend to equality in employment or in economic and political power...He failed to come to terms with the fact that oppression is not a moral condition but a social and historical experience relating to production relations. See Madhu Kishwar, "Gandhi on Women", Economic and Political Weekly, vol.XX, Number 40 and 41, October 5, 1985, pp.1691-1702 and October 12, 1985, pp.1753-1758. V.T. Rajshekar writes, "Gandhi by perpetuating the village economy, the *varnashrama dharma*, a bullock cart life based on *khadi* wanted to avert large scale industrialization which will bring together the exploited people and force them to start an armed struggle against exploitation which will ruin the caste system. V.T. Rajshekar, Hinduism, Fascism and Gandhism (Bangalore: Dalit Sahitya Academy, 1985), p.16.

5 Gandhi wrote in Young India, "I believe in *Varnashrama Dharma* in a sense in my opinion strictly *Vedic* and not in its present popular and crude sense. *Varnashrama* in my opinion is inherent in human nature, Hinduism has simply reduced it into a science. A man cannot change his *varna* by choice. Not to abide by one's *varna* is to disregard the law of heredity. M.K. Gandhi, Young India, 6th October 1921, S. Ganeshan, ed., (Madras: S.

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examples of this. Within this context Gandhi's critique of modernity is regarded as a highly sophisticated idiom through which aims and aspirations of the dominant social groups were articulated and which legitimized their continued dominance.<sup>7</sup>

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Ganeshan Publishers, 1924) p.801. In Harizan, Gandhi wrote, "calling of a Brahmin-spiritual teacher and a scavenger are equal and their due performance, carries equal merit before God and at one time seems to have carried reward before man...." See, Harizan, July 18, 1936. See also, B.R. Ambedkar, Annihilation of Caste With a Reply to Mahatma Gandhi (Aligarh: Anand Sahitya Sadan, 1989), p.101.

- 6 Gandhi's notion of trusteeship is criticized as a device which did not wish to hurt the propertied classes. It had no passion for economic equality. Under its owners need not deprive themselves of their property. All they need to do is, declare themselves as trustees for the poor voluntarily. See, B.R. Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches, vol.9, Government of Maharashtra, 1945, pp.281-82. P.C. Upadhyaya points out that, Gandhi's concept of trusteeship as Gandhi himself admitted, was put forward when socialist theory was placed before the country in respect to the position held by zamindars and ruling chiefs. See Prakash Chandra Upadhyaya, "A celebration of the Gandhian Alternative", Economic and Political Weekly, December 2, 1989, p.2660; See also, Harizan, June 3 1936 and M.K. Gandhi, Trusteeship, compiled by R. Kalekar(Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1960), p.5.

- 7 For instance, Ambedkar writes, "Gandhism stands for freedom from foreign domination, which means the destruction of the existing political structure of the country. At the same time it seeks to maintain a social structure based on varna by its call of back to nature,

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The fact that Gandhi rejected modern western education and argued that to give millions a knowledge of modern English education is to enslave them,<sup>8</sup> is cited further as evidence of his obscurantism. Arguing against his views Dalit intellectuals maintained that their liberation is possible only through modern education because it introduced them to new ideas of social justice and equality, through which they can fight *Brahmanic* Hinduism. For example, Sri Narayana Guru said to his followers, "...educate that you maybe free, organize that you may be strong, industrialize that your financial status may improve".<sup>9</sup> Jyothi Rao Phule asserted that God had sent the English to India to lift the ban on education which *Brahmans* imposed on the *Shudras*, to educate them and make them wise".<sup>10</sup> Ambedkar depicted

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back to nakedness, back to poverty and ignorance. It helps those who have to keep what they have and to prevent those who have not, from getting what they have a right to get....Gandhism is the philosophy of the well-to-do and the leisure class". B.R. Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches, pp.284-91.

