PhD THESIS

Centre for Political Studies
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BEYOND MORALISM AND REALISM: ETHICS OF A SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE SELF IN GANDHI'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

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2021

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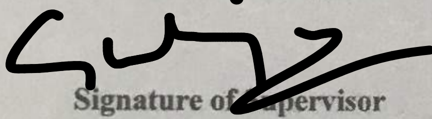

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Date: 25th June 2021.

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Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements are due to many people who made this possible. My biggest gratitude goes to my parents whose love and support made the toughest of times meaningful during this journey. Many thanks are also due to Prof. Gurpreet Mahajan for supervising my Thesis, and for teaching me how to read, write and think like a political theorist.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank all the faculty and staff at CPS who have taught me and helped me at various points during this journey. Particularly, I would like to extend my gratitude to Prof. Pralay Kanungo and Prof. Asha Sarangi for their warmth and support during my initial days as a new student at the Centre who was, for the first time, grappling with the social sciences. I also thank Prof. Amir Ali, Prof. Rajarshi Dasgupta and Prof. Ajay Gudavarthy for memorable classroom discussions, Prof. Gopal Guru for those numerous discussions on Gandhi, and Prof. Manindra Nath Thakur for his insightful comments on my work during our 9b meeting. Acknowledgements are also due to my many friends I made at the Centre and I'd like to use this opportunity to give a shout out to Shekhar Singh, Taanya Kapoor, Aparna Agarwal and Nidhi Prabha for friendships that enriched my academic life during my time here. I must also extend my gratitude to Prachi Gupta, Ankit Singh and to our extremely small but close-knit reading group on Indian political thought that served as an informal forum to test my own ideas and methodologies that informed this Thesis.

Writing a substantial part of this study was made possible by the UGC's JRF/SRF grant and a significant portion of the research, since the pandemic, was made possible by the availability of

relevant materials in open databases like Library Genesis and the Internet Archives. My heartfelt gratitude to these organizations.

Finally, this Thesis on Gandhi is informed by a history of scholarship that I often draw from and critically engage with. Reading Akeel Bilgrami's essay 'Gandhi, the philosopher' as a master's student first stoked in me the possibility of a novel reconsideration of Gandhi and his philosophy. Later on, discovering the works of Faisal Devji, Karuna Mantena and Uday Singh Mehta on Gandhi inspired and instilled within me an ambition to put forward my own reading. And to do this, I borrowed most from Dennis Dalton, Bhikhu Parekh and Ashis Nandy. Yet, such a reinterpretation would still not have been possible if not for the methods and concepts I could rely on to do my reading. A version of contextualism, that can be traced back to the writings of Quentin Skinner, and an idea of a 'situated self', that Gurpreet Mahajan has previously articulated in her writings, served as anchors that guided my own investigation. And this Thesis owes an intellectual debt to all these theorists and interpreters, and it is to them this work is dedicated to.

Introduction

Since Thomas Hobbes, a majority of thinkers in the history of political thought have advocated a view that takes coercion or violence to be an essential and constitutive feature of the political. The social contract tradition, seen from this perspective, is a thought exercise in contemplating social and institutional norms which can minimize the threat the ‘other’ poses to the self, and it succeeds in doing this by establishing the sovereign – the seat of legitimate violence in modern politics. Such an approach to the political not only requires the presence of a coercive sovereign but also operates under the assumption that the relationship between the self and the other is antagonistic or is one in which the self, in its pursuit of good life, can afford to be indifferent to the wellbeing of the other.

This study situates Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi as a thinker who attempts to counter the above assumptions that dominate modern politics and reads his philosophy as an articulation of an alternative idea of the political, a political that is nonviolent and is underpinned by an idea of a ‘socially responsible self’ as opposed to the sovereign. And to arrive at this conclusion, the Thesis relies on a contextual reading of Gandhi and his writings, a mode of textual analysis that places Gandhi’s writings within a specific intellectual context so that we are in a position to identify the relevant interlocutors for making sense of the ideas represented in these texts, thus helping us grasp the underlying ‘ideological manoeuvre’ behind a particular text-action. Such an interpretative framework that is sensitive to Gandhi’s context, the Thesis believes, also helps us draw attention to dimensions of his philosophy that have often received lesser scrutiny in studies in political theory.

The methodology of this study thus not only assumes the significance of texts or writings for understanding a thinker but it also argues for a special place for the written word in our interpretative exercises that can be attributed to the clarity and fixity of meaning associated with any written word as opposed to non-written actions. Finally, the method of interpretation outlined in this work stresses on understanding the origin of an idea in a thinker's philosophy so that we are best placed to understand what he initially intended to do with this idea. And as a result, our interrogation into Gandhian ideas often focuses on understanding their genesis in Gandhi's early writings, when he began to formulate concepts that would go onto become centrepieces of his political philosophy in the subsequent years.

The five chapters that comprise this study reads Gandhi in his context and pins down his writings as well as his unique ideas like swaraj, satya and ahimsa as responses to, or engagements with, some of the important questions and concerns that dominated the political landscape in early 20th century India. The immediate chapter that follows this Introduction lays down the problems associated with reading Gandhi or situating his political philosophy by undertaking a comprehensive literature review of some well-known interpretations of Gandhi's thought. The chapter interrogates some of these available and often-used interpretative frameworks, including the dominant moralism-realism framework for reading Gandhi, and attempts to make evident some of its limitations when it comes to showcasing the comprehensive range of Gandhi's political thinking. The chapter makes a case for moving beyond a reading of Gandhi that views him either as a moralist or a realist and explores alternative frameworks for reading and interpretation that are more sensitive to the context in which Gandhi is articulating his ideas so

that we can better capture Gandhi's relationship to the political, and his contribution to the history of political thought.

The second chapter begins by introducing a version of contextualism as the possible way forward for our interpretative project and attempts to outline how a contextual reading of Gandhi and his writings can aid and enrich our understanding of him as well as his political thought. The first half of this chapter, thus, sets down the interpretative considerations followed throughout this study and the second half undertakes a preliminary reading of two of Gandhi's seminal works, by situating these texts within their contexts. Through these readings, the first two chapters will introduce to the reader the key argument of this study.

The subsequent chapters of the Thesis follows this contextual approach and studies three core concepts that inform Gandhi's political thinking – swaraj, satya and ahimsa. The aim of these chapters is to locate these concepts within the intellectual and historical context in which Gandhi was articulating these ideas, while at the same time highlighting how these ideas are connected to Gandhi's larger project of conceptualizing a vision of politics that is nonviolent and is driven by the self, as opposed to the sovereign.

The third chapter of this study is an attempt to investigate Gandhi's idea of swaraj. And over the course of this chapter, it will be argued that conventional readings of swaraj as an instance of freedom does not stand in the face of a contextual reading of the idea. Instead, the chapter shows that Gandhi's swaraj is more closer to an idea of duty or social responsibility and is best understood when situated alongside and in opposition to Gandhi's contemporary and Hindutva

ideologue Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's conceptualization of religious and political duties. The chapter further charts the course of the idea in Gandhi's early writings and traces its connections to other Gandhian ideas like satyagraha and swadeshi, and finally concludes by outlining specific ethical dispositions grounded in responsibility towards the community that the Gandhian self must undertake as part of its efforts to attain swaraj.

The fourth chapter follows a similar trajectory and looks at the idea of satya or truth in Gandhi's writings. This chapter advocates the view that in order to grasp the idea of truth in Gandhi, it is important that we not only undertake a reading of the concept that is historically sensitive but we must also take into account Gandhi's own political journey. The chapter proceeds by outlining the two dominant tendencies of understanding truth in Gandhi, one rooted in the self's subjectivity, a view of truth that sees it as a moral-existential category that is attainable, and the other grounded in an epistemic scepticism that sees truth as something elusive and unattainable. The chapter locates these two contrasting tendencies within a linguistic and ideological context that helps us see Gandhi's truth not as one thing or the other but as an idea that evolves over a period of time, which at one phase of his life is dominated by his idea of the inner voice and at later stage is taken over by his conceptualization of the idea of relative truth in Gandhi's epistemology. The chapter concludes by highlighting that Gandhi's idea of truth, which can be best understood best as a mode of reflective judgment, was his attempt to think through the place of individual morality when it comes to political action, and to what extend the self and its morality must permeate the political.

The final chapter of this Thesis attempts to read ahimsa or nonviolence in its ideological context. To undertake this, it begins by highlighting the inadequacies of an understanding of nonviolence that either sees it is a political or moral action. Instead, the chapter argues that ahimsa holds a much larger place in Gandhi's philosophy and must be seen akin to 'positive-ideology' or a comprehensive world-view that entails within it both moral and political dimensions. But what is most central to ahimsa when seen through an ideological prism, the chapter argues, is its deep rooted anti-historicism that can only be well understood when we posit the idea as Gandhi's counter to a philosophy of history that came with the Enlightenment period, and is best captured in philosophers like Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill's approach to history, progress and its relationship to the political.

The Conclusion, thereafter, brings together the findings from the five chapters and draws attention to the totality of Gandhi's political philosophy that we have arrived at through a reading of his texts.[1] The Thesis thus treats Gandhi as a systematic thinker, locates the origins of important ideas that underpin his political philosophy, and interrogates the implications of these findings for our own study of ethics and politics.

[1] In addition to a reading of Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* and his two autobiographies (*The Story of My Experiments with Truth* and *Satyagraha in South Africa*), the Thesis also undertakes a close reading of several of his other early writings. These include, but is not limited to, Gandhi's paraphrasing of Plato's *Apology*, William Mackintire Salter's *Ethical Religion* and John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, all of which were published in his journal The Indian Opinion during his time in South Africa.

Chapter 1

Situating Gandhi's Political Philosophy: Methodological Interrogations

Introduction

There is no dearth of writings or interpretations of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and his life. His ideas and actions have undergone incisive dissections and extensive hermeneutical analysis that has resulted in a theoretical fluidity to our understanding of Gandhi. Some say he is pre-modern; some call him post-modern; some consider him a politician, and some refer to him as a saint. Yet within these varied characterizations, one can spot a general tendency when it comes to interpreting Gandhi and his ideas.[2] It appears that a majority of these interpretations lie between two polarities - the moral and the political.[3] The debates thus are often concerning to what extend one overrides the other, the considerations being morality or an idea of the good on one hand and politics, with the associated questions of power and legitimacy, on the other. An actor/thinker who tends to give priority to ethical and moral motivations over political ones is often referred to as a political moralist and those who prioritize the political over the moral when it comes to action is

[2] In this thesis, we will interchangeably use the terms political theory and political philosophy to denote a theorization that helps us understand the philosophical outlook that motivates the politics of a thinker, in this case MK Gandhi. We will also occasionally use the term 'Gandhian ideas' to denote concepts that are unique to his thinking, which includes ideas like ahimsa, satya, swaraj, swadeshi sarvodaya etc. as well as his nonviolent political practices like satyagraha, non-cooperation, civil disobedience etc.

[3] In these writings, we will be using the terms 'political' and 'moral' to denote spheres of activity concerned with politics and morality respectively, the latter also subsuming ethical actions that are also motivated by an idea of the good.

referred to a political realist. The purpose of this introductory chapter is to interrogate the validity and usefulness of such a dichotomous reading of Gandhi and his political thought through this moralist-realist prism. And over the course of doing this, we will also touch upon other methodological frameworks interpreters of Gandhi have used to situate him and his philosophy.

The initial sections of this chapter will explore how the moralism-realism framework in political theory has been employed by theorists and philosophers in their interpretation of Gandhi's philosophy. While all the interpreters in consideration are well positioned to situate Gandhi as a moralist or as a realist through a selective reading of his writings, this chapter will point out that such readings can be criticized, and rightly so, for not only being 'realist' enough but also for ignoring several dimensions of Gandhi's political thinking. Thus, the chapter will attempt to highlight how this moralism-realism debate concerning Gandhi, though insightful, does not address the deeper problems concerning interpretation of Gandhi's political thought. This is because, and as the chapter argues, the moralism-realism debate in Gandhi appears to be primarily a disagreement between two camps of theorists over the nature of Gandhi's ethics rather than a debate over the nature of the Gandhi's conceptualization of the political. By undertaking a comparative assessment of the political theories that emerge from the thinking of Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant and German sociologist Max Weber who serve as inspirations for the moralist and realist schools respectively, and by contrasting them to Gandhi's own perspective on the political, the chapter suggests the possibility of an alternative vision of the political in Gandhi's writings.

The subsequent quest in the chapter thus becomes an attempt to survey alternative frameworks for reading Gandhi that are more context-sensitive and, through which, we may better understand his unique approach to the political that is founded on ideas like the self and community as opposed to the sovereign. The chapter then introduces these alternative frameworks for reading Gandhi like post-colonialism and critical traditionalism etc. which tend to situate his writings within a particular socio-historical context - the emerging nationalism and the anti-colonial movement in India in early twentieth century. The chapter then highlights the significance of 'context' for making sense of Gandhi's political thinking and concludes by assessing the adequacy of the intellectual context employed in these interpretations, highlighting their ability or inability to help us make sense of Gandhi's idea of the political.

Moralism and Realism in Political Theory

In one of his essays, philosopher Bernard Williams contends that the field of political philosophy has historically been dominated by thinkers with an attitude of political moralism.[4] In his analysis, practitioners of political philosophy in contemporary times have assumed that their task is to formulate ideals or generate widely acceptable social norms, which they feel are to be 'enacted' through politics and its available institutional frameworks. The main concern for political philosophers today, according to Williams, is to survey how to better society and lay down moral conditions of co-existence.

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[4] Bernard Arthur Owen Williams, *In the Beginning Was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument* (Princeton University Press, 2005), 3.

Williams disagreed with such an approach and his nuanced intervention in this field was to highlight certain categorical differences between what constituted a moral and a political argument. Williams recommended political theorists to take note of these otherwise overlooked differences and practice 'real' political philosophy as opposed to pushing the discipline towards a branch of applied moral philosophy. And it was indeed Williams who, through this essay, outlined an alternative real political philosophy which he termed 'political realism' and distinguished it from the 'political moralism' that had pervaded the practice of political theory until then.[5] Williams characterized political realism as an approach to political philosophy that is anchored on political concepts instead of ideas that had ethical or moralistic undertones. This is not to say that he advocated a non-normative mode of theorization in the study of politics. Rather, Williams merely suggested that the normativity in political philosophy should evolve from concepts and conditions that are peculiarly political.

Williams' contention was later taken up by several political theorists (Raymond Geuss, Michael Freeden, John Dunn etc.) who can be generalized together as practitioners of political realism. These thinkers, like Williams, saw in the debates in contemporary political theory a dominant tendency of what they call a 'flight from the political.'[6] It is the liberal political philosophies of John Rawls, Robert Nozick etc. that are the targets of this criticism as the realists see these liberal philosophers as articulating a view that wants to shape political society on the basis of ideals that

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[5] Bernard Arthur Owen Williams, *In the Beginning Was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument* (Princeton University Press, 2005), 1-4.

[6] Michael Freeden popularized this theory of the 'flight from the political' in his book *The Political Theory of Political Thinking: The Anatomy of a Practice* (Oxford University Press, 2013.

are *a priori* to politics.[7] Following Williams, they strongly advocate that an attitude of political moralism in the practice of political philosophy misses the point of doing political philosophy, which is to give us a better understanding of the political.

A question then that begs to be asked at this stage is where do we situate Gandhi within this framework of moralism-realism? How do we interpret his political philosophy in such a way that it will address some of the valid concerns the realists have outlined above? And also, does situating Gandhi within this school of political realism really further enhance our understanding of the political as it is claimed? While it is evident that interpretations of Gandhi have often fluctuated within this spectrum of the moral and the political by varying degrees, as opposed to lying at either of these extremes, it has not been clear how an articulation of Gandhi's realism enhances our own understanding of Gandhi as a thinker.

Recent literature on Gandhi, especially the work of Karuna Mantena, has highlighted a general tendency among Gandhi's interpreters to read his philosophy with strong undertones of political moralism. It is important to note that the point of this criticism is not to claim that majority of political theorists writing about Gandhi are moralists. Rather, the significance of Mantena's criticism is that by interpreting Gandhi as a moralist, we are missing out on the insights of his political philosophy. For Mantena, theorizations with moralistic undertones end up bracketing Gandhi to a category of a moral thinker and read him less as a political thinker. And many may agree with such a reading of Gandhi, arguing that Gandhi had less to do with the 'slum of politics'

[7] For more on these debates, see Noël K O'Sullivan, 'The Concept of the Political in Contemporary Western and Non-Western Political Thought,' 2014.

and more to do with morality. A cursory and selective reading of Gandhi's writings may elicit in the reader a similar sentiment. However, it would be problematic not to heed to Mantena's concerns, the reasons for which would become more apparent once we go back to the writings of Williams and Geuss, whose works serve as an inspiration for Mantena's claims.

Williams points out that to think politically is to think of questions concerning the securing of order, safety or conditions of cooperation in society, which are usually obtained by establishing of the sovereign - the seat of political authority in a community. Thus, for Williams, political thinking inherently involves asking questions about the conditions under which such an authority becomes legitimate. The demands of legitimacy may appear to be a moral demand, but this morality arises out of the constitution of the political i.e. with the formation of the sovereign. And hence, Williams sees this mode of moralization within legitimacy as something that is not a priori to the political.

Raymond Geuss, in his text *Philosophy and Real Politics* further critiques normative political theory as failing to fulfil the tasks of political theory. Guess finds contemporary political philosophy to be overly normative and claims that it has hardly served us in comprehending political nuances, whether it be concerning questions of conduct in politics or as a critique of ideology. Geuss, like Williams, advocates us to rely on a realist lens to conduct political analysis so that we are able to grasp the value conflicts at play in a context, which in turn are expressed as ideological differences within a historical context. For Geuss, political theory must work towards clarifying the political realities and is, by nature, historical. He finds fault with contemporary political theorists for using concepts loosely by taking them out of their historical and political context. Finally, like all realists, Geuss also points out that the normative dimensions of political

theory must emerge from those evaluative judgments we make about questions of political conduct and ideology and not from pre-given visions of social justice and equality. Political theory, for Geuss, is both an exercise in explanation of power relations and how it is legitimized, and at the same time throws light on context specific collective action, its organization and the maintenance of order.[8]

Thus, there appears to be a prioritization of certain kinds of problems when it comes to practicing political theory through a realist's lens. Their main contention is that dominant schools of political philosophy have often brushed aside the task of providing an answer to why one must pay heed to purely moralistic solutions to political problems. As Patrick Neal remarked, political philosophers often brush aside basic political conditions like conflict and pluralism and 'sanitize' it to make politics seem like a 'philosophical debate among friends' who can arrive at a conclusion through rational or reasonable arguments.[9] The onus is hence on political theorists to attempt and clarify the merits in such advocacy of reason and moralism, if any. Such clarifications should ideally address the criticisms raised by the realists about the flight from the political and must not only be seriously historical but also accommodate questions concerning power, legitimacy, ideology, conflict and political conduct as opposed to just limiting a thinker to his perspectives on the good life. Such would be the demands on Gandhi's political philosophy, if we are to formulate one out of his writings through this realist prism.