8 M.K. Gandhi, n.2, p.90.

9 Murkot Kunappa, Sri Narayana Guru (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1982), p.vii.

10 Francine R. Frankel and M.S.A. Rao, ed., Dominance and State Power in Modern India. Decline of a Social Order (Delhi: Oxford, 1989) p.487; See also, Gail Omvedt, Cultural Revolt in Colonial Society. The Non-Brahman Movement in Western India 1873 to 1930 (Bombay: Scientific Socialist Education Trust, 1976), pp.1-15.

village life as a sink of inequity and tyranny for the lower castes and advised his followers to educate themselves in law, medicine etc., and leave the rural areas in favour of urban centres.<sup>11</sup> In other words, when Gandhi argued for an indigenous system of education, leaders of the lower orders found it reactionary and too simplistic because indigenous education was controlled by Brahmins and continued to perpetuate the caste system and the superiority of the *Brahmins*.

Leaders like Ambedkar argued that, "...the fact that machinery and modern civilization have many evils may be admitted, but these evils are no arguments against them. For the evils are not due to machinery and modern civilization. They are due to wrong social organization which has made private property and pursuit of personal gain matters of absolute sanctity. If machinery and civilization have not benefited everybody, the remedy is not to condemn machinery and civilization but to alter the organization of society, so that benefits will not be usurped by few, but accrue to

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11 Balakrishna Govind Gokhale, "Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, Rebel Against Hindu Tradition" in Bardwell L. Smith, ed., Religion and Social Conflict in South Asia (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), p.14.

all."<sup>12</sup> In other words, Gandhi in his critique of modernity did not concentrate much on the fault of the system of social organization; instead of offering alternate ways of using the resources made available by modern science and technology he offered alternatives to modernity itself. Examining this aspect, Sudipta Kaviraj writes, "...there is certainly a great deal of humanity in the pre-modern languages of social living. Its sentiments are valuable, but its conceptual apparatus cannot work out solutions to modern calamities. Gandhi's critique of modernity is of course powerful and lucid, but too radical, for he offers not an alternative solution to modernity's problems, but to modernity itself."<sup>13</sup>

The above criticisms overlook some significant aspects of Gandhi's critique. Gandhi, it must be reiterated, appreciated the pre-modern Indian villages basically to show the defects of modernity which manifested itself in mindless

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12 B.R. Ambedkar, Gandhi and Gandhism (Jallander: Bheem Patrika Publications), pp.139-40.

13 Sudipta Kaviraj, "On State, Society and Discourse in India" in James Manor, ed., Rethinking Third World Politics (London: Longman, 1991), p.96.

accumulation of wealth, overconsumption and endless exploitation of nature which threatened the life of the entire globe; to highlight the selfish social relations which did not care for social needs of the individual and the resulting mental slavery which uprooted men from their own culture and recruited them to a new culture which had nothing in common with their being. It has been strongly argued by some scholars that Gandhi did not reject science and technology, but was articulating a plural concept of science and technology, against the idea of a universal, cumulative and imperial technology developing according to the laws of linear progress. According to them, Gandhi was upholding a notion of science and technology which did not supplant human beings, which symbolized the dignity and autonomy of an individual resisting the demands of modern collectivities and, above all, which represented non alienated labour.<sup>14</sup>

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14 Ashis Nandy, "Cultural Frames of Transformative Politics: A Credo" in Bikhu Parekh and Thomas Pantham, ed., Political Discourse: Explorations in Indian and Western Political Thought (New Delhi: Sage, 1987) p.240; Ashis Nandy, Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias: Essays in Political Awareness (Delhi: Oxford, 1987), p.137. See also, Ramashray Roy, "Modern Predicament and Gandhi" in Ramashray Roy, ed., Contemporary Crisis and Gandhi (Delhi: Discovery, 1986), pp.44-48 and Ramashray Roy, Self and Society. A Study in Gandhian Thought (New Delhi: Sage, 1984).

Vandana Shiva, Shiv Visvanathan and Ashis Nandy's analysis of modern science and technology help us to understand Gandhi's critique of modernity in a better way. According to Vandana Shiva, modern science perpetrates violence against the subject of knowledge. Violence is perpetrated socially through a sharp divide between the expert and non-expert -- a divide which converts the vast majority of non-experts into non-knowers, even in those areas of life in which responsibility of practice and action rests with them.<sup>15</sup> It is probably for this reason that Gandhi sought to recover the human body from the medical technologist by refusing to accept the doctor's authority over human body. Instead he sought to restore the body to the individual by accepting the individual's right to give primacy to his cognition of his own body.<sup>16</sup> Again modern science perpetrates violence against the object of knowledge.<sup>17</sup> Building of large dams, de-forestation and such

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15 Vandana Shiva, "The Violence of Reductionist State", in Alternatives, Social Transformation and Humane Governance, vol.XII, no.2, April 1987, p.243.

16 Ashis Nandy, "From Outside the Emporium: Gandhi's Cultural Critique of the West", in Ramashray Roy, ed., Contemporary Crisis and Gandhi (Delhi: Discovery, 1986), p.94.

17 Vandana Shiva, n.15, p.244.

other mindless efforts to transform nature are the best examples of this fact. Modern Science also perpetrates violence against the beneficiaries of knowledge.<sup>18</sup> Poor are the worst victims of it. It is so because science becomes the pursuit of state, especially in the Third World countries. Here, states define development as a scientific project, a movement from the state of nature to civil society. As a result, other civilizations and tribal cultures are seen as contemporary ancestors, and hence, backward; the fact that backwardness may have something to say for itself is not entertained. Examining the above aspects, Shiv Visvanathan writes, "...the tragedy of modernization in Third World countries was however doubly violent. It sprang not only from the violence of the West through colonialism and science, but also from the modernist impulse of our elites, internalized without a clue to its genealogy and self-doubts."<sup>19</sup> Technology, according to Ashis Nandy, exercises its domination under the banner of 'technology control'. It means manipulating the existing

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18 Ibid.

19 Shiv Visvanathan, "From the Annals of the Laboratory State", Alternatives, Social Transformation and Humane Governance, vol.XII, no.1, January 1987, pp.37-60.

conditions of men and nature to get the desired effect. 'Instrumentalism' is its core ideology, that is, using men and nature as mere instruments by a few for their own selfish interests.<sup>20</sup> Nandy writes, "...technology always had elements of instrumentality and control associated with it, even in the traditional societies, but modernity by removing the older ideological limits on Instrumentalism tends to reduce technology to 'technologism'. It hierarchises the relationship between those who possess technology and those who do not, and it allows to destroy a part of the person, society and nature for former's own good."<sup>21</sup> Technologism allows no escape because it is based on the assumption that technology itself will find solutions to the technological problems.<sup>22</sup> Nandy points out that Gandhi judged technology not on the grounds of what it was and what it can achieve, but on the grounds of what it replaced and what it symbolized.<sup>23</sup>

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20 Ashis Nandy, n.16, p.94.

21 Ashis Nandy, Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias: Essays in Politics of Awareness (Delhi: Oxford, 1987), p.136.

22 Ashis Nandy, n.16, p.99.

23 Ibid., p.100.



While analyzing Gandhi's views on education, we must remember that he was not in favour of supporting *Brahmanical* superiority. While the suspicion and doubts of the Dalits are well founded, given their experience of years of subjugation and subordination, Gandhi fought actively more than any other leader of the Indian National Congress for the upliftment of the Harijans and untouchables. His objection to western education must therefore be contextualized. He was not opposed to the spread of literacy and knowledge. He was critical of that knowledge that was being passed on to them through the educational system under the British *raj*; such knowledge was bookish, impractical and irrelevant for Indian people. Gandhi wanted education to be linked with production; it must provide avenues for practical skills and knowledge that could be used by the people. He therefore respected skills and techniques such as cultivation, weaving, and so on. Gandhi maintained that knowledge was the basis of the reproduction of society's material life. Modernity, in association with Brahmanical Hinduism, tried to marginalize this concept of knowledge which Gandhi resisted throughout his life in practice.