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[8] Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton University Press, 2008).

[9] Patrick Neal, *Liberalism and Its Discontents* (NYU Press, 1999), 73.

Debating Gandhi as a Political Moralist and Realist

One of the initial attempts[10] to constitute a comprehensive study of Gandhi's thought was undertaken by Raghavan Iyer in 1973 when he wrote *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*. In this book, Iyer categorized Gandhi as a 'political moralist.' As Iyer himself noted, 'to read Gandhi as a political moralist is to refer to Gandhi as someone who is not concerned with the ethical and practical problems of men in authority', which is to say that Gandhi's political theory is less concerned with theorizations of political conduct and is instead focused on emphasizing moral norms and principles that should guide and inform our life.[11] Iyer views Gandhi's entry into politics as driven by an urge to spiritualize the political life and its institutions, by infusing religiosity and morality into the political.

Iyer's initial point of entry to studying Gandhi, like most of Gandhi's readers, is *Hind Swaraj*. Iyer considered this short text written in 1909 as the 'point d'appui of Gandhi's moral and political thought' and located the basic argument of this text in Gandhi's critique of modern civilization.[12] In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi wrote that modern civilization

> 'takes note neither of morality nor of religion. Its votaries calmly state their business is not to teach religion. Some even consider it to be a superstitious growth…and prate about morality…I have come to the conclusion that immorality is taught in the name of morality…This civilization is irreligion.'[13]

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[10] Though there have been several outstanding works on Gandhi even before Iyer, none of them appears to have made a differentiation between Gandhi's moral and political thinking as Iyer did and is hence most suitable to make the point we are attempting to arrive at.

[11] Raghavan Iyer, The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi (OUP Press, 2000), 27.

[12] Iyer, 17.

[13] Mahatma Gandhi, *Gandhi:'Hind Swaraj'and Other Writings*, ed. Anthony J Parel (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Iyer locates the above moral critique of modernity and its ways of life in Gandhi's text as 'crucial' to comprehending his political philosophy. Calling *Hind Swaraj* 'a manifesto of moral condemnation', Iyer argues that Gandhi is more concerned with providing us with an 'imagery of compelling power' than put forward a 'closely reasoned' case against modern civilization.[14] In fact, he specifically points out that Gandhi did not attempt to undertake any 'rigorous social analysis' to arrive at 'political conclusions' and sees Gandhi as delivering a value judgment in the text primarily driven by a moral logic.[15] This is because, in Iyer's reading, Gandhi considered civilizations to be useless unless it provided 'form and substance to virtue.' As a result, Iyer argues, Gandhi developed a 'daringly sanguine view' of how he must play his part in purifying politics. And this he would do by upholding 'absolute standards' in all walks of life.

Iyer is not far from Gandhi's own characterization of his political work. Gandhi had, since his early days in politics, claimed that his venturing into the territory of politics was primarily driven by a need to 'spiritualize' political life and its institutions, indicating the hold of moralistic and religious ambitions over Gandhi's political considerations.[16] And this is most starkly expressed in Gandhi's autobiography where he writes that those who say religion has nothing to do with politics

[14] Iyer, 'The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi,' 63.

[15] Iyer, 67.

[16] It is important to note here that Gandhi, at varying instances, entertains both moralism as well as realism in his writings, though the moralistic strains are more dominant when we read him. As a result, as we shall see in the subsequent sections, interpretations of his political philosophy can foster both these elements.

do not know what religion means.[17] Gandhi did not shy away from this posture of attributing a 'religious' zeal to his political work even later in his life. In 1938, while addressing a group of missionaries, he told them 'I could not be leading a religious life unless I identified with the whole of mankind and that I could not do unless I took part in politics' and concluded that religion 'provides a moral basis to all other activities without which life would be a maze of sound and fury signifying nothing.'[18]

Iyer reads Gandhi's partaking in politics as his attempt to apply the 'universal moral codes' of satya and ahimsa on to the field of politics. It is this pursuit of universal morality that Gandhi aimed at through his involvement in politics according to Iyer. This was because Gandhi did not see the political, moral, spiritual etc. as separate spheres of action with its own moral codes. In Iyer's reading, the norms of conduct Gandhi advocates are absolute and highlighted that Gandhi understood moral engagements as containing within them a practice of serving. And, politics being concerned with the 'happiness of the toiling masses' seemed to Gandhi a natural avenue to serve others. Thus, Iyer reads Gandhi as having found no difference in the goals of his moral and political vocations. Iyer highlights this as a characteristic specific to Gandhi, an attitude to engage in politics with an aim of bringing a moral spirit into politics and reads Gandhi's engagement in the political as his ambitious attempt at the 'purification' of politics.

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[17] Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, 'An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments With Truth, Trans,' *By Mahadev Desai, Ahmedabad: Navjivan Publishing House*, 1927, 11.

[18] http://www.mkgandhi.org/momgandhi/chap18.htm

In comparison to Iyer, Anthony J. Parel, in his book *Gandhi's philosophy and the quest for harmony*, highlights that it is not satya and ahimsa as Iyer claims but the theory of purusharthas that is the central concern in Gandhi's thought.[19] For Parel, Gandhi's moralism is much more complicated than the application of his twin principles and feels that all of Gandhi's philosophy flows from his deep learning of the theory of purusharthas, that underpins the ethical outlook in epics like Mahabharata and Ramayana that Gandhi held close to his heart. Parel claims that when we read Gandhi through this lens of the purusharthas, we may be able to reconcile the moral with the political in Gandhi in his philosophy. This is in contrast to Iyer's interpretative approach that demarcates the moral and political as separate while arguing that what matters to Gandhi is the moral and not the political. For Iyer, Gandhi's thought is not concerned with questions of men in authority and power. Parel moves away from this view and sees Gandhi as a thinker who is not blind to the concerns of men in politics. This is because the essence of purushartha, which according to Parel drives Gandhi's moral and political life, is that a well lived life requires a 'coordinated pursuit' of all the 'four canonical goals of life'- wealth and power (artha), ethics of duty based on experience (dharma), pleasure, both sexual and aesthetic (kama) and spiritual freedom (moksha).[20] However, despite Parel's sensitivity to highlighting Gandhi's concern with questions of power and politics, which Iyer overlooks, Parel inevitably tends to frame his reading of Gandhi within this vision of a good life, which in this case is represented by the philosophy of purusharthas that calls for a balanced and coordinated approach to life, a way of life that takes into account all spheres of activities including the moral and the political. As a result, even in Parel's

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[19] Anthony Parel. *Gandhi's Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, Introduction.

[20] Anthony Parel. *Gandhi's Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p 32.

interpretation, politics is significant for Gandhi as merely a means to an end, i.e. a necessity to living by the purusharthas. This makes Parel's interpretative framework as much susceptible to a mode of moralism, though distinguishable from Iyer's moralism which reads the essence of Gandhian project as an attempt to universalize the ideals of satya and ahimsa.

Mantena calls the above readings of Gandhi a 'classic statement' of Gandhi as a moralist.[21] Going by Mantena's formulations, one can argue that both Iyer and Parel's interpretation of Gandhi's involvement in the political life as Gandhi's attempt to guide all areas of his life through specific norms - the twin principles of satya and ahimsa in Iyer's case and the theory of purushartha in Parel's interpretation. And Mantena's writings on Gandhi is driven by a motivation to move away from this mode of moralism embedded in these interpretations of Gandhi's political philosophy. Mantena is not alone in seeking such a reading of Gandhi and she views the more recent interpretations[22] of Gandhi as also attempting to move away from the more traditional assumption of Gandhi's moralism that she especially reads in Iyer. She finds in some of the recent interpretations a novel reconsideration of Gandhi's critique of liberal politics and modern practices of judgment. And Mantena attempts to connect these insights to, and situate them within, an older literature on the theory and practice of nonviolence that signifies the theoretical relevance of Gandhi's politics and political thinking.[23]

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[21] Karuna Mantena, 'Another Realism: The Politics of Gandhian Nonviolence,' *American Political Science Review*, 2012, 3.

[22] specifically, those by Uday Singh Mehta, Akeel Bilgrami, Ajay Skaria, Faisal Devji, and Dustin Ells Howes.

[23] It is important at this stage to highlight that this reading of Gandhi that prioritizes his practice of politics over his moral outlook, and into which Mantena situates her own interpretation, also has a long history. And Gene Sharp, for example, can be considered as a seminal theorist who has written on Gandhian nonviolence in purely political and strategic terms. Within this reading of Gandhi as a strategist, one may also locate Indian historians like Bipin

For Mantena, Gandhian nonviolence, when read through a realist lens, is based on a 'contextual, consequentialist and moral psychological analysis of the political world' and entails within it a deep sensitivity to the 'inherent tendencies' of 'conflict, domination and violence' that pervades the political.[24] And when nonviolence is framed this way, Mantena believes we can better understand Satyagraha or nonviolent action as it is meant to be i.e. as 'a practical orientation in politics as opposed to a moral proposition, ethical stance or standard of judgment' or a 'self-limiting' political act aimed at minimizing the 'negative consequences of politics.'[25] And just like how Gandhi's own writings reinforce Iyer's Gandhian moralism, Mantena's Gandhian realism can also be traced back to Gandhi's writings and is most starkly represented again in his early political tract *Hind Swaraj*.

In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi presents a hypothetical example of an armed man who stole Gandhi's property. This act angers Gandhi and he wants to punish the man who robbed him for the misdeed.[26] For this purpose, Gandhi recruits other armed men and threatens the miscreant. The

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Chandra, Bhagwan Josh etc. who go onto compare Gandhi's nonviolent tactics to a Gramscian War-of-Position. For a detailed understanding of such readings of nonviolence as a political strategy, see section 'Interpreting nonviolence as a political action or moral response' in Chapter 5. But for now, what is essential is to recognize that while earlier realistic interpretations of Gandhi tended to focus more on the tactical nature of Gandhian nonviolence, Mantena is more interested in understanding and presenting Gandhi not as a political strategist but as a political realist in the mould of predecessors like Hobbes or Weber who has something original to contribute to our understanding of politics.

[24] Mantena, 'Another Realism: The Politics of Gandhian Nonviolence,' 2.

[25] Mantena, 3.

[26] Gandhi, *Gandhi:'Hind Swaraj'and Other Writings*, 61.

miscreant, in turn, collects his friends and threatens Gandhi and his neighbours. Gandhi, through this example can be seen to be indicating that antagonistic action will only lead to a cycle of further antagonism and eventually violence. Through this incident, Gandhi wants to reveal to us the close proximity of our actions to violence and the problem of unintended consequences, which for Mantena, plays a central role when it comes to Gandhi's rejection of violence as a means for political action, even when the ends are good intentioned ones. The conclusion Gandhi derives is that, by using violent means, we can only reach violent ends and the means we employ should be such that it minimizes the unintended consequences produced by that action, for which a constant vigilance of the means is required from a responsible actor.[27]

In *Hind Swaraj*, in the same section of the text titled 'On Brute Force', Gandhi also attempts to explain to the reader the inseparability of means and ends, which forms another feature of Gandhi's political action according to Mantena. In her reading, for Gandhi, means and ends maintain an 'inviolable connection' and this is best articulated by Gandhi when he compares the means to a seed and the end to a tree.[28] Through this simple simile, Gandhi creates his theoretical framework for the inviolability of means and ends. And by highlighting this, Gandhi wants to tell us that the means in itself is end determining, a theorization some theorists refer to with the phrase 'means as ends creating', meaning that there is no separation between means and ends.[29] Gandhi tells the reader that different ends are created from different means and a nonviolent movement and a

[27] Karuna Mantena, "Another Realism: The Politics of Gandhian Nonviolence," *American Political Science Review*, 2012, 461.

[28] Gandhi, 63.

[29] Gandhi, 61–65.

violent movement cannot achieve the same social change. He further stresses that the means should be carefully chosen after due consideration and should be context specific. By giving the example of different ways to drive out a thief who wants to steal from his house, Gandhi writes that the right response to the thief will depend on his own relation to the thief, who may be a stranger to him, an acquaintance, or even his relative. Gandhi goes on to say that 'one needs to adopt means to fit each case' indicating that different contexts require different actions or responses to deal with the situation.[30]

Following his successful political activism in South Africa and his initial engagements in the Indian national movement, particularly after the Chauri Chaura incident, the challenges of managing and controlling mass movements must have been obvious to Gandhi. Further, he might have carefully considered the lack of effectiveness of violent struggles against the British and the violent repercussion the British were capable of inflicting on Indians because of their access to arms and ammunitions. Following on from these considerations, it appears that Mantena's reading of Gandhi's politics of nonviolence as a contextual and strategic political action do make for a strong case. It is contextual because it is dependent on whom you are engaging with and what relation you share with the antagonist. It is strategic not only because Gandhi felt nonviolence is the only effective mode of politics that can minimize the unintended violent consequences of his political actions, but also because he knew that the political method he was formulating would have near-perfect legitimacy in India as well as the West. Thus, one may conclude that Gandhi's rejection of violence was not absolute as Iyer claims and his embrace of nonviolence came out of

[30] Gandhi, 63.

strategic considerations. Gandhi, in this interpretation, exhibits characteristics of a political realist or a political strategist, a skilled political actor who understands politics primarily as a site of power struggle and acts strategically to minimize the negative consequences of his action, yet at the same time, identifying, formulating and utilizing the most effective strategy to counter antagonisms.

Up until now, we have seen how Gandhi's interpreters and his own writings provide a peek into some of the theoretical considerations that informs his political thought. And in this preliminary reading, even a single text like *Hind Swaraj* provides us with two conflicting formulations of his political thought, which we have referred to as a reading of Gandhi as a moralist and realist. And this is best articulated by Iyer and Mantena in their interpretation of Gandhi, both of whom situate his politics within a moralism-realism framework in political theory.

In contrast to these interpreters, several thinkers have highlighted how the context of anti-colonialism and the intricate yet disrupting relationship between tradition and modernity is central to understanding Gandhi's political thinking. In this reading, the situatedness of Gandhi in the Indian context and the associated dilemmas of action involved in resisting British colonialism and modernity is indispensable to grasp the foundations on which Gandhi constructs his political philosophy. However, this is not to say that Mantena and Iyer are insensitive to these dimensions in Gandhi's thought. Rather, our purpose is to interrogate the adequacy of a framework like moralism-realism as it is formulated when it comes to understanding a thinker like Gandhi. After all, by culling Gandhi's politics out of the Indian context and disengaging it from his contemporaries and interlocutors, even a realist interpretation of Gandhi like the one advocated by

Mantena can be criticized as paying less heed to the tenets of practicing realist political theory, which requires one to conduct a reading that is not only more historically rooted but also a reading that is more sensitive to the social and intellectual context of Gandhi's political thought, thus helping us grasp his broader ideological outlook.

Situating Gandhi Beyond Moralism and Realism

Gopal Guru has argued in his essays on political thought in modern India that 'beyond', as a category when studying India, carries with it a unique epistemic and normative value.[31] It establishes its standing through a 'negative language' that emerged under an adverse intellectual environment where a particular discourse, the Dalit discourse in the Indian case, was forced to make its distinctness evident in comparison to the Western or Desi articulations through instances of dissonance, difference and defiance. However, the way in which we tend to use the term hereafter is devoid of such epistemic or normative value. Rather our usage of the term 'beyond' in this study carries with it a much narrower and simplistic objective.

The first part of the title of this study, 'Beyond moralism and realism,' may indicate to the reader that the aim of this study is to put to rest this philosophical debate involved in reading Gandhi through the lens of a moralist or a realist. While we may have begun our investigation with such an ambitious endeavour, a cursory survey of this methodological debate in studying Gandhi's political thought show us that the debate is in no way nonsensical. As already highlighted in the preceding section, while textual evidence does seem to be more in line with a reading of Gandhi

[31] Guru, 'The Idea of India:'Derivative, Desi and Beyond',' 5.

as a moralist, a realistic interpretation of his politics can also be weaved from a reading of his canonical work like *Hind Swaraj*. But one is led to feel there are more important issues at stake in this moralism-realism debate concerning Gandhi, and these can only be uncovered if we can successfully recast the moralism-realism debate within Gandhi's thought in a new light.

Though our analysis of Iyer and Mantena's interpretation of Gandhi previously positioned them as belonging to either ends of the moralism-realism scale, a closer reading will reveal certain affinities and shared concerns. To begin with, both of them are concerned with understanding Gandhi, and is particularly interested in comprehending his theory of politics. But, where they disagree is precisely in their characterization of the nature of Gandhi's approach to politics.

Both Iyer and Mantena begins their analysis with the assumption of the existence of ideas like personal and political morality and they believe that an important task at hand for a political thinker is to meditate deeply on how personal morality i.e. moral ideals of the self, play out in one's political engagements. Or to frame it differently, the key question at hand for Gandhi in their interpretation concerns how the morality of the self permeates the political world. The moralism-realism framework understood from this vantage point is thus primarily a disagreement between two interpreters of Gandhi who attribute two different ethical dispositions to Gandhi and his relationship to politics. While both of them agree that the central concern of Gandhi's philosophy is an attempt to conceptualize an ethical engagement with the political world, they see different things in Gandhi's ethical vision.

For Iyer, Gandhian ethics is primarily deontological in nature and is closely aligned to the Kantian tradition. Scholars often argue that Kant's political philosophy is an extension of his moral philosophy. Iyer agrees with this assumption and reads Gandhi as a thinker, who in a similar vein, is attempting to extend his morality to the political sphere. Iyer argues in his book that 'Gandhi's view of politics was the consequence of, and not independent of, his view of morality' and outlines Gandhi's ethical outlook as being similar to those expressed by Kant in his essay *On the Discordance Between Morals and Politics*.[32] In this essay, Kant advocates a view of ethics as a 'system of unconditional authoritative laws' in accordance with which we must act, both in the private and public spheres of life. For Iyer, Gandhi is a thinker who, following Kant, develops a 'system of morality' for the self that is 'absolutist' in all compartments of life. In doing this, Iyer argues that Gandhi 'refused to distinguish between' political and personal morality and rejected a view that 'politics is intrinsically moral in its own way.'[33] Rather, ethics in politics needs to be cultivated through a conscious imposition of the self's personal or moral standards in politics. Thus, the standard of political conduct of the individual, in this view, are derived from the moral ideals of the self, the obedience to which is the individual's duty or obligation according to Gandhi, in Iyer's reading.

In contrast to Iyer, Mantena believes Gandhi's significance as a political thinker lies in his pointing out to us the dangers of applying personal morality onto the political without due consideration of the consequences of such imposition. The centrality of the means rather than the

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[32] Iyer, 'The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi,' 51.