While analyzing Gandhi's views on caste system we must not overlook an important aspect of his thought. This

becomes clear when we compare the views of Gandhi and Ambedkar on the question of caste. As D.R. Nagaraj points out, "...Gandhi represents the traditional Indian mode of tackling the problem of caste system and Ambedkar represents the modern western mode of thinking".<sup>24</sup> Gandhi's theoretical position on caste is that the problem of caste system concerns equally lower castes and the caste Hindus. In order to eradicate the caste system the value system of both societies should undergo a radical change. For Gandhi there is no point in changing oneself while excluding the 'other'. The 'other' should also experience a process of change. The inseparability of the 'self' and the 'other', which was the philosophical mainstay of *Bhakti* movement, was invested by Gandhi with a new kind of radical militancy.<sup>25</sup> The logic of Ambedkarite method is that if Dalit society becomes militant and aggressive, caste Hindu society will be forced to come to its senses. In a fundamental sense this mode of action rejects the Gandhian obsession with the 'other'. The

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24 D.R. Nagaraj, "Gandhi and the Dalit Question: Comparative Reflections on the Gandhian, Ambedkarite and Marxist Approaches" in Kappen Mercy, ed., Gandhi and Social Action Today (New Delhi: Sterling, 1990), p.79.

25 Ibid., p.77.

inbuilt militancy of this path has naturally attracted the angry youth of lower castes throughout the country, particularly since a self-criticism did not come from the higher castes. So today Ambedkar has become the rallying point for the lower castes and Gandhi is seen by them as pious, politically useless *sadhu*. But one has to remember that equality of castes is qualitatively different from the annihilation of the caste system. In the caste ridden Hindu society, the 'other' will remain aloof and refuse to change itself. As long as it does not change, the crime of untouchability will thrive in many subtle ways. The caste Hindu society will retain the same old values. It is very difficult to find a lasting solution to this problem within the framework of Ambedkarism. In this context Gandhi proves more useful and relevant. His almost metaphysical insistence on clinging to the 'other' and thereby seeking to change the 'other' has been politically validated.<sup>26</sup>

## II. Gandhi As Critical Traditionalist?

Two questions are examined here: first, what is the meaning of critical traditionalism and why is Gandhi

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26 Ibid., p.80; See also, Ravindra Kumar, "Gandhi, Ambedkar and the Poona Pact 1932", Occasional Papers on History and Society, No. , Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Teen Murti, New Delhi, 1985, pp.2-26.

projected as a critical traditionalist? Second, what aspects of Gandhi's critical traditionalism are worthy of consideration?

Critical traditionalism is considered as an attitude and perspective that uses resources available in the tradition and makes it a base on which the battle for human liberation can be carried on, but it also simultaneously changes and radicalizes traditions. In other words, critical traditionalism does not accept the given understanding of tradition or at least it does not attach any special sanctity to it. Further, it associates certain permanent elements with a tradition and argues that certain injunctions within it are relevant to contemporary times but certain elements can be ignored if they do violence to human dignity. In fine, critical traditionalism emphasizes the pluralistic and open aspects of tradition representing a confederation of cultures.<sup>27</sup>

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27 Ashis Nandy, n.16, pp.92-117; Valerian Rodrigues, "Conception of Revolution in Marx and Gandhi: Converging Perspectives" in V.T. Patil, ed., New Dimensions and Perspectives in Gandhism (New Delhi: Inter-India, 1989) pp.272-73; Avijit Pathak, "Elitist Errors" in Indian Express, December 6, 1992, p.8; Madhu Kishwar, "Religion and Dogma", Indian Express, April 25, 1993, p.8.

Gandhi is projected as a critical traditionalist because he did not accept the given framework of Brahmanical Hindu religious tradition, but wanted to restructure the Indian society by recognizing those social aspects of Hinduism which were open, humane and pluralistic.<sup>28</sup> While other leaders, under the influence of modern ideas rejected the Hindu way of life, he used elements of the existing tradition, and through it, articulated the unspoken aspirations of people by mobilizing them against the British

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28 Some scholars criticize traditional Hindu pluralistic culture as anti-democratic. For example Kaviraj argues that pluralism in the context of democratic culture and pluralism in the context of ancient and medieval India mean different things. We can call a society pluralistic in the sense that there were numerous co-existent political units and certain variety of life styles. In this sense Indian animal and plant life also shows great pluralism -- but this is not in the sense of democratic tolerance. Pluralism in a democratic sense would involve asking the widow, Dalit and a tribal their views on the matters affecting their lives. It is difficult to believe that this was done on a large scale in India. See, Sudipta Kaviraj, "Political Culture in India: An Anti-Romantic View" in Teaching Politics, vol.VII, no.3-4, pp.2-6. See also, Ashok Rudra, "Against Feudalism" in Economic and Political Weekly, December 5, 1981, pp.2137-2146 and Prakash Chandra Upadhyaya, "A Celebration of the Gandhian Alternative", Economic and Political Weekly, December 2, 1989, pp.2655-2662.

colonial rule.<sup>29</sup>

Upholders of Gandhi's critical traditionalism argue for the need to reconsider certain aspects of his critique of modernity in order to face the problems of our time, which according to them, essentially have their roots in modernity. Such problems are: contemporary aggressive communalism, centralized state power,<sup>30</sup> neglect of agriculture<sup>31</sup> and according primacy to industry and

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29 Bhikhu Parekh, Colonialism, Tradition and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhi's Political Discourse (New Delhi: Sage, 1988), pp.82-108; Bhikhu Parekh Gandhi's Political Philosophy: A Critical Examination (London: Macmillan, 1989) pp.1-35; Ashis Nandy, "Politics of the Assassination of Mahatma Gandhi", in his At the Edge of Psychology: Essays in Politics and Culture (Delhi: Oxford, 1990), pp.70-98; Rustom Bharucha, The Question of Faith (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993), p.81 and Ashis Nandy, n.21, pp.XI-XVIII and 128-138.

30 Rajni Kothari, State Against Democracy. In Search of Humane Governance (Delhi: Ajanta, 1988).

31 Regarding the plight of Indian agriculture, Madhu Kishwar writes, "No country in the world has made economic progress by following policies which inevitably promote pauperization of its agricultural based population. The millions who flock to cities to live in slums and work as rickshaw pullers, domestic servants, rag pickers or stone breakers and take on sundry low paid occupations are economic refugees from our village, mostly from poor peasant families. Even the sons of so-called middle and high income peasants come and work as bus conductors, drivers, peons and so on, since they earn more in these low paid occupations.

technology, the ecological and environmental impact of industry and technology,<sup>32</sup> despoiling traditional human habitats in the name of development and submitting the former to the total mercy of the latter, growth of large urban centres along with numerous slums and so on and so forth.

To resolve some of these problems, upholders of Gandhi's critical traditionalism argue that some aspects of Gandhi's critique of modernity should be retained. They feel that Gandhi's concept of religious tolerance could be an alternative to the state sponsored secularism and religious fundamentalism that we find today. In their view communalism is a product of modernization. The instrumentalities generated in the process legitimized the use of any means for the specified end, in this case, that of gaining political power. Therefore, we have religion being treated as a means to an end -- an instrument to be exploited for political ends. Here religion ceases to be an ethical outlook, a way of life. Gandhi they feel, recognized both the need for being located in our tradition and culture and