[33] Iyer, 56.

ends, when it comes to political action, is a feature she finds neither in Kant nor in Iyer's reading of Gandhi inspired by Kant. Instead, she traces this ethical outlook to a school of Weberian consequentialism that ties political actions to an ethics of responsibility that is very much concerned with the outcome of actions rather than the principles it involves. For Mantena, Weber is the 'seminal theorist of ethics and politics as two competing domains' and unlike Kant argues for a view of the political as a distinctive site of social interaction underscored most importantly by the 'specific means employed, namely violence.'[34] Similar to Weber, Mantena reads Gandhi's approach to politics as being grounded in a view that takes violence and power as the constitutive elements of the political and unlike Kant paid close attention to the 'burden of action.' As a result, ethics for Gandhi is not the domain of 'contemplation and cultivation of ideals' but the thoughtful attempt to meditate with regards to how ideals can be 'enacted in the world', thus shifting the focus away from principles in ethics and politics to the consequences involved.[35] Seen from this perspective, the moralism-realism debate concerning Gandhi's political philosophy is ultimately a difference over the nature of Gandhi's ethics, a disagreement between a deontological and consequential reading of Gandhi.

Weber, Kant and Gandhi

In the backdrop of the political drama surrounding the conclusion of World War I, Weber delivered the, now famous, lecture in Munich that informed what he later published as a text titled *Politics as a Vocation*. For Weber, the purpose of the lecture, and in turn the text, was to

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[34] Karuna Mantena, 'Gandhi and the Means-Ends Question in Politics,' *Occasional Papers of the School of Social Sciences*, no. 46 (2012): 3.

[35] Mantena, 4.

‘elaborate on the nature of politics and of human action in modern times’, which he did by drawing our attention to two particular attitudes to political action. For Weber, the purpose of this text was never to advocate a theory of realpolitik or to posit the accumulation of power, including the use of violence as a legitimate expression of such power, as the purpose of politics. Instead, the text was Weber’s attempt to provide the reader with a ‘a sketch of the political education’ that is necessary to transform one from the realms of spectatorship of politics to becoming an actor or agent of politics.[36] Seen this way, Weber’s meditation is an attempt to answer the question – what does it mean to act responsibly, and with maturity, in politics?

In this text, Weber identified two attitudes when it comes to politics - the ethic of responsibility (Verantwortungsethik) and the ethic of conviction (Gesinnungethik). To think about responsibility in politics, for Weber, is to acknowledge that the consequences of an action undertaken by an agent are entirely his own doing, irrespective of whether the outcomes were intended or not. Verantwortungsethik is hence an ethical outlook that attends to the consequences of a political action. Weber contrasts this with the Gesinnungethik and points out that the difference between the two has to do with the ‘complete absence of intentionality as an excuse in the ethics of responsibility and its overdetermination of judgment in the ethics of conviction.’[37] Thus, for Weber, it does not matter if we did not intend to cause an unfortunate consequence in relation to our actions. To take shelter from taking responsibility for the adverse consequences of

[36] Max Weber, David S Owen, and Tracy B Strong, *The Vocation Lectures* (Hackett Publishing, 2004) Introduction.

[37] Weber, Owen, and Strong, 69.

our acts under the garb of intentions, or the lack of it, is to be a 'political infant' according to Weber, an act of political immaturity.

This intervention of Weber in the study of politics, and his prioritization of the ethic of responsibility over the ethic of conviction, has often led scholars to suggest that Weber finds no relevance for deontological ethics when it comes to politics. As a result of his focus on the consequences over intentions, ideals or principles as the source of ethical action in politics, this political morality rooted in a form of consequentialism is conventionally pitted against a brand of Kantian ethics in politics, the assumption being that Kant's approach to the political is conviction driven. While there is some truth to this presentation of these two contrasting ethical outlooks in politics, there is more than meets the eye when it comes to both Weber and Kant, and their approach to politics.

Though Weber relies on these two conceptually distinct categories of ethics of conviction and responsibility to make sense of the nature of political actions and their underlying motives, he feels these two ethical orientations are 'not absolute antitheses' but are 'mutually complementary', and 'only when taken together do they constitute the authentic human being who is capable of having a vocation for politics.'[38] For Weber, there are no transcendental realms in politics that the actor can reach out for justifying an action but only his own judgment in the face of conflicting values. Thus, integrity of a political actor is not concerned with the moral ideals or principles one holds per se but in taking responsibility for a position for which the

[38] Weber, Owen, and Strong, 92.

rightness is not guaranteed. While this is indeed dependent on the consequences of an action, it avoids a vulgar consequentialism that foregoes any place for values. Rather, what it entails is the absence of a metaphysics of political morality.

Unlike Weber, Kant's political project is grounded in 'metaphysics', a term he used to refer to a 'set of fundamental a priori principles' of a discipline.[39] Kantian ethics is often termed as being 'formal', in that they are very general and do not tell us about the content of an action. Thus, Kant's ethical metaphysics only provides categories and rules to which we can appeal while judging the moral quality of our actions. Unlike Weber who determines the right conduct by focusing on the consequences of an action, Kant sees right actions as those that do 'not involve our using ourselves or others as means to our subjective ends.'[40] And this has nothing to do with the consequences of our action but our intentions.

One of the rules Kant outlines in his study of the metaphysics of morality is what he calls the formula for the Kingdom of Ends: 'Act always in such a way as if you were through your maxims a law-making member of a universal kingdom of ends."[41] By bringing in the dimension of man's sociality and his life in a community through the idea of a kingdom, Kant takes in to account that man does not act in a vacuum but 'always in relation to other men', thus indicating

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[39] Kant's political writings also correspond with the period of his critical philosophy. During this period, Kant held that that the world of appearance is conditioned by categories like space and time and ordered by a priori concepts like causality. Kant saw his philosophical project hence as aimed at elaborating a system that helps us grasp these relevant a priori principles, which he referred to as 'metaphysics.'

[40] Immanuel Kant and Hans Siegbert Reiss, *Kant's Political Writings: Edited with An Introduction and Notes by Hans Reiss; Translated by HB Nisbet* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), Introduction.

[41] Kant and Reiss, Introduction.

the possibility of a political theory, a system of principles governing organized human relations who live together in society. But such a political theory is linked to a metaphysics of morality for Kant. After all, politics concerns 'what we ought to do in our social and political context' and is concerned with 'establishing criteria' to 'settle public conflicts of interest', but in a 'universal manner.'[42] Yet, such affinity between ethics and politics is not as simple as it has been made to seem in Kant.

For Kant, morality in politics is based on a metaphysics of law and not on a metaphysics of morality as theorists like Iyer and Mantena have suggested. While Kant's theory of law does flow from Kant's conception of morality, it is distinct and different from the realm of morality and it is only in the formal nature or its characteristic universality that law imitates Kant's moral metaphysics. This conclusion, which we have currently drawn, is quite different to the previous portrayal of Kant, for example as Mantena or Iyer have highlighted, as both of them read Kant as someone who advocates a conception of political morality that is directly derived from the morality of the self. From a cursory reading of Kant's political thought, it is evident that Kant definitely does not recommend such a conscious impositions of the self's personal moral standards in politics but what he insists is the establishment of a legal order as a necessity within the political.

For Kant, politics is primarily as an instrument of conflict resolution so that a civil society can prosper, a concern that is highly reminiscent of his contractarian predecessor Thomas Hobbes,

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[42] Kant and Reiss, Introduction.

Kant considers the existence of 'law' to be foundational to any conception of politics. And for Kant, it is a metaphysics of law that a metaphysics of politics can amount to, one in which the task at hand for a political actor is to judge the 'lawfulness' of his political act.[43] Thus, for Kant, it is neither the morals nor consequences that an actor must pay heed to in his political engagement but the lawfulness of his action.[44] While there are some affinities between the system of ethics and politics in Kant's philosophy, he is very clear that moral and political duties are different in nature. Political duties, for Kant, are not duties towards oneself and is less concerned with one's moral ideals. Rather, they are primarily duties that are directed towards others.

Politics, seen through this Kantian lens, hence becomes an arena of public engagement that is concerned with performance of our obligation towards others where our non-performance of such political duties is outrightly 'wrong' and can be 'enforced.' Thus, a coherent political order, for Kant, is a legal order where political actions can be evaluated by the just or unjust nature of such acts. It is important to note here that in conceptualizing such a political order, Kant is not concerned with the 'content of the relationship' between the individuals who comprise the political community but only with the form of such relationships. But what is clear is that for Kant, whereas the morality and moral action is concerned with motives of the self or 'subjective motives' and its universalizability, political action and law does not concern our subjective motives and are realized through domain of the 'rights (recht)' which in turn establishes the just

[43] Kant and Reiss, Introduction

[44] It is important to note here that while authors like Reiss see the idea of 'lawfulness' at the heart of Kant's political, there are others who continue to see the metaphysics of ethics, the principle that the law should embody, as the underlying basis for making sense of Kant's political. However, for our purposes, Reiss' interpretation of Kant throws most light on what we intent to interrogate.

or unjust nature of our actions. Rights are after all to be found in ‘external relations’ and is dependent on the existence of the ‘mine and thine’ i.e. the self and the other.

Interestingly, the more we engage with Kant’s political theory, the more he seems to maintain an affinity towards a Hobbesian realism, a feature of his political thinking that is often overlooked in the desire to read Kant’s conception of politics exclusively through a prism of his moral philosophy. Kant’s closeness to Hobbes is thus not just reflected in their shared methodological contractarian commitment but is also evident in their foundational assumptions concerning the making of the political. For both Hobbes and Kant, the key political question concerns securing ‘peace.’ And no amount of political realism attributed to Hobbes can negate the reality that Hobbes eventually relies on ‘peace as a pre-political moral value’, just as Kant does.[45] Further, Kant is also in agreement with Hobbes when it comes to the necessity of violence, or at least some form or coercion, for establishing such an order of peace and security. Kant’s idea of law thus ‘presupposes coercion’, a paradoxical infringement on freedom of man so that his own freedom can be safeguarded.[46] But where Kant takes forward this Hobbesian political in an idealistic, not moralistic, direction is when he suggests that this social contract must be seen as a ‘practical idea of reason’, in that it can be ‘applied’ to the practical world.[47] For Kant, social

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[45] Ilaria Cozzaglio and Amanda R Greene, ‘Can Power Be Self-legitimating? Political Realism in Hobbes, Weber, and Williams,’ *European Journal of Philosophy* 27, no. 4 (2019): 6.

[46] Kant and Reiss, *Kant’s Political Writings: Edited with An Introduction and Notes by Hans Reiss; Translated by HB Nisbet*, Introduction.

[47] Reiss, in his introduction to *Kant’s Political Writings* points out that an ‘idea’, for Kant, is ‘not found in experience and can thus be neither proved or disproved by scientific enquiry’, but is ‘a regulative principle of reason in the light of which experience can be given order and unity’, which it would otherwise lack. Thus, for Reiss, Kant’s conception of politics is more idealistic than moralistic for it aids in our ambitions to say something about the kind of state or authority that should exist.

contract is ultimately a ‘political judgment’ that helps us in coming to decisions or conclusions concerning politics without relying on ‘historical reasons.’ To consider Kant’s political theory as an instance of pure moralism undersells his political philosophy.

Thus, Mantena's political realism driven critique of Kant seems a little off the mark if it is only based on finding fault with Kant for not maintaining enough separation between the political and the moral. Because as we have seen, Kant does maintain a separation between the moral and political and he argues that both these domains carry with it distinct obligations that do not overlap, a point that goes directly against both Iyer and Mantena's characterization of Kant's approach to the moral and the political. But one can deem Mantena's critique of Kant as exhibiting no shade of realism, when it comes to his conception of the political, as accurate if we can attribute the same criticism to Hobbes' approach to politics as well. For Kant and Hobbes, the idea of ‘peace’ or ‘order’ or ‘security’ is the foundation on which they conceptualize their theories of politics. However, a realist can still find fault with Kant and Hobbes as they appear to be relying on this idea of ‘peace’ as a pre- political value. And one can argue that because Hobbes and Kant rely on such values like peace and security that are *a priori* to the making of the political, they fail to conceptualize a version of normativity that is uniquely political, a normativity that is autonomous and independent of this pre-political pursuit of peace.

Mantena makes an important intervention when she brings in a Weberian lens to read Gandhi, in contrast to the Kant-inspired moralistic interpretation of Iyer. However, the significance lies less in the affinity between Weber and Gandhi’s ethical outlook, as she points out, but in the disagreement between Weber and Gandhi when it comes to their understanding of politics. As

we have already seen, while it is true that Kant and Weber maintain contrasting approaches to moral philosophy, their theory of politics is not as divergent as their ethical schemes suggest. And it wouldn't be entirely wrong to suggest that they maintain a shared view of the political, a view that can be traced back to Hobbes again. All these three thinkers agree to a characterization of politics as that sphere of activity in which some form of coercion or violence is deemed legitimate or just. All of them take it for granted that violence is inherent to the conception of the political. But among the three, Weber best articulates this and maintains the most nuanced position when it comes explaining the nature of politics.

In contrast to Kant, Mantena accurately portrays Weber as the 'theorist par excellence' for asserting the autonomy of the political.[48] And it is in Weber that we can indeed locate a political normativity that stands independent from the Hobbesian search for peace or order. For Hobbes, the sovereign, by its nature, is legitimate. Or as Williams pointed out, Hobbes assumed that 'the necessary condition' of providing security and peace, serves also as the 'sufficient condition' for attaining legitimate power or political authority. In this Hobbesian scheme, 'the authorization mechanism is not only the cause but also the normative explanation of sovereignty' and the 'political subjection to a sovereign is legitimate' by the nature of the mechanisms used to create a sovereign.[49] The political, for Hobbes, comes only into existence only with the establishment of the sovereign and has no natural status. It is only with the creation of the sovereign that we transcend our 'nasty, brutish and short' nature and become 'citizens' rather than being a

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[48] Mantena, 'Gandhi and the Means-Ends Question in Politics,' 2.

[49] Cozzaglio and Greene, 'Can Power Be Self-legitimating? Political Realism in Hobbes, Weber, and Williams,' 9.

‘multitude.’ All politics begins with the making of this citizen and his legitimate subjugation by the sovereign in exchange for his protection.

Both for Kant and Weber, the underlying motivation of the citizen to agree to the political subjugation under the sovereign is different from that of Hobbes. For Hobbes, obedience to the sovereign is founded on fear and is highly transactional, in that the citizen only obeys the sovereign for offering him protection from the state of nature. For Kant, the citizen’s motivation to obey is less dependent on fear and is more based on ‘reason’ as this offer of protection by the sovereign in return for obedience of the citizen is the most reasonable thing to do given the context. However, for Weber, it is neither fear nor reason that drives the motivation to obey but the sovereign’s rightfulness to power.

Weber points out in his writings that when the citizen's obedience to the sovereign is not tied to any physical or material interests, it can be viewed as legitimate. According to Weber, as far as obedience is not derived from fear or other motives of expediency, the willingness to submit to an order imposed by the sovereign will imply the belief in ‘legitimate authority’. If we read Kant's theory of political obligation through this Weberian scheme, citizens motivated by ‘reason’ to obey the sovereign makes the latter legitimate in the eyes of the citizen. However, the nature of such authority is not political. For political authority to come into play, the domination enforced by the sovereign over its citizens must not only be legitimate (as in Kant's case) but it must also lead to a situation in which ‘the manifested will (command) of the ruler or rulers [i.e. the sovereign]’ influences the conduct of ruled i.e. citizens, and influences it in such a way that ‘their [i.e. the citizens] conduct to a socially relevant degree occurs as if the ruled had made the

content of the command the maxim of their conduct for its very own sake.'[50] In Weber's political theory, true legitimacy in politics emerges when the interests of the sovereign and the citizens, the ruler and the ruled, converge.

Two important points emerge from our discussion of Weber's political theory. The first concerns the stress Weber places on the role of violence in the establishment of a political community, a view that can be traced back to both Hobbes and Kant.[51] Weber maintains that violence is essential as a means when it comes to politics though it may not be the primary means. Secondly, Weber believes that the power wielded by the sovereign will be deemed legitimate and justified if the conditions for the convergence of the interests between the ruler and the ruled can be established. The important question one must ask at this stage then is whether Gandhi would be in agreement with Weber in his approach to politics. Would Gandhi endorse a theory of politics as articulated by the likes of Kant and Weber we have discussed? It seems unlikely. This is because for Gandhi, all these conceptualizations of the political can be traced back to a much simpler logic of the doctrine of utility. And he pointed out in one of his letters that a votary of ahimsa or nonviolence, which he considered himself to be, 'cannot subscribe to the utilitarian

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[50] Weber, Owen, and Strong, *The Vocation Lectures*, Introduction.

[51] Weber's comprehensive statement on what constitutes a political community is best expressed in his treatise *Economy and Society*. In this text, Weber writes the following about a political community: 'As a separate structure, a political community can be said to exist only if, and in so far as, a community constitutes more than an "economic group"; or, in other words, in so far as it possesses value systems ordering matters other than the directly economic disposition of goods and services...a separate "political" community is constituted where we find (i) a territory; (ii) the availability of physical force for its domination; and (iii) social action which is not restricted exclusively to the satisfaction of common economic needs in the frame of a communal economy, but regulates more generally the interrelations of the inhabitants of the territory.'

formula.'[52] Nonviolence, by its nature, cannot reconcile with the doctrine of utility, Gandhi wrote in one of his letters to a reader of Young India.

This letter was the result of a question raised by a reader of Gandhi's journal *Young India* who asked Gandhi to explain how his philosophy of nonviolence differed from 'the utilitarian doctrine of the greater good of the greater number.' The reader found Gandhi's position on nonviolence problematic as the latter had approved the killing of some rabid dogs to ensure the well-being of those affected whereas he had condemned the acquittal of a doctor, at the edge of incapacitation, by a jury who found him not guilty of murder for forcing chloroform on his 'imbecile child' and killing her, all for the reason that there was no one to take care of the child after his incapacitation, and he wanted to rid his child of such suffering that would soon befall. The reader was perturbed by Gandhi's selective prioritisation of the human life over the animal life and wondered whether Gandhi was merely subscribing to another version of the anthropocentric utilitarianism under the garb of nonviolence.