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32 See, Glaude Alvares, Science, Development and Violence: The Revolt Against Modernity (Delhi: Oxford, 1992).

the role of religion as an ethical outlook in the life of man. Ashis Nandy is one of the most forceful exponents of this line of thinking. He argues that the Western concept of secularism should be replaced by an indigenous notion of religious and ethnic tolerance and adds, 'it is from non-modern India, from the traditions and principles of religious tolerance encoded in everyday life associated with different faiths of India' we must seek clues to counter secular theories of statecraft and fundamentalists misuse of religion.<sup>33</sup> Thus taking clues from Gandhi's notion of religious tolerance they suggest that the modern state should learn something about religious tolerance from everyday Hinduism, Islam etc., rather than wish that the

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33 Ashis Nandy, "The Politics of Secularism and Recovery of Religious Tolerance", Alternatives, Social Transformation and Humane Governance, vol.XII, no.2, April 1988, pp.179-92; Ashis Nandy, "Secularism", Seminar, no.394, June 1992, pp.29-30; Ashis Nandy, "Three Propositions", Seminar, no.402, February 1993, pp.3-4; Rustom Bharucha also upholds Nandy's views, see, n.29, p.81. Nandy has been criticized for overlooking the inherent oppressive tendencies in *dharma* and religion itself, which gave rise to multiple way of life due to the hierarchy of various castes and communities. See Gail Omvedt, n.1, p.726. See also, Sarah Joseph, "Indigenous Social Science Project. Some Political Implications" in Economic and Political Weekly, April 13, 1991, pp.959-63.



ordinary Hindus, Muslims, etc., to learn tolerance from various fashionable secular theories of statecraft.<sup>34</sup>

Gandhi's views on agriculture, handicrafts, small scale industries, decentralization and village *panchayats* also find sympathy among the upholders of his critical traditionalism. The latter attack the development project of the state which ignores agriculture, the vital sector of our economy, by promoting the interests of the industrialists and urban consumers at the cost of the poor peasantry.<sup>35</sup> They criticize the state for perpetrating poverty, development disparities between regions, growth of big cities and environmental degradation through its developmental policies. Part of the contemporary problems and failures of the state policies stems from the disjunction of political power and policy making processes

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34 Ibid., (1988), p.189.

35 Madhu Kishwar, n.31. Balagopal examining the impact of modernization on agriculture concludes that modernization of agriculture has ruined the agricultural production of the villages geared towards the needs of the collectivity and as far as the rural rich are concerned, it has increased their wealth and power. See, K. Balagopal, Probing in the Political Economy of Agrarian Classes and Conflicts (Hyderabad: Perspectives, 1988), p.227.

from the people. Centralized planning located in Delhi and other regional capitals is unaware of the diversity of problems and the solutions suggested are therefore inadequate for serving the individual needs. Initiative for plans and policies must come from the people, so that the administrators are able to take into account the local needs and aspirations. The political organization thus established on the basis of *panchayats* and village republics would provide an alternative to the growing powers of the state and the whole notion of nation state which has come under challenge today.<sup>36</sup> Upholders of critical traditionalism also argue to reconsider Gandhi's views on education, ethics and *swadeshi*, because they feel that these views have a strong sense of social responsibility inbuilt in them and thus can help in introducing a new socialization plan for Indian society enlaved by colonialism.<sup>37</sup>

In fine, Gandhi's powerful and lucid critique of modernity, and the implicit humanity of his alternatives,

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36 Ram Manohar Lohia, Marx Gandhi and Socialism (Hyderabad: Rammanohar Lohia Samata Vidyalaya, Nyasa, 1978), pp.120-40.

37 Bhikhu Parekh, n.29 (London, 1989), pp.1-35 and Krishna Kumar, Political Agenda of Education: A Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas (New Delhi: Sage, 1991).

encourage upholders of critical traditionalism to seek help from the side of Gandhian theory to modernity's problems. This task is challenging because, apart from many good aspects in our culture, there are also some anti-democratic aspects present in it which need to be identified; one such important aspect being caste system. Therefore, the role of caste needs to be identified. Moreover the language of *Ramrajya* has run into problems under the images of hegemony of the majority culture. Under these circumstances, it is not enough to suggest that different aspects of Hindu culture are present in the Indian state since independence or that the cult of majority invariably finds an expression in the state in every society. To gain wider acceptability and to minimize the doubts that have been raised, the advocates of Gandhian ideology need to emphasize the critical dimensions of Gandhi's writings.

## CONCLUSION

Contemporary critiques of modernity view modernity as a failed project, on the brink of disaster, because it has produced a culture of mass production and over consumption. Simultaneously it has produced a world of exploitation, dehumanization and authoritarian political developments with a threat of nuclear arms. The neutrality of science, devoid of any ontology of nature has resulted in environmental degradation on a scale that has never been experienced before by mankind. The contemporary critiques of modernity also challenge the dichotomy between tradition and reason by questioning the unlimited faith in the latter, and argue for plural conceptions of science, tradition and reason rooted in the cultural milieu of the society.

These aspects of modernity were identified by Gandhi long time ago. In trying to understand the nature of modernity, pre-Gandhian responses were, we find, deceived by modernity. While some welcomed modernity, some partially rejected it and some thought of synthesizing it with the Indian cultural ethos, but ironically, all made a mental surrender to it. Gandhi departed from the earlier responses by not making a mental surrender to modernity. More than the others he recognized that modernity implies a rupture, a

break with the past, its legacies and tradition. By encouraging the free flow of capital across national boundaries and making man a world citizen, it provided simultaneously a sense of homelessness. It deprived the individual of a sense of belonging and rootedness. Therefore, he did not want modernity to destroy the traditional way of life of the people, especially its religious and moral aspects that provided the foundations of traditional culture. Throughout his political life he tried to convince the people of the evils of modern civilization.

The basic strengths and limitations of his critique of modernity were essentially located in his moral approach to social, political and economic problems of modernity. His crucial limitations were that he overlooked some of the achievements of modernity in the West, such as, the democratization of society along with the achievement of a greater degree of socio-economic equality. He equated modernity with industrialization and capitalism, completely overlooking the potentialities of those social forces which were trying to bring modernity under cognitive and moral control. Again by giving primacy to moral issues over socio-economic contradictions, he put the cart before the horse. Not only his approach to modern calamities was moral, but his conceptual apparatuses to overcome these calamities were also moral. His notion of equality did not extend beyond

morality to economic, social and political equality. He failed to come to terms with the fact that moral equality was baseless without socio-economic equality and without achieving the latter it was difficult to annihilate caste, class and gender oppressions. It was so because these problems basically originated from socio-economic contradictions within society.

The everlasting strengths of Gandhi's critique of modernity was his success in detecting the internal contradictions of modernity and his ability to highlight its deeply alienating results particularly under colonial conditions. Besides, his critique of modernity captured the sentiments of those poor peasants, artisans, small town intelligentsia and all those for whom modernity had brought few material benefits. They were all deeply moved by his critique. Moreover, a strict practice of his critique in his own life was easily understood by the people; indeed the masses began to make sense of Gandhi before he began to speak because of his practice. Sadly this intelligibility between the elites and masses has been lost after Gandhi due to the alienating effects of colonialism over the elites, who mindlessly go on imitating the West and totally get alienated from their own culture, society and being.

In fine, Gandhi's views, such as, primacy to agriculture, preference for cottage and small scale

industries, rejection of labour transplanting technology, arguments for decentralization of political and economic power and, above all, his socialization plan to remove mental slavery resulting from colonialism, have in it inbuilt social responsibility and valuable sentiments which can provide moral guidelines to all those social forces which try to change the present social reality.

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3094