Gandhi explained to the reader that the latter had misunderstood his position. Gandhi pointed out that while the situation of killing the dogs were indeed regrettable, it was almost impossible to coexist with animals that posed an immediate threat to a community. However, if the animal was of no threat and was killed out of our own self-interest, that would be a violation of ahimsa while

[52] Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1991), 376.

the utilitarian logic would find no problem with such a position. Further, Gandhi also pointed out that his condemnation of the doctor over a form of euthanasia was not because he prized human life but because the doctor 'betrayed want of faith in the humanity of those around him.'[53] According to Gandhi, the doctor should not have assumed that the child 'would not have been cared for by others.'[54] Gandhi then went on to write in the letter that a votary of nonviolence would 'prefer to die rather than make himself party to vivisection or to an endless multiplication of armaments.'[55] And that what differentiated the philosophy of nonviolence from utilitarianism was the absence of self-interest in the former and the valorisation of human happiness and self-interest in the latter. For Gandhi, the utilitarian 'to be logical' can 'never sacrifice himself' whereas a votary of ahimsa will 'strive for the greatest good of all and die in the attempt to realize that ideal.'[56] Self-sacrifice and suffering is built into the philosophy of nonviolence. He concluded the letter by highlighting how the 'greatest-good-of-all principle' as understood within the utilitarian scheme was faulty. Instead, Gandhi advocated the principle of the 'upliftment of all', or what he called sarvodaya, which was in line with his philosophy of ahimsa.[57]

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[53] Gandhi, 375.

[54] Gandhi, 375.

[55] Gandhi, 376.

[56] Gandhi, 376.

[57] Gandhi, 377.

For Gandhi, a political order founded on self-interest is nothing but a utilitarian project. And it is on this ground that he rejects a view of politics advocated by thinkers like Hobbes and Kant. Further, Gandhi would have also found the contractarian approach to politics and its justification for violence entirely ludicrous. As he wrote in his journal *Harijan*, communities are bound together by 'ties of love' or nonviolence, not fear and violence.[58] And this, he considered not to be a moralistic claim but a historical reality and pointed out that the 'law of nonviolence' is what sustains life, not just in families but also when it comes to political communities and nations. For Gandhi, those who haven't realized this power of the law of nonviolence 'have not investigated' the 'vast possibilities' of this idea. To posit fear and violence, in contrast to love and nonviolence, as the foundation for building a political society seems to Gandhi a logical fallacy.

Compared to Kant and Hobbes, Gandhi would have maintained a more sympathetic attitude towards Weber's theory of politics where power is legitimate if the conditions for the convergence of interests between the ruler and the ruled are well established. However, it is unlikely that he would have agreed with Weber's propositions, primarily because for a country like India, what constituted the 'ruled' was not a monolithic coherent grouping but a diverse and dispersed set of communities with varied interests, values and priorities that can hardly ever be reconciled. Given the diversity of attitudes and interests of citizens in the Indian context, everyday politics would end up becoming a power struggle to 'control national life through national representatives', he wrote in his journal while critiquing the idea of representative

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[58] Gandhi, 385.

democracy. As a result, Gandhi concluded that the only way forward was to develop a conception of the political that was not grounded on the sovereign but rooted in the individual or self, a theory of politics where 'each person would become his own ruler.'

Gandhi, Self and the Political

Dennis Dalton's study of political thought in modern India revealed to him a 'conceptual consensus' when it came to Indian thinkers. By this, he meant that despite all their differences, it was possible to club most of them together because their shared concerns were representative of a broader 'ideological tradition' when it came to their meditations on the political.[59] According to Dalton, there are broadly three conceptions of the political and each of these can be traced back to distinct ideological traditions.[60] The 'Greek' tradition's characteristic outlook towards the political is that it understood politics as an 'all-embracing activity' where the individual is realized through its participation in the polis or the state. Such a perspective dates back to Aristotle's idea of the political community as the 'most sovereign and inclusive' or the 'final and perfect' association of members in society that is teleological in nature. Though Dalton terms this approach to the political 'Greek tradition', this perspective is not limited to the ancient Greek thinkers and extends all the way to modern political thinkers like Rousseau and Hegel. In

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[59] Dalton used the term ideological tradition to refer to what he calls a shared 'commitment to ideas about human nature and the good society, the nature of authority and the relationship of individual to the state, the values of freedom and equality, emphasis on consensus rather than conflict, cooperation rather than conflict as social ideals, and on a method of change that relies on moral example and suasion rather than violent revolution or legislative reform.'

[60] See Dennis Dalton, 'The Ideology of Sarvodaya: Concepts of Politics and Power in Indian Political Thought,' *Thomas Pantham and Kenneth L Deutsch, Political Thought in Modern India, Sage, New Delhi*, 1986, 283.

comparison to the Greek conception, the ‘modern European’ ideological tradition, inspired by the liberal philosophy of thinkers like John Locke and John Stuart Mill, views society and not the state as primary and stresses on the sanctity of the individual’s private life rather than the political life. As a result, their political is grounded in a minimal state that views power as antithetical to the interests of the individual if it transgresses into the private domain.

In contrast to these two, the ‘anarchist’ tradition of political thinking puts neither the state nor the individual but the community at the centre of its political thinking. As opposed to the focus on the political or private life of the individual, the anarchist conception of the political, according to Dalton, is concerned with ridding the community of any excess political power and authority. In his analysis of Indian thinkers, Dalton placed them within this anarchist tradition. This was not only because thinkers in modern India were more focused on the idea of ‘community’ rather than the individual or the state in their conceptions of political authority but also because of their reiteration of a sceptical outlook towards all forms of political authority that is common to the anarchistic conception of the political. This does not mean the interests of the community are prioritized at the cost of the individual. Rather, in Dalton’s reading, thinkers in modern India were equally concerned with the project of self-realization as much as the Greek or European traditions. However, where the Greek tradition focused on an idea of individual or self that finds its purpose by partaking in the political process or the modern European self that depended on minimal institutions to ensure the self is presented with socio-political conditions for self-realization, Indian thinkers advocated a philosophy of self-realization rooted in a theory of social change that emphasizes the self’s engagement with its community.

While one may not entirely agree with Dalton's classification of all political theory into these three approaches to the political, his typology serves as an interesting starting point to begin our own meditation of Gandhi and his conceptualization of the political. According to Dalton, political theories articulated by most of the Indian thinkers advocates a theory of social change that relies less on laws and legislations imposed from the outside and instead focused on cultivating a conception of the political morality that was influenced by the conduct of the self, underpinned by its obligations towards society and the communities that constituted it. And Dalton sees Vivekananda as a pivotal figure in this tradition of political thinking and reads him as anticipating Gandhi's political thought, which for Dalton, is again based on cultivating a philosophy of ethics that is self-driven and is less dependent on a constitution or a body of legislators. Dalton sees Vivekananda as central to this Indian approach to the political primarily because in his view, the basis of all systems, social or political, rests upon the goodness of man. The task of political thinkers in modern India, according to Vivekananda, was thus to promote of 'a sound body of individual ethics', that he felt must not be dependent on political institutions, for 'men cannot be made virtuous by an act of the parliament.' Dalton concludes that this is why thinkers like Vivekananda, and later Gandhi, found religion to be of huge significance to politics as for both of them, religion attends to the essentials of good conduct in society.[61] Thus, while their affinity towards an anarchist conception of the political ensured that these thinkers did not perceive inherited religious or traditional ethics as something authoritative, they also did not attribute any special significance to a secular outlook in enriching the individual's ethical outlook.

[61] Thomas Pantham and Kenneth L Deutsch, *Political Thought in Modern India* (Sage Publications Pvt. Ltd, 1986), 271.

Dalton’s analysis of Gandhi as following Vivekananda’s approach that advocates less dependence on conventional institutions and mechanisms of politics and more reliance on a system of ethics of the self sits well with our own comparative analysis of Gandhi, Kant and Weber. As far as what we had gleaned from a comparison of these three thinker, whereas the sovereign and the accompanying violence, or at least a form of coercion, is indispensable to both Kant and Weber, Gandhi’s larger project when it comes to the political does seem to maintain some affinity to the anarchic conception. Gandhian political project, based on our initial reading, appears to be an earnest attempt to displace the sovereign and its numerous manifestations from the centre of politics and put in its place the self, its ethics and practices, as the foundation for the activity of politics, a view of politics that sits well with the anarchic approach to the political. However, the problem with borrowing this approach in its entirety is that it creates alternative interpretative problems when it comes to reading Gandhi and his philosophy.

The main problem is that any attempt to place Gandhi within this anarchic tradition needs to take into account that unlike the conventional anarchists, Gandhi was never against all forms of authority and power in society. Rather, what he was against was a centralized idea of political authority that could be traced back to the sovereign and its propensity for coercion and violence. Instead, Gandhi appears to be more sympathetic to a notion of law and authority in society that is more decentralized. Such a form of authority can be traced back to the self or community, as opposed to the sovereign, and may even rely upon pre-established sources of authority like tradition, religion or other moral-ethical norms that the self may draw upon to make sense of its responsibilities to improve the wellbeing of its community. And Gandhi’s political philosophy

provides ample room for such self-driven action that can also be collectively undertaken. This is because rather than setting up institutions that often draws upon its legitimacy from the sovereign, Gandhi focused his efforts on certain ethical dispositions and political practices that derived its legitimacy not from other established institutional structures but from the self itself. The self and its truth, and not the sovereign, would be the sole arbitrator of what is lawful and acceptable in this Gandhian worldview. And the shared truth that one finds within one's own community sets the ground for conceptualizing a collective ethics and politics that can further the wellbeing of everyone in this community.

Finally, an anarchist reading of Gandhi, as Dalton suggests, can only partially highlight the significant role the colonial context and the associated social and intellectual context, including the role Gandhi's interlocutors, played in his conceptualizing of the political, something which this study intends to focus on. As a result, if we conclude that Gandhi is merely adopting or contributing to this already established anarchic conception of the political, it leaves many a things unsaid when it comes to Gandhi's larger project. Yet, Dalton's characterization of Gandhi as maintaining an affinity to the anarchist school does help us recognize that Gandhi understood that his main task as a political thinker was to develop a system of ethics in politics that is capable of sustaining the power of the self in the absence of or in opposition to the coercive sovereign and its institutional structures through which political power is generally articulated in society.

Gandhi's political project, based on this reading, was to affirm the power of this self while reigniting the moral and political capacities vested within the community where the self is

situated. Such a theory of politics, while not outrightly rejecting all forms of political authority, finds limited use for an institution like the state and its laws. Instead, it is primarily concerned with establishing practices through which the self, alongside the community, could bring about their overall advancement. This is what political power amounted to in Gandhi's philosophical outlook. And by conceptualizing politics this way, Gandhi also succeeded in detaching the community's dependence on the state or a ruler or a set of representatives to further its interest and realized that his immediate task in politics concerned the creation of a repertoire of nonviolent tools of engagement using which the self and its community could amplify their social capacity for change in the face of colonialism and the emerging nationalism within the community. The self, alongside the community, thus became for Gandhi the foundation on which a nonviolent political order could be conceptualized and the colonial conditions became the context around which this self could take shape. Thus, the subsequent task of this study is to investigate into the nuances of such a colonial context under which Gandhi begins to meditate on his idea of the self.

Gandhi and Nationalist Thought in Colonial India

Political theorists who study modern India are often engaged in a debate related to the 'epistemic calibre' of political ideas in India. And Partha Chatterjee's intervention in this debate is a useful entry point for our own investigation into alternative methodological frameworks available to situate Gandhi and his political thought within the colonial context. Chatterjee expressed his arguments regarding this in his book *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* that was published in 1986. In this important work, Chatterjee claimed that though nationalist thought in India succeeded in effecting 'significant displacements in the framework of modernist thinking

imbibed from the West' thus constituting itself as a 'different discourse', he pointed out that nationalism in India 'remained dominated by the very structure of power it sought to repudiate.'[62] This is because, in Chatterjee's analysis, India was one among the many modern nations that was in the midst of transforming itself from being a colonial to a post-colonial nation state in the twentieth century through, what he referred to as, a 'passive revolution.'[63] And as a result, the Indian case must only be seen as being part of a larger subset of transformations that was taking place in countries which were finally achieving independence from colonial rule. Chatterjee warns us about reading his work as particularly arguing for a derivative understanding of Indian nationalism and cautiously reminds us that his arguments must 'stand or fall at the general level' i.e. as arguments about 'nationalist thought in colonial countries' and not as an argument about Indian nationalism.[64]

Chatterjee succeeds in articulating his vision by first calling to our attention an 'ideological unity' when it comes to nationalist thought in India. His book is thus an elaboration of how this ideological unity came about and he relies on stages or 'moments' to demonstrate to the reader the ideological unfolding. Primarily, there are three 'ideological moments' in Chatterjee's analysis – the moments of departure, manoeuvre and arrival, all of which are 'necessary' for any post-colonial nationalistic thought to achieve its 'paradigmatic form.'[65] The first among these takes place during

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[62] Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (Zed Books, 1986), 32.

[63] A theory of historical progress that Chatterjee locates in his reading of Gramsci's 'Notes on Italian History', in which Gramsci used the term 'passive revolution of the capital.'

[64] Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (Zed Books, 1986), 32

[65] Chatterjee, 33.

the encounter between the nationalistic consciousness and the ‘post-Enlightenment rationalist thought’, which results in the development of an acceptance of one’s own ‘difference’ from the West. However, this acceptance is also accompanied by an awareness that the so called ‘backwardness’ of one’s self and community is not a ‘character that is historically immutable’ and collective action must hence focus on transforming the community from its backwardness by adopting all the ‘modern attributes of European culture’ like science, technology, progress etc. Thus, the focus at this stage is to synthesize the best of both worlds, ‘an act of cultural synthesis’ that fuses the East’s superior spirituality with the West’s modernity.[66] The task of nationalistic consciousness following this realization is to ensure popular mobilization and struggle while distancing such popular intervention from the state. This, Chatterjee argues, is undertaken by the ‘historical consolidation of the national by decrying the modern’ and is materialized as part of the second moment, the moment of manoeuvre. And it is at this stage where a figure like Gandhi, and his political thought, becomes relevant to Chatterjee’s narrative.

In continuation with our previous discussions, *Hind Swaraj* is a text that Chatterjee too relies on to interpret Gandhi and his political thought. And keeping with his broader agenda of situating Gandhi within the ideological current that was driving the process of historical consolidation of a national consciousness, Chatterjee sees in Gandhi’s text a substantive critical engagement with the West, that is at a level ‘more fundamental’ than the one witnessed during the moment of departure. Though Gandhi is another anti-colonial anti-imperialist like his contemporaries as well as those before him, Chatterjee finds in Gandhi’s thought a conviction that posits the self’s ‘limitless desire’ and the its spirit of ‘ruthless competitiveness’ as what drives the colonial

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[66] Chatterjee, 37.

expansion and the accompanying economic exploitation.[67] It is a strong moral-socioeconomic critique of modernity that Gandhi evinces in his writings according to Chatterjee which he reads as a 'fundamental critique of civil society' and not as an instance of romanticism or a pre-modern traditionalism that he finds in other nationalist thinkers. In fact, Chatterjee goes onto claim that Gandhi is not 'operating at all with the problematic of nationalism' or 'thinking within the thematic of nationalism.'[68] He writes, Gandhi 'seldom speaks in terms of the conceptual frameworks or the modes of reasoning and inference adopted by nationalists of his day.'[69]

As we can see, Chatterjee's interpretation lies closer to a reading of *Hind Swaraj* that is in line with Iyer, who recommends a reading of *Hind Swaraj* as a text of moral critique. But Chatterjee does not subscribe to this moralism-realism framework for reading Gandhi and instead relies on a method that is more contextual and is based on the identification of the 'thematic' and the 'problematic' of Gandhi's political thought.[70] In comparison to a framework like moralism-realism, Chatterjee's reading exercise can be summed up as an attempt to recover the ideology of a thinker, in this case Gandhi, by paying close attention to the colonial context around which Gandhi began to articulate his ideas. However, Chatterjee's work is not an in-depth study of Gandhi and it would be ludicrous to fault him for his inability to construct Gandhi's political

[67] Chatterjee, 93.

[68] Chatterjee, 91.

[69] Chatterjee's observation is significant because one may be led to believe, in a less-engaged cursory reading of his book that following his larger claim concerning the possibly derivative nature of the anti-colonial movement in India, Gandhi's political thought is to be placed within the problematic and thematic of the Indian national movement. This observation of Chatterjee's should discourage readers of Gandhi away from such a narrow positioning of Gandhi's concerns within the limits of nation-building and Indian nationalism.

[70] For more on the thematic- problematic, see chapter 2 of Partha Chatterjee's *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (Zed Books, 1986) or the introduction section of the next chapter of this study.

thought in a holistic manner as opposed to limiting his assessment of Gandhi to a reading of *Hind Swaraj*. After all, Chatterjee's interest in Gandhi is only peripheral and is instrumental to his broader project of developing a narrative of the evolution of nationalistic thought in colonial India. Yet, what is important to keep in mind is that for Chatterjee, a text like *Hind Swaraj* is primarily an interrogation into the reasons of the 'moral failure on the part of Indians' and he does not attribute any added significance to Gandhi's indigenous or desi symbolisms. There is nothing specific to read into Gandhi's use of 'elements of culture' or tradition according to Chatterjee.[71] But for other writers, to miss the point of Gandhi's attachment to tradition is to misread his entire political project.

Gandhi's Critical Traditionalism

Gopal Guru, in his writings, point us towards a 'dilemma' that nationalist thought faced in colonial India. According to Guru, though nationalist thinkers had a strong will to establish for their people 'an autonomous epistemological space' that rests outside the western discourse, they were 'unable to escape' the Western epistemological grip.[72] Yet, Guru feels that Chatterjee's broader position concerning nationalism does not sit well at least in the Indian case. This is because the Indian context provided certain distinctive cases which were fundamentally 'self-referential', in that it developed specific intellectual conditions that were 'historically available' only in the Indian context. He refers to these as 'desi' responses in contrast to 'derivative' and considers Gandhi as an example of such thinking.

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[71] Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?*, 121.

[72] Gopal Guru, 'The Idea of India:'Derivative, Desi and Beyond',' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2011, 2.

In Guru's understanding, for a thinker like Gandhi, the west is only an 'epistemological shadow' for the 'self-definition' of Gandhi's own thought. Such desi thinkers, Guru goes on, relies on an entirely 'authentic' articulation of concepts or ideas. Their engagement with western categories and ideas only serve as a 'negative reference point' for these thinkers and they ensure that their ideas stand out from the western epistemological space. What is characteristic about such thinking is its 'positive dissociation' from the contending dominant intellectual traditions, and in Gandhi's case, it's hegemonic response to western modernity.[73] Gandhi's desi thought, thus for Guru, when seen this way, is not only an expression of confidence in the indigenous epistemes but is also a 'moral source.' Following Bhikhu Parekh, Guru calls Gandhi's ideological approach an instance of 'critical traditionalism.'

Parekh, in his study of Gandhi, used the term critical traditionalism to refer to a particular form of response to British colonialism that was prevalent among certain Hindu leaders in modern India.[74] Apart from the conventional traditionalists who were blindly reiterating the traditional assumptions and inherited customs as a social good within the dominant Hindu society during the second half of 19th century, Parekh highlights in his book three specific modes of critical attitude displayed by Hindu leaders in their engagement with tradition.[75] A group of political

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[73] Gandhi's political thought, for Guru, is 'hegemonic' in the sense that it seeks to 'assimilate' other heterodox intellectual traditions within the Indian context into his own. The best example, for Guru, is Gandhi's attempt to assimilate the Dalit discourse within his ideological framework.

[74] Parekh considers Indian thinkers like Bankim, Vivekananda, Bipin Chandra Pal, Aurobindo as the early ones, and points toward Gandhi as continuing this tradition.

[75] For more on this, see Chapter 2 of Bhikhu C Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition, and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhi's Political Discourse* (Sage, 1999).

thinkers in late 19th and early 20th century took a ‘modernist’ position that reflected an outlook which viewed Hindu society in India as doomed or ‘beyond hope’ when it came to its internal ability to bring about and sustain social reforms. In contrast to these modernists, there were also several ‘critical modernist’ thinkers who advocated a ‘creative synthesis’ between the traditional and modern values that provided room for a syncretic way of life.

Critical traditionalists, for Parekh, were different from both the modernists and critical modernists primarily in their attitude towards their indigenous traditions. Though both the critical modernists and critical traditionalists valued tradition, the former were instrumental in their attitude towards tradition while the latter maintained a serious ethical attachment towards their culture and ‘mobilized their own indigenous resources, borrowing from Europe whatever was likely to supplement and enrich them.’[76] This is because unlike others, critical traditionalists did not believe that civilizations could be ‘compared and assessed on the basis of some universal criteria’ as modernists or critical modernists assumed.[77] Instead, they believed civilizations were an ‘organic whole’ and could not be judged based on criteria from the outside. And that any such criteria developed would anyway be derived from ‘another civilization’ and hence lacked that universality the modernists or critical modernists believed such criteria entailed.

According to critical traditionalists, ‘values and institutions’ are integral to a specific community and its life could not be judged independently of the ‘capacities, habits, dispositions and deepest

[76] Parekh further notes that while the critical modernists aimed to combine the best of both the civilizations to construct a new civilization, critical traditionalists found this approach ‘absurd’ and focused on ‘reform’ and ‘regeneration.’ While the former focused on preserving what seemed valuable, the latter aimed at eliminating what was evil in the existing civilization.

[77] Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition, and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhi’s Political Discourse*, 62.

instincts' of that particular community.[78] Hence, to talk about civilizations in general or abstract terms did not make sense for these thinkers. But this did not mean the uniqueness of a civilization served as an excuse for not having room for improvement. Rather, they just highlighted that no civilization is perfect and hence could neither serve as a model to be emulated nor could it provide easy recipes for improvements to other civilizations as western modernity was claiming. Thus, unlike modernists and critical modernists, critical traditionalists held that each community must 'autonomously identify its own needs and problems, assess and mobilize its own resources and then borrow from others what was likely to augment and enrich them.'[79] For Parekh, Aurobindo articulated this ethos best when he recommended an 'assimilative appropriation' that lets 'things settle into oneself' as opposed to a blind borrowing or rejecting the good and the bad from other cultures and communities as a critical modernist would do.[80]

From Parekh's analysis, one can conclude that for critical traditionalists like Gandhi, the situatedness of the self in a particular history and culture, in this case the Indian civilization, served as not just a socio-economic fact but also as an ethical source. Indigenous traditions not only aided Gandhi in providing him with resources to critique the ills of modernity, but tradition also acted as a platform that he could fall back upon to view the world differently in the face of increasing secularization. This meant Gandhi could rely on the lens of tradition to develop an 'acute sense of political realism' that gave him the political awareness that political struggles are

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[78] Parekh, 53.

[79] Parekh, 67.

[80] Parekh, 69.

not a phenomenon that concerned numerous unencumbered selves but involved individuals situated within a community who act together as groups. Political activity then, from this critical traditionalist prism, had to be founded on means that could forge ‘group loyalty’ and ‘solidarity’ between these historically and culturally embedded individuals and groups.

Unlike Parekh, Ashis Nandy relies on the term ‘critical traditionalist’ to refer to a broader ideological approach that is not necessarily limited to the Indian context. Nandy uses this term more widely but like Parekh reads Gandhi as the prime example of such thinking in modern India.[81] In his book *Bonfire of Creed*, Nandy points out that critical traditionalism refers to an ideological approach that is able to construct within its living traditions ‘a theory of oppression, overt and/or covert.’[82] For Nandy, no tradition is relevant for our times unless it has, or can be re-engaged to develop within it, ‘an awareness of the nature of evil in contemporary times.’[83] In Nandy’s reading, such an attitude of critical traditionalism helped Gandhi to confront the rationalism and authoritarian tendencies embedded in western modernity. Nandy believes that by founding his political ideology within the rubric of critical traditionalism, Gandhi succeeded in reinstating the ‘dignity and intellectual relevance of the everyday lives of people and communities’ who lived with and in such traditions.[84]

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[81] In Intimate Enemy, Nandy also refers to Tolstoy and Thoreau as examples of thinkers maintaining a critical traditionalist outlook.

[82] Ashis Nandy, *Bonfire of Creeds: The Essential Ashis Nandy* (Oxford University Press New Delhi, 2004), 241.

[83] Alastair Bonnett, ‘The Critical Traditionalism of Ashis Nandy: Occidentalism and the Dilemmas of Innocence,’ *Theory, Culture & Society* 29, no. 1 (2012): 7.

[84] Bonnett, 13.

For Nandy, Gandhi maintained a strange relationship with the west. This is because though he was never short of polemics that indicated an outright rejection of western modernity, he also appropriated several ideas from the west and tinkered with them to make these relevant for the Indian context. In fact, several of the thinkers Gandhi admired were from the west. And even in India, Tagore, whom Gandhi held in high regards, and Gokhale, who Gandhi considered to be his political mentor, were advocates of a syncretism when it came to the relationship between tradition and modernity. Yet, despite his close engagement with western thinkers and thinkers inspired by western ideas, Nandy believes that for Gandhi, it was important that his critique of modernity had to be constructed out of indigenous traditions. This is because only such an engagement could result in a 'native theory of oppression', which is a prerequisite for salvaging whatever is good in one's cultural context, and in the Indian case the preservation of a 'deeply rooted radical diversity' in the country.[85]

Critical thought, disengaged from traditions, could easily be appropriated and re-packaged as another instance of critique inspired by western or modern values, and hence the assertion of the Indian 'cultural eminence' in response to British colonialism in a text like *Hind Swaraj*, according to Nandy. The indigenous religions and traditions were thus to be projected as a

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[85] According to Nandy, Indian thinkers like Gandhi saw cosmopolitanism as integral to Indian tradition but their understanding of cosmopolitanism was very different to how the term was understood in the west. In Nandy's analysis, cosmopolitanism in the west is 'bureaucratic', 'shallow' and celebrates a particular kind of diversity that is 'permissible', 'legitimate' and 'tamed'. Unlike the west, thinkers like Gandhi preferred and celebrated a 'radical diversity' that required you to 'tolerate' and live together with those who challenged the 'very basic axioms' one's political life.

resource for critiquing and challenging the dominant forces of injustice within a society.[86] Thus, like Parekh, Nandy too finds categories like west and tradition as indispensable to make sense of Gandhi's political thought. To read Gandhi without making space for his cultural symbolisms within his political-ethical outlook is to misread Gandhi for writers like Nandy, Parekh and Guru. All of them suggest that Gandhi's critical traditionalism must be understood as his attempt to 'sift out a socially critical content within the broader means of tradition.'[87] They see the place of tradition in Gandhi's ideology not as a political or rhetorical resource as Chatterjee claims but as a moral and ethical source to counter the psychological impacts of colonialism.

Situating Gandhi in the History of Political Thought

Our discussions on situating Gandhi and his political thought in the preceding sections have focused on two broader tendencies exhibited while interpreting a thinker. In the beginning, we were introduced to a framework of moralism-realism that seems to be more like a scale within which we can situate Gandhi, with the extreme ends of this scale representing the purely moral or political nature of Gandhi's philosophy. While no interpreter outrightly situates Gandhi at either end of these polarities, the differences between interpretations within this framework is concerning which half of this scale the interpreters tend to situate Gandhi's thought. It is the proximity of his situatedness to the moral or political ends of this scale that helps one understand Gandhi's philosophy in this reading.

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[86] Ashis Nandy, 'Traditions, Tyranny, and Utopias: Essays in the Politics of Awareness,' 1987, 139.

[87] Nandy, *Bonfire of Creeds: The Essential Ashis Nandy*, 248.

Following this, we introduced a reading of Gandhi which prioritizes his location within the Indian context and as responding to some of the challenges created by colonialism and the emerging Indian nationalism in later 19th and early 20th century. In this reading, theorists writing on Gandhi are less concerned with the inherent moral or political nature of his thought and advocate an interpretative approach that points us towards understanding Gandhi's political project as a critique of western modernity while at the same time engaging with one's own tradition. In this approach, even the most moralistic of intentions of a thinker can be read as an ideological posturing with political implications and hence avoids such dichotomies of reading a thinker like Gandhi within the exclusive prism of moralism or realism. Finally, such a situated reading of Gandhi rooted in the Indian context, by virtue of the method, will inevitably result in a deeper engagement between Gandhi and his interlocutors as well as the socio-political and ideological context in which he articulated his ideas. Thus, by undertaking a reading Gandhi that is sensitive to the Indian context in the late 19th and early 20th century, we succeed in grounding our study in history, as realists like Geuss have advocated. However, a serious study that aspires to read Gandhi in his context will also need to perform the painstaking task of establishing intellectual affinities between Gandhi and his interlocutors by providing traceable links that confirms such connection.[88] Such a reading, a realist like Guess would argue, is to 'do' political philosophy.

But it would be slightly arrogant on our part to dismiss all other readings of Gandhi as being of less value to studying political philosophy. And interestingly, some of the most exciting and

[88] However, such a contextual endeavor must wait until the next chapter as the task at hand, in this chapter, requires us to survey and understand other frameworks writers have employed to understand Gandhi and his political philosophy so that we are in a position to identify the inadequacies or weaknesses associated with existing interpretations.

thought-provoking essays on Gandhi are often those that shy away from subscribing to a historically sensitive realistic reading. For example, Akeel Bilgrami's interpretation of Gandhi hardly pays any attention to the historical context of Gandhi's thought and instead contextualizes Gandhi as a thinker who is countering a view of the world rooted in the Enlightenment tradition, in ways similar to other critics of modernity. But, unlike others who read Gandhi's critique of Enlightenment or the west as an instance of moralism or critical traditionalism, or as an instance of irrationalism and nostalgia as some have done, Bilgrami interprets Gandhi and his writings as being continuous with a tradition that was 'clear eyed about the disenchantment in the world.' He fits into this tradition a whole range of writers like Blake, Shelley, Whitman, Spinoza, early Marx etc. alongside Gandhi, all of whom he clubs together and refer to as thinkers of 'radical Enlightenment', a movement that refused to be complacent about the orthodox Enlightenment's legacy of scientific rationality.[89] However, such a worldview is substantively different from those espoused by thinkers who belong to the anti-Enlightenment tradition. This is because the radical Enlightenment thinkers were never unscientific or against reason as their views were after all echoing a worldview that could be traced back to a group of 'scientific dissenters' of the British Royal Society, who are nevertheless scientists. Unlike the anti-Enlightenment camp who prefers romanticism to rationality, radical Enlightenment thinkers like Gandhi, for Bilgrami, ascribe to what he calls a 'thin' notion of rationality, in contrast to the thick notion of rationality advocated by those who ascribe to the conventional scientific worldview. For Bilgrami, such a comparative engagement between Gandhi and thinkers of the Enlightenment tradition is a great way to understand the uniqueness of Gandhi's ideas rather than a context sensitive engagement

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[89] For more on this, see Akeel Bilgrami, 'Gandhi, Newton, and the Enlightenment,' *Social Scientist*, 2006, 17–35.

which would otherwise limit oneself to a comparative study of thinkers with whom Gandhi had actually engaged in debates. This is because by stressing in our analysis the difference between Gandhi's worldview and those of other thinkers, we gain more clarity and insight into Gandhi's moral and political thought.

At first, such a reading may seem to be a less methodical approach to make connections between Gandhi's philosophy and other figures in the history of philosophy. But such a view can be reconsidered if one is willing to think about 'context' in a different way, as one that takes a very different time frame in contrast to the colonial context. Political philosophy, as we have already seen, takes place in a specific context. And it is this realization that forced us to investigate the context to really understand Gandhi's political philosophy. While we are correct in locating British colonialism and the emerging nationalism as an indispensable context to begin our study of Gandhi, a good question to ask if whether what we call the 'context' for Gandhi's philosophy only includes the immediate postcolonial situation. It asks us whether we are right in suggesting that what constitutes the context for our study ceases to exist beyond the immediacy of Gandhi's anti-colonial project. And the answer is a resounding no. Because to limit Gandhi's ideas to concerns that are only aimed at countering British imperialism is to ignore other substantial avenues of his thought. As a result, and in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of any thinker, after the first step of setting up the immediate social and intellectual context, it may help us to situate the thinker in a longer history to understand what affinities and disconnections appear between the thinker in consideration and his historical predecessors. Thus, in our particular study of Gandhi's political philosophy, it makes sense to not only to understand Gandhi's political concerns within his immediate context but also from a longer historical

context i.e. in the history of political thought.[90] And Bilgrami's attempt to study Gandhi alongside some thinkers of the Enlightenment era must be seen within this attempt to historicize Gandhi within a much larger history as he believes Gandhi's concerns were not just immediate but also echoed the problems raised by several other thinkers in the past.

Conclusion

We began this chapter by interrogating the relevance of a theoretical framework like moralism-realism employed by theorists like Iyer and Mantena in their interpretation of Gandhi's political thought. In addition to not being 'realistic' enough because of the lack of situatedness of such interpretations within a specific historical context, our analysis also revealed that a reading of Gandhi as a moralist or realist do not provide further clarity on the underlying questions that underpin Gandhi's theory of politics. Instead, their debate appears primarily to be a disagreement over the nature of Gandhi's ethics rather than his politics. Further, as we have seen, the moralism-realism framework also fails in its ability to explain the ethical significance of tradition or culture in Gandhi's political thought, unlike the critical traditionalism framework employed in the works of Parekh and Nandy. Following this, we conducted a comparative assessment of Gandhi, Kant and Weber, the latter two representative of schools of moralism and realism according to Iyer and Mantena.

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[90] And in fact, this is something this study hopes to achieve as it progresses. Over the due course of the thesis, it will be evident to the reader that our reflections on Gandhi's political philosophy will inevitably move from his more immediate interlocutors situated in the Indian context to thinkers in the past, especially those from the Enlightenment era, whose ideas exerted a palpable influence, positive or negative, over Gandhi and his contemporaries.

Our subsequent probing of Kant and Weber's underlying assumptions concerning politics revealed that there appears to be more similarities than differences when it comes to their conceptualizations of the political. And this chapter argued that Gandhi's real significance as a political thinker can only be grasped if we situate his political thought as an attempt to counter these assumptions in politics that takes violence as a necessary and constitutive feature of the political. Instead, Gandhi wants to construct a nonviolent political that is grounded in an idea of the self and its responsibilities towards the community. And perhaps such a reading can also help us accommodate some of the insights that come from a more context-sensitive reading of his thought that reads Gandhi as a thinker responding to challenges emerging from the colonialism and the rising Indian nationalism. A reading through a postcolonial or a critical traditionalist lens shows us that political struggles are not a phenomenon that concerns numerous unencumbered selves but involves individuals situated within a community who act together as groups.

Our discussions and conclusion, up until this point, must naturally lead to further questions concerning Gandhi and his ambitious project of carving out a theory of politics centred around the self as opposed to the sovereign. What is the nature of politics in this Gandhian project? What do we make of freedom or rights in such a view of this nonviolent political? If not the sovereign, what kind of political authority exists in Gandhian politics? What are the implications of Gandhi's fixation on truth to this system of politics? What is the place of various Gandhian ideas within this scheme? While all of these questions appear to be important and can be taken up over the course of this project, a more immediate task concerns further exploration of the

nature of this self that Gandhi wants to place at the centre of his politics. What kind of a self emerges from our reading of some of his important works when we situate these works within the colonial context that is propelling competing visions of the self, the other and community? Where does the other stand in relation to this self? This chapter has left all these questions open for further interrogation. And it is to these pressing questions we must turn to next.

Chapter 2

Reading Gandhi in his Context: The Idea of a Socially Responsible Self

Introduction

Towards the close of the previous chapter, it was pointed out that all political philosophy takes place in a specific context. And to make sense of a philosopher, it is important that we accustom ourselves with the context in which he articulates his political vision. And our attempt in the last chapter was to survey a few of these contexts interpreters of Gandhi have relied on to make sense of his political thought. While some of these context-sensitive readings were useful in helping us recognize aspects of Gandhi's thought that are often overlooked when we read him as either a moralist or a realist, there is a significant need to look at other, somewhat neglected, contextual dimensions that direct us towards a more wholesome approach to Gandhi's philosophy, an interpretative approach that can throw light on and support our finding that Gandhi's larger political project must be seen as an attempt in the history of philosophy to counter the otherwise modern conventional way of conceptualizing a political that takes violence to be its necessary and constitutive element.

None of the interpreters we previously discussed in this study provide us with an immediate intellectual context, especially concerning the discourse of his contemporaries, within which we can situate Gandhi's nonviolence, not merely as a moral or a political intervention, but as an

instance of a paradigmatic shift in thinking about the political. And this begs for us to seek an investigation into the immediate intellectual context in which Gandhi cultivated his ideas. It calls for a closer reading of Gandhi in his context, which is exactly what this chapter intends to do. But such an endeavour is fraught with difficulties and the most immediate problem concerns the methodology we can use to inform our own reading of Gandhi in his context. So, we must begin this chapter by looking at the available practices of a contextual approach to studying political thought, and then seek to employ methods that can aid our own reading of Gandhi. And it is to this we must immediately turn to next.

Skinner, Ideology and the Recovery of Illocutionary Force

A contextual approach to the study of political thought is often associated with the methods employed by theorists engaged in the study of history of ideas like JGA Pocock and Quentin Skinner, who are often clubbed together under what is generally called the 'Cambridge School.' However, it is important to note that Skinner and Pocock's methods 'differ significantly' and for the purposes of this investigation, we are primarily concerned with Skinner and his methodology employed in studies of political thought. Unlike Pocock's stress on language to identify the persistence and development of vocabularies over a period of time, Skinner's study of historical works is directed towards understanding 'what an author was doing in the intellectual context' of his time.[91] Thus, Skinner's focus while reading Machiavelli, for example, is to highlight to his readers how Machiavelli subverted the 'advice to princes' genre that preceded him. For Skinner,

[91] Mark Bevir and George Klosko, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Political Philosophy* (University Press Oxford, 2011), 20.

the objective of his study of a thinker, be it Machiavelli or Hobbes, is to recover the ‘intention’ of the concerned thinker.

Skinner argues in his methodological writings that in order to understand the text or a thinker, it is not enough to merely make sense of the linguistic utterances available in the text. Instead, Skinner proposes that any understanding of the text or a concept associated with a thinker requires us to also take into account the general social and intellectual matrix out of which the concerned thinker and his texts emerge. According to Skinner, it is the political life of a period that sets the problem for a political thinker. And to make sense of this political life, it is important for us to look closely at the political practices during the time. Moving away from conventional ways of doing political thought before him, Skinner’s approach focuses less on the linguistic meanings embedded in the text, and more on the ideological position of the thinker articulated through the text in consideration. And it is in this sense that political philosophers like James Tully, following Skinner, recommends ‘ideology’ as a suitable framework to understand the texts or ideas of any prominent thinker.

To analyse political thought through this framework of ideology requires us to focus on recovering the social mentalities during the author’s time, which includes paying due attention to other dominant and competing ideologies alongside those of the thinker we are studying. And it is this consideration of the context and the contemporaries of any thinker that makes the study genuinely historical for contextualists like Skinner and Tully. Political thought, then for them, becomes a history of ideologies. The study of such political thought requires us to situate an actor in a social condition where the actor is undertaking ‘a particular course of action’, also

hoping to make their actions ‘appear legitimate’ by relying on existing normative vocabulary. Political action, when seen this way, is an ‘ideological manoeuvre.’[92] Within this contextual framework for interpreting political action, Skinner points out that it is necessary for the interpreter to secure both the ‘illocutionary’ in addition to the ‘locutionary’ forces involved in the act to really grasp its meaning. But to get a sense of these terms, we need to go to the source of Skinner’s interpretative framework, one that is indebted to the specifics associated with speech act theory, a theory of performativity that owes its origins to Wittgenstein’s philosophy.

Among the major proponents of speech act theory was British philosopher JL Austin. Austin, in his works, demonstrated that it is incorrect to assume a ‘strictly correlative’ relationship between meaning and understanding by pointing out that understanding requires one to grasp not only the meaning of a given utterance but also, what he termed, the ‘intended illocutionary force.’[93] Alongside other linguistic philosophers of his time, Austin argued that if speaking and writing are conceived pragmatically as ‘linguistic activities performed by speakers and writers’, they can then be understood to be comprised of ‘two kinds of action.’[94] The first kind is concerned with what the author is saying or writing, which are expressed through ‘words, sentences, arguments, theories and so on.’ Austin referred to this first kind as action containing within it certain ‘locutionary’ or ‘propositional’ meanings. But a second kind of action is also at play in any act of speaking or writing. After all, the author is ‘doing something’ i.e. he writes or speaks to make a

[92] James Tully, ed., *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1988), 19.

[93] Bevir and Klosko, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Political Philosophy*, 23.

[94] Bevir and Klosko, 24.

point. Thus, there is an ‘intended force’ associated with any utterance and Austin referred to this as the ‘illocutionary force’ of a linguistic action, containing within it a force that has nothing to do with the locutionary or propositional meanings of an utterance.

This idea of illocutionary force is central to Skinner’s interpretative framework in two ways. First, it told Skinner that the agent’s ‘doing’ in performing an utterance is not concerned with linguistic meaning but with another ‘force coordinate’ associated with this utterance.[95] Secondly, Skinner also realized that neither a study of an author’s intellectual biography alone nor an exclusive deep dive into the social context of his time can supply the interpreter with this force coordinate. Rather, due consideration must be paid to the author’s ‘intended meaning’ as well as his ‘intention that this intention must be understood.’[96] And this can only be understood if we pay heed to the illocutionary meanings[97] associated with the text. Tully sums it up succinctly when he writes that to clearly understand the ‘historical meaning’ associated with a thinker or his text from the past, ‘it is not sufficient to understand its locutionary meaning. It is also necessary to understand what the author was doing in writing it; the point or force of the author’s argument.’[98] Thus, for any interpretative exercise, irrespective of the Western or Indian context, understanding a thinker and his ideas is to ‘secure uptake of the illocutionary force’ of his utterance.

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[95] Tully, *Meaning and Context*, 61.

[96] Tully, 63.

[97] By the term ‘illocutionary meaning’, I simply refer to the meaning embedded in the illocutionary force of an associated speech-act.

[98] Tully, *Meaning and Context*, 9.

Modes of Contextualism

Writing on the ideas of freedom in modern India, Sudipta Kaviraj brings to our attention two approaches available to an interpreter in his encounter with an idea, both of which he refers to as 'historically reliable' versions of contextualism.[99] The first among these is what we discussed above, a Skinnerian contextualism that is focused on 'recovering authorial intentions' by 'studying' the 'intellectual or theoretical texts' that reveals to the interpreter their 'correct historical meanings.'[100] Elaborating on this method, Kaviraj highlights that recovering 'meanings' of concepts in such an investigation are established by a study of the predominant 'linguistic conventions' of that time by relying on a 'wider study' of texts specific to that intellectual milieu. This is because it is the 'circulation of concepts' within this particular discourse that generates the meaning that the interpreter is seeking. Thus, following this method, a researcher understands the thinker he is studying by identifying the nuances of the thinker's thought precisely by 'measuring their difference' from the established norms of 'common linguistic practices.' The researcher succeeds in doing this by studying specific texts, or what Kaviraj refers to as 'great texts' supported by a 'vast repertoire of small texts', the purpose of the latter limited to serve as an aid to better understand the former. Even though the priority interpretative source for this mode of contextual research in political philosophy is the 'exemplary theoretical text' of a thinker, which we may refer to as the thinker's key political treatise, this method transcends the text or treatise by forcing the interpreter to discover the

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[99] Robert H. Taylor, ed., *The Idea of Freedom in Asia and Africa*, The Making of Modern Freedom (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2002), 97.

[100] Taylor, 98.

‘structure of thought’ of his subject.[101] Thus, for the researcher, the great and small texts are illustrations of a thinker’s political thought, while following this approach.

In contrast to this, Kaviraj posits Begriffsgeschichte, popularized by German intellectual historian Reinhart Koselleck, as an alternative method of contextualism available to a researcher studying political philosophy. According to Kaviraj, Koselleck’s form of contextualism focus ‘less on theoretical constructs’ or the structure of thought of a thinker and the meaning of a concept in this approach evolves when the researcher recreates a ‘conceptual history.’[102] Thus, there are ‘no privileged texts’ that are to be devoured to understand a concept that a thinker articulates. Rather, understanding of a concept in this method makes use of several kinds of documents, including the ‘small texts’ and other ‘humbler forms’ of writing. Our main focus, following this method, is to construct a history of the concept as opposed to recovering the meaning of a particular text written by a thinker. At the heart of this approach is what Koselleck called the ‘invocation of parallel or opposed concepts.’ In his writings on Begriffsgeschichte, Koselleck pointed out that ‘without registering the overlapping two expressions’, by which he meant the idea under study as well as its opposite expression within that specific socio-political context, it is ‘not possible to deduce the structural value of a word as ‘concept’ either for the social framework or for the disposition of political fronts.’[103] Koselleck’s assumption behind this methodology is that although there may be multiple expressions, concepts transform

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[101] Taylor, 98.

[102] Taylor, 98.

[103] Kari Palonen, ed., *Finnish Yearbook of Political Thought, Vol. 3 1999* (SoPhi, University of Jyvaskyla, 1999), 31.

'diachronically' through formations of 'polar opposition.' The purpose of texts, great or small, is to serve as possible sources to identify these conceptual opposites while practicing this mode of contextualism.

Kaviraj's methodological recommendation for interpretative exercises in the 'Indian case' is to combine these two forms of contextualisms articulated above.[104] It is important to note that these two different styles of contextualism are not significantly varied methodological approaches, as Kaviraj notes, but makes their difference felt in their 'emphasis.' Both these methods are concerned with identifying 'shifts in mentalities' of a thinker or his ideas and hence requires of the researcher to recover the context in such a fashion that due focus is paid to the thinker as well as his contemporaries, which together makes the context for investigation. However, whereas the first method emphatically relies on the 'texts' written by a thinker as the primary interpretative source to understand him, the second method investigates the 'concepts' employed by the thinker, alongside its counter-concepts, to understand his politics.

In comparison to Kaviraj, Partha Chatterjee's seminal study of nationalist thought in India offers another methodological proposal, at least in the terminologies it employ, to study political thinkers and their ideas in modern India. Chatterjee's method is based on the identification of the 'thematic' and the 'problematic', the latter borrowed from Louis Althusser's 'symptomatic reading' of Karl Marx.[105] In this Althusserian framework, a symptomatic reading of a 'relevant

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[104] Taylor, *The Idea of Freedom in Asia and Africa*, 99.

[105] Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (Zed Books, 1986), 39.

body of texts' in the works of a thinker helps us identify the problematic, by which he means the 'theoretical or ideological framework' in which a term or a concept is articulated.[106] But alongside the problematic, Chatterjee recommends that we also recover what he calls the 'thematic', in order to develop a holistic understanding of a thinker and his thought. By the term 'thematic' Chatterjee refers to the 'justificatory structures' that substantiate the 'claims of realizability' of an ideology and is concerned with the 'epistemic and moral principles' that supports the claim made in a text. Thus, unlike the problematic that is primarily concerned with the 'practical' or 'programmatic' statements made by a thinker in his articulation of an ideology that offers a socio-political possibility among several other political visions, thematic is concerned with the epistemological principles and ethical frameworks that a thinker relies on to justify his ideology.

The important issue at this stage is then to ponder how we should go about interpreting a thinker like Gandhi, the subject of our study, when presented with these methodological commitments. In other words, how are we to employ the above approaches in our study of Gandhi and his political ideas? Thus, the task at hand requires us to clarify and understand some of these methodologies better so that we are in a position to prefer one over the other or at least devise our own method, that employs the strengths exhibited in these approaches while undertaking our study of Gandhi. While it is evident that both Kaviraj and Chatterjee stress on the necessity of texts or writings of a thinker to be indispensable to their interpretative process, it begs further

[106] For example, Althusser's symptomatic reading of Marx shows that Marx's writings form two different 'conceptual problematics' separated by an 'epistemological break.' Such a reading suggests that Marx's rejection of Hegel and Feurbach's ideologies in his youth paved way for a more 'scientific' approach to historical materialism that dominated his later years.

interrogation to really understand what constitutes the 'text' and how we should prioritize the important over the unimportant when it comes to our interpretation of Gandhi.

The first and immediate aim of this chapter, as pointed our previously, is to outline the interpretative nuances associated with a contextual approach that we can rely on in our reading of Gandhi. Once this is established, the second and the more significant task of this chapter is to attempt at a cursory reading of two of Gandhi's well-known texts, *Hind Swaraj* and *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, so that we are in a position to identify what these texts are doing in that particular intellectual context. Thus, this chapter hopes to read Gandhi in his context and pins down his texts as responses to or engagements with some of the important questions and concerns that had dominated the minds of political thinkers in early 20th century India.

Over the course of this chapter, it will be argued that Gandhi's larger ideological project, as evident from a contextual reading of his texts, needs to be understood as an attempt to counter an exclusionary conception of self and community that was gaining ground in India as the spirit of anti-colonialism and nationalism began to take hold of the political imaginations of Gandhi and his contemporaries. And this exclusionary outlook, which can be traced back to the writings of Gandhi's contemporary and Hindutva ideologue Vinayak Savarkar, rests upon a construction of the 'other' or the non-Hindu as something that threatens or weakens the self, a view of the other that has a long history in political theory and goes back to Hobbes but is best articulated in the writings of Carl Schmitt. This chapter argues for interpreting Gandhi as a political thinker who is attempting to break away from a conception of the political that is rooted in an antagonistic

relationship between the self and the other and reads his texts as attempting to put forward an alternative nonviolent political that is founded on an idea of the self that is not only inclusive and accommodative of the other but also sees itself as being responsible for safeguarding the concerns and wellbeing of the other. The chapter concludes by interrogating the possibility of an ethics of a socially responsible self in Gandhi's political thought.

Understanding Gandhi's Ideological Manoeuvres

How does our preceding discussions on contextualism inform our project of reading and understanding Gandhi and his political philosophy? The first important suggestion that contextualists like Skinner make is that any interpretative exercise of a thinker will need to take into account his texts. After all, it is this reading of texts that opens us up to the concepts employed by the thinker. Though obtaining clarity on these concepts are important, we are more concerned with how a thinker used those concepts i.e. what he did with certain ideas. Further, going by this Skinnerian framework, we can also conclude that our interpretation of these texts will need to go beyond a purely textual approach that is focused on understanding the meaning embedded in the text within a framework of locutionary forces. To really understand a thinker and his writings, we also need to pay heed to the illocutionary force associated with a text.

Thus, putting all of this into perspective regarding our study, we can conclude that though concepts like swaraj, satya and ahimsa are central to Gandhi's political thinking, our interpretative endeavour must not be limited to just clarifying what these concepts mean. After all, all of these concepts were articulated by Gandhi and embedded within specific texts that he

wrote. The task then at hand is not to just construct a context to understand these texts but to read these texts in such a way that it throws light on the intentional force associated with Gandhi's use and deployment of these concepts in the text as well as the broader social context.

But such aims and ambitions may create some valid questions in the minds of readers. And the most important one concerns an assumption that any endeavour to recover the intentions of a thinker is bound to fail. Intentions are after all purely mental events and it would be ludicrous to assume a researcher can recover these mental states of a thinker, be it dead or alive. However, following Skinner, one can claim that authorial intentions are 'not purely mental events' and can be recovered by a researcher through 'intertextual comparisons' and the accompanying inference of influence.[107] 'Documentary evidence' becomes critical to ascertaining the intentionality of an author and the interpreter must take due care to avoid calling any 'random resemblance' as an instance of influence.[108] The interpretative methodologies employed in our study must hence follow this Skinnerian assumption that equates understanding of a thinker to our grasp of his intentions, i.e. to understand what the author is doing in articulating a particular position and how he is differentiating himself from other actors and their ideologies that prevailed during that time. The reconstruction of illocutionary forces will help in recovering these authorial intentions. And when these intentions are located within the political context of a thinker, we may refer to them as the 'ideological manoeuvres' of a political thinker, as already seen. The aim of our study,

[107] 'Ideas in Context: Conversation with Quentin Skinner,' accessed August 21, 2020, https://cjh.uchicago.edu/issues/fall16/7.12.pdf.

[108] 'Ideas in Context: Conversation with Quentin Skinner,' accessed August 21, 2020, https://cjh.uchicago.edu/issues/fall16/7.12.pdf.7.1'7.12.Pdf.'

when seen through this Skinnerian lens, is to thus understand Gandhi's ideological manoeuvres associated with his texts and the use of certain concepts as articulated within these texts, which can in turn can help us lay the structure of his thought and his political philosophy. The logical follow-up question then a researcher of political thought must ask in his interpretation of a thinker concerns the sources he should rely on to reconstruct this political philosophy. Or to put it in other words, what constitutes the 'texts' that serve as our sources of interpretation for this study of Gandhi's political thought?

Studies in political thought have focused on what we initially called the 'great texts', supplemented by a reading of some 'small texts.' These great texts are taken to be the systematic statements of a thinker's epistemological and moral claims as well as his practical and programmatic politics, and thus serves as the best source for studying a thinker and his ideology. After all, canonical texts are expected to be loaded with certain perennial moral and political questions. It is in this sense that interpreters of Gandhi often take *Hind Swaraj* to be central to developing an understanding of Gandhi's political thought. Going by this approach, a close reading of *Hind Swaraj* should reveal to us both the thematic and the problematic of Gandhi's thought.

While logic and common sense may readily agree with the above assumption, limiting our research to written sources, even if we include the small texts alongside the canonical ones, comes with other problems. For example, is it okay to equate a translated version of a writing to its original version? And more importantly, why must we prioritize texts over action? Why not base our interpretation of Gandhi's political thought by conducting a close study of how he

planned and organized a political campaign, for example the Civil Disobedience movement in 1930's, as opposed to limiting our interpretative material to a text he wrote two decades before kicking off this landmark moment in Indian history with the now iconic Dandi march.

Let us first address the question concerning translation. This is definitely a serious problem for contextualists who stress on the significance of linguistic specificities and conceptual resemblances when studying a thinker and his social context. This problem is to some extent addressed while reading Gandhi. This is because Gandhi himself translated, or was at least closely associated with, translating his important writings, including the now famous texts like *Hind Swaraj* and his autobiographies *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* and *Satyagraha in South Africa*. Further, Gandhi's lifelong involvement in publishing and editing English language journals like Indian Opinion and Young India means that the large corpus of writings, from which we will selectively draw for our interpretative study can be said to represent an accurate translation, which is in line with the expectations of a contextual study of Gandhi. However, the second question, of prioritizing writings over action, requires us to delve further into understanding what constitutes a text within a contextual framework.

For Skinner, the idea of a text is not limited to philosophical treatises or literary works. Instead, he uses the term to represent a range of interpretative sources which include what we conventionally refer to as texts as well as other sources like 'films, paintings, buildings, and other such artefacts.'[109] Further, by providing us with an approach that is focused on

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[109] 'Ideas in Context: Conversation with Quentin Skinner,' accessed August 21, 2020, https://cjh.uchicago.edu/issues/fall16/7.12.pdf.

understanding a thinker's ideology by recovering the 'illocutionary force', Skinner's framework of interpretation provides room to read not just the thinker's linguistic utterances but also the extralinguistic dimensions of his political thought. Following Skinner, we can also attempt to read the extralinguistic acts of a thinker as 'ideological documents', alongside the textual ones. This is significant when it comes to interpreting a thinker like Gandhi whose politics is embedded with manifold symbolisms.

Within Skinnerian contextualism, Gandhi's adoption of the loincloth as his go-to attire, his decision to suspend the Non-Cooperation movement, the theatrics associated with the Dandi March etc. can all be considered as documents to be read and interpreted, and hence can serve as source materials for a contextualist. However, though these actions can be treated as texts, they do not diminish the importance of the written texts in which ideas are articulated and elaborated by the subject himself. Textual sources, like Gandhi's writings, cannot be dispensed away altogether in interpretations of his political thought and a text like *Hind Swaraj* or his thoughtful autobiographies can indeed serve as critical sources when it comes to understanding his philosophy. What may be helpful, instead, is to use other sources, including non-textual ones, to supplement our understanding of what emerges from these texts. After all, written words provide the interpreter with a fixity of meaning that non-written actions often lack. This is because the written word is produced after bouts of reflection of ideas and refinement of prose that adds to it a certain clarity which an episode or incident of spontaneous action might not entail, thus requiring us to pay more attention to Gandhi's own writings in our analysis. But, irrespective of the sources we use, the more important point we can learn following a contextualist like Skinner is that our interpretative efforts must focus on understanding a text, be it a political treatise or a

speech or adoption of an attire , in its own terms so that we are in a position to identify the specific ideological manoeuvres performed by the thinker in undertaking that act or speech-act i.e. understand what the writer was doing in writing this text or performing an action within a particular intellectual context.

While discussing Gandhi, Chatterjee made an important remark that Mahatma 'meant different things to different people.'[110] By making this point, Chatterjee was highlighting the complexities involved when considering Gandhi's utterances. According to Chatterjee, what Gandhi meant in his interactions with the peasants and tribals was 'completely different from the way it was interpreted' amongst the more urban intelligentsia and literati.[111] This is because the diversity of the Indian condition required Gandhi to face different audiences. As Bhikhu Parekh once highlighted, this meant Gandhi encouraged ambiguity, and at times 'deliberately', so that his utterances don't polarize ideological and political differences.[112] Relying on a range of sources also provide us room to account for the occasional multiplicity of meanings associated with Gandhi's symbolisms. By conceptualizing 'illocutionary force' as something that can possibly entail within it the scope for producing multiple effects i.e. a plurality of meanings, which is in turn dependent on the nature of relationship between Gandhi and his audience, adopting Skinnerian contextualism may help us recover Gandhi's 'manoeuvres', in plural, associated with a specific act or a particular piece of writing.

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[110] Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?*, 125.

[111] Chatterjee, 125.

[112] Ramin Jahanbegloo, *Talking Politics: Bhikhu Parekh in Conversation with Ramin Jahanbegloo* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 93.

Gandhi's political career spanned over half a century and was spread over three continents. Over the course of this political journey, he made numerous revisions to his beliefs and ideas and was involved in a variety of debates with his interlocutors, reflective of the ideological range of his worldviews as well as the geographical scope of his activism. This means the range of contemporaries and influences we must draw on to recreate the context is in itself a vast endeavour. Given this scenario, and the idea that there is a possibility of multiple authorial intentions associated with a single utterance, it makes sense to prioritize and identify the most important, one among the few possible, illocutionary meanings associated with his action.

Born in 1869 in Gujarat's Porbander district, which was then part of the Bombay Presidency under British rule, Gandhi went to London when he was 18 to study law. And by the time he was 23, he had sailed to South Africa where he would spend a little over two decades, initially working as a lawyer and then spearheading one of the first instances of organized nonviolent political resistance against colonial injustices. Gandhi returned to India in 1915 and some of the most significant nonviolent moments in modern political history were sculpted during his time in the country. He remained one of the most important leaders of the Indian struggle for independence until his assassination in 1948 and his political philosophy of nonviolence continue to evoke interest and inspiration for numerous political movements across the world even today.

Throughout his life, Gandhi remained an avid reader and was influenced by thinkers and ideas not just from India but also from the west. Yet, some of his famous works entail a strong criticism of the west, which he differentiated from a limited set of western thinkers he admired

and whom he often clubbed together and referred to as the 'other west.'[113] In addition to this diverse reading and its influence on his worldview, Gandhi was also almost maniacal in terms of sharing what he learned. And this is reflected not only in the large corpus of his articles that was printed and circulated in the several journals he established and edited, but also in the thousands of letters he had written during his lifetime to people near and far. And add to this the thousands of essays and pamphlets he wrote and the speeches he delivered as part of advocating the Indian cause in colonial South Africa and British India, in addition to his meditations on ideas, thinkers, texts, politics and society etc. some of which are often considered canonical, one can easily appreciate the humungous endeavor that is facing a researcher of Gandhi's political thought, in terms of the range of textual sources available for interpretation. An interpretation of Gandhi that takes into account each and every textual source to construct his political thought can turn out to be an extremely tedious and outrageous task. And it is in resolving these questions of feasibility that we may now turn to.

We have agreed to the contextualist's assumption that it is an interrogation of a thinker's text that open us up to the dominant concepts at play during a particular historical and political context. And while, for a writer like Gandhi, the intended audience may be manifold, an interpreter will need to prioritize one among the several of the ideological manoeuvres a thinker attempts in his texts. This is because a single text is embedded with several intentions and will end up doing a

[113] In his 1909 foreword to Hind Swaraj as well as the 1910 preface to the text, Gandhi made it clear to his readers that he was involved in a 'larger movement of European thought' that resisted and questioned Western imperialism and the accompanying industrialization. And he was vocal in admitting that he considered himself to be part of this 'European doubters and dissenters' and said that he formulated his critique of modern civilization as well as Indian society by borrowing from these European thinkers. And it is these dissenters from Europe Gandhi thought as the 'other' west. To further understand Gandhi and his relation to this other west, see Sussane Hoeber Rudolph, Lloyd Rudolph '*Gandhi's India, the World's Gandhi*' from: Routledge Handbook of Indian Politics, Routledge.

wide range of things in a particular context. Given this, an interpreter must take due care to recognize that a hierarchical set of intentions is always at play while understanding a text. However, we are always in a position to prioritize one among the many intentions as more important and thus equate that to be the thinker's main agenda at play in a text. This can be done because, as Skinner pointed out, 'intertextual comparisons' of Gandhi and his contemporaries can point to us the influences or rhetoric as well as the conceptual overlaps embedded within the text and the context. Also, Koselleck's suggestion that these conceptual overlaps often reveal to us in the form of polarities further help us in narrowing down the core intentionality associated with the thinker in his use of a concept or writing a text.

A Contextual Reading of Hind Swaraj

Among all the texts Gandhi wrote, perhaps none as much as Hind Swaraj has caught the attention of philosophers and political theorists in their attempts to understand Gandhi and his ideas. On 13 November1909, Gandhi, with his friend Hajee Habib, boarded the SS Kildonan Castle to head back to South Africa after an 'intense' four and a half months stay in London.[114] In almost all of Gandhi's hagiographic accounts, it is written that for the next nine days since they boarded the ship, Habib hardly saw Gandhi as the latter was immersed in completing a 275 page manuscript, that eventually became *Hind Swaraj*. Written originally in Gujarati, by hand, the text was launched in January 1910. The English version, that came out two months later, was dictated by Gandhi to his friend and associate Hermann Kallenbach and was titled *Indian Home*

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[114] Ramachandra Guha, *Gandhi before India* (Penguin UK, 2013), 362.

Rule.[115] And it is this version of the text that went on to achieve the privileged status of becoming a canonical text in the study of political thought, at least in India.

Unlike the self-disclosure that accompanies his later autobiography, Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* is written as a dialogue taking place between the reader and an editor of a newspaper who go on to discuss a range of topics. Writing about the form of the text, Gandhi highlighted in the preface to *Hind Swaraj* that his decision to adopt the form of a dialogue was to make the text 'easy' for the reader. Further, Gandhi felt the Gujarati language 'readily lends itself to such a treatment' and pointed out that the dialogic structure was the 'best method of treating difficult subjects.'[116] But it seems unlikely that this was merely a decision driven by ease and convenience, values that seem peripheral to Gandhi's philosophical outlook.

Dialogue as a literary form was common in the traditional Indian philosophical discourse. Also, one of Gandhi's favourite texts *The Bhagavat Gita*, though poetic in its form is ultimately dialogic in nature. With such strong influences already at play, it seems Gandhi's avoidance of any mention of such influences from the Indian tradition as an inspiration for this text written as a dialogue is slightly puzzling. And this is especially so keeping in mind the conventional claims that one of the provocations that led to Gandhi writing Hind Swaraj was to respond to English

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[115] Guha, 362.

[116] Mahatma Gandhi, *Gandhi:'Hind Swaraj'and Other Writings*, ed. Anthony J Parel (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 6.

writer GK Chesterton's claims that Indian nationalism was 'not very Indian and not very national.'[117]

In this understanding, in addition to the rising wave of revolutionary violence, Gandhi was also disturbed by this characterization of Indians as not being 'authentic' since the demands being raised by the nationalists in the country was for a self-government that would oversee the political and institutional arrangements which were ultimately imported from the West. As Chesterton wrote in one of his essays, 'a conquered people demanding its own institutions and the same people demanding institutions of a conqueror' are significantly different demands.[118] This is often seen as another instance of provocation for Gandhi's writing of *Hind Swaraj* and the treatise is read by some as Gandhi's attempt to contemplate on an idea of this authentic Indian self.

Given such a context, it seems strange that Gandhi would misdirect his contemporaries and interpreters towards an influence that would indicate a western thinker like Plato and his Socratic dialogue *Apology* as the key influence behind Gandhi's adoption of the dialogic form in *Hind Swaraj*. After all, it was only a year before that Gandhi had read and published this Socratic dialogue in his journal *Indian Opinion*. Given this series of events, it is only natural that an interpreter would identify the west rather than the Indian philosophical and religious roots as the inspiration behind Gandhi's interest in dialogic format. Perhaps there is more than meets the eye

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[117] Guha, *Gandhi before India*, 379.

[118] Guha, 364.

when it comes to Gandhi's silence towards an opportunity to valorise the indigenous roots of Gandhi's dialogic influence. And that may be because the genesis of Hind Swaraj lie elsewhere.

One of the key tasks Gandhi had in mind while writing *Hind Swaraj* in 1909 was to articulate his idea of Swaraj. Though conventional readings of *Hind Swaraj* do take into account the understanding that the text was written as a response to the rising revolutionary spirit in India that called for an armed rebellion against the British, less attention has been paid to an intertextual reading of this text alongside the writings of other nationalist thinkers of the time. And if we undertake such a reading, perhaps none as much as Gandhi's contemporary Vinayak Damodar Savarkar stands out as the key interlocutor to understand this text and its context, thus helping us grasp Gandhi's intentions behind undertaking a project like *Hind Swaraj*.

One of the most important thinkers associated with the revolutionary school in India around the time Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj* was Savarkar. Gandhi first met Savarkar in October 1906 while visiting London's India House that housed several Indian students in the city and was well known for brewing the revolutionary spirit and call for India's independence from the British. Political disagreements between these thinkers came to the fore during their dinner in India House when Savarkar apparently questioned Gandhi's commitment to the Indian freedom struggle following the latter's inability to share a dinner together as Gandhi would not eat the fish that was served. Savarkar is reported to have mockingly questioned Gandhi's credibility as an Indian leader by suggesting that those who could not eat dinner together could in no way work together and is said to have commented 'this is just boiled fish…we want people who are

ready to eat the British alive.'[119] But, Gandhi's disagreement with Savarkar's political project did not come to public scrutiny until an incident a few years later, in July 1909, four months before he wrote Hind Swaraj.

On 16 July 1909, Gandhi published a scathing criticism of the assassination of Curzon Wyllie, a British officer, by Indian student Madhan Lal Dhingra. Dhingra was not only a member of Indian House in London but it is also said that his act of assassination was inspired by Savarkar's writings. Writing on the assassination in the *Indian Opinion*, Gandhi pointed out that Dhingra was 'egged on to do this by ill-digested reading of worthless writings' and that those who incited him to do this 'deserve to be punished', perhaps a veiled reference to the writings of Savarkar and the revolutionary school. Gandhi went onto equate Dhingra's assassination as an act committed in a state of 'intoxication' caused by a 'mad idea.' Gandhi found Dhingra's act 'cowardly' and concluded the piece by highlighting that a man's courage consisted in 'suffering deeply' as opposed to killing others. As we shall see in detail in the next chapter, Gandhi's Hind Swaraj can be understood better if we read it alongside Savarkar's text *The Indian War of Independence – 1857*. After all, Dhingra was very much inspired by Savarkar and his speeches, which the latter delivered as part of the open weekly meetings of Free India Society, a London based revolutionary political organization with close links to India House. And the source for the content of these speeches were select chapters from *1857*.

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[119] Vikram Sampath, *Savarkar: Echoes from a Forgotten Past, 1883–1924* (Penguin Random House India Private Limited, 2019), 153.

Gandhi is writing *Hind Swaraj* in this specific ideological context when there was an increasing acceptance of revolutionary violence as the way forward for India's independence movement. The originality of Savarkar's *1857* was to counter the then dominant and prevalent political practice of moderation that informed the activities of the Indian National Congress and posit violence against the British as both a religious and political duty. Gandhi, through *Hind Swaraj*, reformulated duty by bringing in dimensions of social responsibility or obligation towards one's own community as the moral source of all duties and responsibilities as opposed to fighting the 'other' i.e. the British, as Savarkar argued in *1857*. Thus, Gandhi's ideological manoeuvre, through a text like *Hind Swaraj*, was to counter Savarkar's characterization of the ideal Indian self as violent, vengeful and ultimately not accommodative of the British's presence in India. Gandhi wanted to defuse this politically and religiously charged nature of this self's obligations that Savarkar outlined. Instead of the violence and antagonism towards the other i.e. the British, that was embedded in Savarkar's conception of self, Gandhi's reconceptualized the Indian self as one who draws his moral worth from his social responsibilities or obligations towards community.

This brief intellectual encounter between these two thinkers in modern India, as revealed later, would turn out to be just the first of the many differences. And with time, Savarkar will end up becoming not just the initial but also the most significant interlocutor to make sense of Gandhi and his political thought. This is because one of the primary tasks of Gandhi's larger ideological project, over the subsequent decades, was to refute Savarkar's political philosophy that evolves from this violent antagonism towards the British to a more concrete and 'exclusivist' conception of the self and community that wants to delegitimize the Indianness of all non-Hindus. And the

encounter between Gandhi's inclusive conception of the self and community alongside Savarkar's exclusive notions will serve as a framework for helping us understand not only Gandhi's later writings but also the political project he attempted to articulate through them.

Situating Gandhi's Autobiography in its Context

The image of Gandhi as a political thinker or a moralist often overshadows a lot more of what Gandhi was. And among the many things he experimented with, perhaps his experiments with literary forms have often received minimal attention. Rather, debates and discussions, and mostly for the right reasons, have focused on the content of his books rather than the form they were devised in. The result is that we have less clarity on the reasons behind Gandhi's adoption of a particular form over another. For instance, as already seen, one can explain away Gandhi's use of a dialogic form while writing *Hind Swaraj* as an influence of Plato's *Apology*. In this reading, one does not take the pain to meditate deeply on Gandhi's reasoning behind his decision to frame the text as a dialogue and the form of this text is often taken as an instance of ease or convenience for the writer as opposed to be driven by any ethical presuppositions. In a similar vein, one can trivialize Gandhi's adoption of the autobiographical form as having no significance. After all, Gandhi was not the only Indian thinker in the early twentieth century who had penned his autobiography. In fact, the first half of the twentieth century witnessed a proliferation of autobiographical writings by political thinkers in modern India. Further, the preface to his autobiography does indicate that he began the project at the behest of his friends and associates, and was himself hesitant to write an autobiography. But if we are able to transcend such a lackadaisical engagement with a text or a writer, perhaps we can uncover

something deeper in Gandhi's literary excursions that may reveal to us a philosophy that drove his ethics and politics.

In November 1923, while in Yerwada prison, Gandhi first ventured into the territory of serious autobiographical writing. But it was not his famous autobiography *The Story of My Experiments With Truth* that he began with but a memoir of his time in South Africa. As in the case with Gandhi's dictation to Pollack when they compiled the English version of *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi's South African memoir was dictated by him in Gujarati to his fellow prisoner Indulal Yagnik and was titled *Dakshina Africana Satyagrahano Itihas*.[120] Gandhi, supported by Yagnik, completed thirty chapters of the proposed book while in jail and he completed the remainder after his release. As with most of his writings, the book was serialised in Gandhi's journal Navjivan and ran from 13 April 1924 to 22 November 1925, during which began the translation of the book from Gujarati to English, undertaken by his fellow-ashramite Valji Desai.[121] And it was only in 1928 that the English version of the book, aptly titled *Satyagraha in South Africa*, was published.

During this period, Gandhi seems to have been immersed in a reminiscent and reflective mode of writing and perhaps he felt *Satyagraha in South Africa* was too focused on his political journey, almost negligent of his personal life. And this may explain Gandhi's almost continuous engagement in autobiographical writings, moving right on from *Satyagraha in South Africa* to a more personal and intimate memoir. It is almost as if Gandhi felt that a narrative rooted in his

[120] Ramachandra Guha, *Gandhi: The Years That Changed the World, 1914-1948* (Vintage, 2018), 279.

[121] Guha, 278.

political engagements could hardly address the more deeper ethical foundation on which he had lived his life. This nature and the ethics of the self, that he had carefully nurtured all these years, would become the subject of his second autobiographical work.

Gandhi wrote this intimate autobiography in Gujarati and titled it *Satyana Prayogo Athava Atmakatha*. As scholars and interpreters have often pointed, the English rendering of the title as *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* does not accurately capture the spirit of Gandhi's original title that stressed less on the self or 'My' and more on Satya or Truth.[122] The book, from Gandhi's perspective, was primarily concerned with 'experiments with truth', for which his self only served as a vessel. Truth was the authoritative voice in this book, not Gandhi. The autobiography was published as weekly instalments in *Navjivan* from 29 November 1925, just four days after the last episode of Satyagraha in South Africa, and ran until 3 February 1929. Unlike his first, the second memoir was simultaneously translated to English, this time by Gandhi's loyal associate Mahadev Desai, and was parallelly published in Gandhi's English Journal *Young India* between December 1925 and February 1929.[123]

Bhikhu Parekh, while discussing this autobiography, provides us with a backdrop for situating Gandhi's autobiographical writings. As Parekh pointed out, autobiographies written by political thinkers and activists before Gandhi had often focussed more on things outside of the self. Often times, the self embodied in these writings by Indians were more of an eye through which one

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[122] For more on this, see Introduction to Tridip Suhrud, ed., *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Penguin, 2018).

[123] Guha, *Gandhi: The Years That Changed the World, 1914-1948*, 279.

could see a story of modern India. Giving examples from the autobiographies of Indian revolutionary activist Damodar Hari Chapekar and political leader Surendra Nath Bannerjee, one of the founders of the Indian National Congress, Parekh points out that the narrator selves within these works were that of a biographer of an emerging nation and often hardly delved into the personal or the interior universe of their own selves.[124] This is because the predominant cultural disposition in a Hindu majority modern India was that of a disapproval towards all forms of 'self-assertion', 'self-display' and 'self-glorification.' And the right to engage in such acts of self-aggrandizement was only allowed to 'those who had attained great moral and spiritual heights.'[125] The idea of autobiography in the Indian context, unlike the West, was constantly thrown under a critical gaze and Gandhi's adoption of this form was perceived by some as an attempt to 'borrow and legitimize an alien and apparently immoral genre of writing.'[126]

In Parekh's reading, Gandhi agreed with the criticism raised in India that autobiography is a self-centred or egoistic enterprise. But according to Parekh, it is precisely such inherited cultural assumptions that helped Gandhi transform the genre by appropriating it for the Indian context. Instead of the 'vices of self-assertion' that arises as a result of the focus on the self in an autobiography, Gandhi posited the 'soul' at the centre of autobiography.[127] Whereas the self found its expressions in its acts and achievements, the soul is expressed in one's spiritual

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[124] A Raghuramaraju, ed., *Debating Gandhi* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 160.

[125] Raghuramaraju, 161.

[126] Raghuramaraju, 161.

[127] Raghuramaraju, 164.

dimensions. It is concerned with one's morals and character and is ultimately tied to the self's humble pursuit or engagement with truth. Instead of displaying his moral grandeur, what was required of the Gandhian self was to showcase its moral innocence and foibles, thus resulting in a 'morally innocent autobiography.'[128] Parekh concludes that despite being a 'champion of traditional India', Gandhi's decision to engage with this 'distinctively Western genre' was a 'highly symbolic and radical act' and showed to his anxious compatriots the way to respond to foreign values and practices. Also, by penning an intimate autobiography, Gandhi lent his 'moral authority' to practices of 'self-disclosure and self-assertion' in a society that was otherwise hostile to such acts. Gandhi's autobiography thus entailed significant implications for the conceptions of self in the Indian context. By showing that our life is not just a 'diligent discharge of inherited roles and obligation' but a journey of self-creation that may deviate from culturally prescribed courses, Gandhi's autobiography embraced a view of life and self that welcomed certain aspects of modernity while refusing a dogmatic acceptance of traditional norms.[129]

Though Gandhi did not himself discuss in-depth about his adoption of these literary forms- its sources or influences and his reasoning for following them- our discussion up until now points us toward an outlook that suggests a very different understanding of Gandhi than the one we often encounter. One can collect several moments from Gandhi's life as well as his writings that showcase his consistent polemics against the 'west' and his strong preference for the swadeshi. Yet when it came to significant questions that touched upon how one must engage with ideas and

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[128] Raghuramaraju, 165.

[129] Raghuramaraju, 168.

values that are alien or different to the self, the Gandhian self never recommended shying away from an engagement. As Parekh pointed out, Gandhi's engagement with the western forms and practices, and his unique mode of adopting ideas and values from the west, presented a 'therapeutic and inspirational value' that not only overcame the colonial inferiority that had pervaded the Indian consciousness but also opened them up to a constructive engagement with the west. Or to put it in other words, by borrowing ideas and forms that were inherently western and by adopting them for the Indian context, Gandhi was reiterating a more inclusive conception of the self that was primarily multicultural and open to the other, and in many ways moved away from the dominant ideas of the self that was prevalent in Indian around that time. Thus, through his texts, Gandhi, as Parekh notes, was introducing 'an essentially modern, though suitably Indianized conception of the self in Indian culture.'[130] And perhaps in doing this, he intended to articulate a political theory in modern India that stood out for its distinctive stress on the 'ethics of a socially responsible self', a brand of ethical and political theory that is focused on cultivating an inclusive self and community.

The Self, the Other and the Political

Gurpreet Mahajan, in her writings, points out that unlike thinkers in the west, political thinkers in modern India were forced to ponder on political questions not just as an individual but also from the perspective of the community to which they belonged to or represented.[131] The cultural diversity in a country like India ensured that Indian thinkers in early twentieth century relied on

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[130] Raghuramaraju, 168.

[131] Gurpreet Mahajan, 'From Community to Nation: The Making of the Majority-Minority Framework,' in *Political Ideas in Modern India: Thematic Explorations*, vol. 10 (Sage, 2006) 167–85.

cultural community as the vantage point from which their reflections on the self began. Conceptions of self and community were thus intertwined in the political psyche and nationalist discourse in modern India. Within this backdrop, Mahajan recommends the categories of 'majority' and 'minority' to refer to the specific subject position from which such a self, situated in its community, can begin to 'assess its concerns and attitude.'[132] While her essay in consideration delves deeper into the attitude of such a self to colonial rule and the making of a nation, one can rely on this motif of the 'situated self' and its vantage point of being part of a 'majority' or 'minority' within a political community, and extrapolate from it the political ideology of most of the thinkers in modern India.

Of all the political thinkers in modern India, perhaps none were preoccupied with the categories of majority-minority and its place in the making of a community as much as Gandhi and Savarkar. In his comparative assessment of Gandhi and Savarkar, Thomas Pantham points out that the fundamental difference between Gandhi and Savarkar emerged as a consequence of how they conceptualized the 'self' and 'community.' According to Pantham, while both these thinkers rested their conceptions of community on a 'religious' community that was predominantly Hindu, they understood 'Hinduism' quite differently. For Pantham, Savarkar's Hinduism was less concerned with the 'ethical or spiritual dimension' and rested on a 'power-political conception of religion.' In contrast to this, Pantham reads Gandhi's idea of community as being grounded in a 'multi-religious, liberal-secular democracy', where the ethical or spiritual dimensions are 'thematized for integration into a radical democratic programme.' As a result,

[132] VR Mehta, and Thomas Pantham, ed., *Political Ideas in Modern India: Thematic Explorations*, vol. 10 (Sage, 2006), 170.

Savarkar conceptualized the Indian nation as a community of Hindus in ‘racial, religious, linguistic and territorial’ terms, which he referred to as the elements of ‘Hindutva.’ However, such a community grounded in Hindutva lacked any meaningful engagement with the ‘moral beliefs’ or ‘principles’ of religion, which Gandhi deemed to be the foundation for any community, or for that matter, any civilization. In Pantham’s analysis, such conceptualizations of community are never far from a similar conception of the self and as a result reads Savarkar’s ideology of Hindutva as being founded on a ‘traditional and rigidly hierarchic concept of the self’, a self which can relate to the non-self or the other only by ‘assimilating it’ or ‘excluding it’ by seeing it as ‘alien’, ‘enemy’ or ‘impure.’[133]

Political thought, since Thomas Hobbes, has been preoccupied with devising a society in which the self and the other can coexist. In fact, the Hobbesian social contract can be seen as a thought exercise in contemplating social and institutional norms which can minimize the threat the other poses to the self. A political community comes into existence only when we are able to blunt and neutralize such threats posed to the self and its interests. Until then, according to Hobbes, we continue to remain in a ‘time of war’ where ‘everyman is enemy to everyman.’ Such an environment is not a society for Hobbes but a state of nature, where the self lives in ‘continual fear’ and in ‘danger’ of a ‘violent death’ in the hands of the other, his enemy.[134]

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[133] Mehta, and Pantham, 10: General Introduction (Pages 45-46).

[134] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Rod Hay (Prepared for the McMaster University Archive), 77.

This portrayal of the 'other' as an enemy or a 'threat' has been borrowed by several political thinkers but its best explication is available in the writings of Carl Schmitt and his text *The Concept of the Political*. In this work, Schmitt's identifies the categories of 'friend' and 'enemy' as the 'final distinction' that expresses the characteristic nature of the political. According to Schmitt, while special distinctions like good and evil, beautiful and ugly, profitable and unprofitable establish the characteristic nature of morality, aesthetics and economics respectively, it is the friend-enemy distinction to which all political actions and motives can be reduced to. Schmitt notes that it is not necessary for the political enemy to be 'morally evil' or 'aesthetically ugly' or even appear as an 'economic competitor.' Instead, what constitutes the enemy in the political is his 'otherness.' Schmitt writes that for one to be perceived as an enemy, it is only required that he is seen as 'the other, the stranger.' He further writes, to become the enemy or the other it is sufficient that 'for his nature that he is, in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible.'[135]

It appears both Gandhi and Savarkar realized during their early years of political activism that politics in India was not a matter concerned with unencumbered individuals. Rather, political activity belonged to the domain of culturally situated selves, a consequence of the numerous religious and caste communities that existed in the country. And it is through these religious and social markers that Indians negotiated their Indianness, without which they found it difficult to maintain a shared history and a sense of community. And for both these thinkers, a political

[135] Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (University of Chicago Press, 2007), 24–28.

project that did not take into account their historical and cultural embeddedness would be doomed to fail. Yet, they maintained contrasting outlooks when it came to accommodating history and culture that was alien or different from one's own. Their approach to the 'other' was strikingly divergent.

It was during his time in London between 1906 and 1910, when the Home Rule movement was at its peak in India, that Savarkar began seriously meditating on the idea of being a Hindu in the soon to be self-governing Indian nation. But his articulation of the relationship between the two ideas emerge only in his much later political tract *Hindutva*. Originally published in 1923 with the title 'A Maratha' during his prison term in Ratnagiri, the text also serves as his most evolved articulation of the self, the other and their role in the making of a nation.[136] Savarkar's main task in this text is to point out to the readers what it means to be a 'Hindu.' And his conception of the self is ultimately reflective of the sources of identity that he finds essential to his idea of a Hindu.

To make his point, Savarkar finds it important to move away from conflating his idea of the Hindu self with a conventional understanding of Hindu as an individual who subscribes to the religion of Hinduism. Instead, in this text, he relies on terms like 'Hindutva', 'Hindudom' and 'Hinduness' that are more seeped in history and culture, as opposed to ethics and religion, to denote what makes one a Hindu. For Savarkar, the self is a product of the history it finds itself in. And it is this history, the self is intertwined with, that provides it with an identity. Savarkar uses the term history in a much broader sense and includes not only shared customs and traditions but

[136] Sampath, *Savarkar: Echoes from a Forgotten Past, 1883–1924*, 470.

also 'bonds of common blood' that evolved over centuries as a result of intermingling of people within a particular geographic terrain.

The consequence of conceptualizing the idea of the Indian self as something that has evolved out of a particular history, which is closely tied to a specific culture, geography and kinship, is that it denotes whatever is excluded from this history as non-Indian. And, it is only the original predominantly Hindu cultural communities that populated the geographic terrains of the Indian subcontinent that met Savarkar's filter for Indianness. All 'foreigners' and 'migrants' who had, over the years, moved and settled in the subcontinent were excluded from Savarkar's conception of the Indian community because most of them did not have any shared history with the Hindus, the original inhabitants of India, and hence could not be deemed Indian according to Savarkar. And it is these excluded people that represented the 'other' in Savarkar's framework of community.

Savarkar considered the other, which comprised predominantly of the Muslims and English who came to and settled in India since the advent of the Mughals and later following the East India company's Indian excursions, as significant for the making of a united Indian community. For Savarkar, the presence of the other provided the opportunity for Indians to come to terms with their 'national consciousness' when the Hindu self recognizes that they have 'nothing in common' with the other. Despite the internal differences within the Hindu self that permeated different regions of the subcontinent, the presence of the other provided an opportunity for the Hindu selves to come together and 'bitterly resist' the 'foe' while recognizing the shared things Indians 'admired' and 'recognized' in themselves.[137] After all, 'nothing makes [the] self

[137] Vinayak Savarkar, *Hindutva* (Hindi Sahitya Sadan, 2017), 37.

conscious of itself so much as a conflict with non-self.'[138] Reiterating a view of the political that is reminiscent of Schmitt, Savarkar goes onto identify this other as 'enemies' and writes that the 'foe' has 'nothing in common' with the Hindu self and must be separated from Indians by drawing 'a line of demarcation between us and the foreigners.' And he goes onto write, 'Nothing can weld peoples into a nation and nations into a state as the pressure of a common foe. Hatred separates as well as unites.'[139]

It is clear from his writings that Savarkar is mainly addressing the majority Hindu community in early 20th Century India and the text is his attempt to inculcate a spirit of national unity among this majority. And such spirit of community and brotherhood, for Savarkar, could only be realized when the Hindu majority takes pride in their identity and appreciate their Hindu-ness. Hindus, for Savarkar, are not just tied together by the love they share toward the 'fatherland' or by 'common blood' that runs through them but, more importantly, by the 'common homage' Hindus pay towards their 'great civilization' i.e. the 'Hindu culture' which has been carried forward since ancient times.[140] Indians, are hence, dutifully bound to appreciate and recognize the supremacy of the Hindu civilization in their land and non-Hindus, the minorities in the country who belonged to other cultural traditions, were to shed their religious and cultural loyalties and consent to their historical Hindu-ness. Community, thus for Savarkar, was to be to be built by excluding this otherness – the religious and cultural loyalties that would differentiate

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[138] Savarkar, 52.

[139] Savarkar, 53.

[140] Savarkar, 97–102.

the other from the majority Hindu self in the newfound nation. Savarkar strongly believed that accommodating such differences was detrimental to the national project that was taking shape in the early 20th century. According to him, 'everything that is common in us with our enemies weakens our power of opposing them' and referred to principles of universalism and nonviolence that advocated a more inclusive conception of nation or community as 'opiates' that resisted the aggression the self must inculcate towards the other.[141]

In her reading, Mahajan terms Savarkar's attitude towards nation building as that of 'exclusionary majoritarianism', in which the other is defined 'both in cultural and territorial terms' and 'remains excluded.'[142] Like Pantham, she too sees Savarkar's idea of the self and community as 'hostile' to the other and highlights that Savarkar's assimilation of the other into the community takes place by 'negating its differences', without which there exists a 'fundamental incompatibility' between the self and the other in his framework. Savarkar, thus, cannot think of a community or a nation in which 'differences could be accommodated.' Rather, the 'antagonistic other' must be 'excluded' or 'expelled.' The other, within this framework, has no normative value on its own but only a strategic significance of uniting the self, and its extension, the community or nation. In comparison to Savarkar's conception of the self that is dependent on bringing the other into 'hierarchic subordination' for its existence, one can read in Gandhi's writings a view of the self that is more open and inclusive, and is hence not dependent on defining itself by controlling or excluding the other.

[141] Savarkar, 37.

[142] Mahajan, 'From Community to Nation: The Making of the Majority-Minority Framework,' 182.

The Self and the Other in Gandhi's Political Thought

Gandhi's disagreements with Savarkar began during his time in South Africa. Even though the result of the disagreement could be attributed to their two irreconcilable approaches to the role of violence in politics, there existed much deeper fissures between their philosophical outlooks towards the self and the other. Not only was Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* an ideological manoeuvre aimed at countering a view of the self in Savarkar's *1857* that advocated violence and antagonism towards the British, as we have already seen, Gandhi also ensured the text also served as his first meditation on the place of the other in the making of a community. And this becomes more clearer when we look at another event that appears to have inspired this text.

A month before he began writing Hind Swaraj and during his visit to London, Gandhi was invited to speak at a meeting that was held under the auspices of the Hampstead Peace and Arbitration Society. Interestingly, he was requested to speak on the topic 'East and West' and Gandhi aptly titled his speech at the event 'Union of East and West.' Taking English poet Rudyard Kipling's quip that the 'East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet' as his starting point, Gandhi said he considered Kipling's doctrine to be one of 'despair' and called such an outlook 'inconsistent with the evolution of humanity.'[143] He went onto say that it was 'utterly impossible' for him to accept a doctrine of that nature' and suggested the participants at the event to look towards the 'vision' of Tennyson, 'another English poet' who 'foretold the union between the east and the west.'[144]

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[143] Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, ed. Raghavan Iyer (Oxford University Press, USA, 1991), 86.

[144] Gandhi, 87.

For Gandhi, the possibility of the union between the east and the west, the self and the other, was of utmost importance. During the same speech, he said it was this ‘possibility’ of fusion that drove him all the way from India to South Africa. And that it was the realization of such possibilities that ensured people from different cultures coexisted together in many colonial dominions, including India. Gandhi claimed that it was this hope of a union of the self and the other, a peaceful coexistence of different and seemingly contrasting cultural impulses within a community, that provided Gandhi and his compatriots in South Africa with hope and optimism needed to face the ‘great difficulties’ of everyday life. And if he hadn’t believed so or instead agreed with Kipling, Gandhi claimed he would ‘never have lived’ in a place like South Africa. Gandhi, over the course of the speech, takes forward this idea of the ‘unity of the East and the West’ and said,

‘There has been individual instances of English and Indian people living together under the same rule without a jarring note, and what was true of individuals could be made true of nations…[while] it was true that there was no meeting place between civilizations...the barriers are daily vanishing.’

And within a month of this meditation on the relationship between the East and the West, Gandhi penned *Hind Swaraj*.

For an untrained reader, the text may come across as a damning condemnation of the west, despite all this talk of Gandhi’s belief in the unity of the east and the west. However, as we go back to the context we had touched upon in the previous sections, one may be able to recognize that this condemnation is not absolute. As already seen, while writing *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi seems to have deliberately avoided the opportunity to valorise the indigenous Indian culture at the expense of an alien culture, in this case the British, despite there being calls to establish the

‘authenticity’ of Indian nationalism. Instead of articulating a statement of ‘authentic’ Indianness in Hind Swaraj that valorised the self at the expense of the other, Gandhi wants to highlight to the readers the ethical and moral sources available within both the Indian and Western civilization as a means to critique the ills of ‘modern civilization’, of which British Imperialism was just one among the many manifestations. Instead of insulting the British, Gandhi deliberately relied on blanket terms like the ‘west’ and ‘modern civilization’ as the targets of his criticism, while at the same time maintaining enough caution to also point out how the ‘other west’ i.e. the critical other of the west, was always present within itself as its moral anchor. Such caution ensured that Gandhi’s critique of the west was never totalizing in its nature. As a result, even though Gandhi had no qualms in referring to the west as ‘evil’ or ‘satanic’ as part of his polemics, his respect for the west meant that his criticism and rejection of the west were never absolute. And he strongly believed that India could learn from an engagement with this other west, a view he held onto throughout his life.

A similar outlook that advocated an engagement, rather than detachment, with the ‘other,’ is also evident in Gandhi’s adoption of autobiography as a literary form to tell the story of his self. As Parekh noted, Gandhi’s autobiography upheld a view of life that ‘welcomed’ aspects of modernity even though he was untiring in his criticisms of what he referred to as the ‘modern civilization.’ Through these efforts, perhaps Gandhi was signalling to his contemporaries, not just in India but across all cultures and civilizations, a way of being and living that prioritized openness and engagement with what may seem alien to it. Unlike Savarkar’s idea of the relationship between the self and the other which was primarily antagonistic and exclusionary in nature, it is already evident in the symbolic gestures available from the form and contents of his

texts that for Gandhi, the self and the other must engage and inculcate a relationship that is more inclusive in nature, a view of coexistence where the self and the community was accommodative rather than dismissive of the other.

Thus, in contrast to Savarkar, the ‘other’ in Gandhi’s philosophical outlook was not to be perceived as being threatening or hostile to the wellbeing of the self. For Gandhi, the other was constitutive and indispensable to any conception of community and it entailed within it a normative value. Firstly, it was only by engaging with the other that the self was able to introspect and reflect critically on its own nature. For Gandhi, a nation that was devoid of the other and wholly comprised of the Hindu self, as in Savarkar’s case, could offer no real awareness of what it means to be a Hindu. Reflections on the self, independent of the critical other, was meaningless. But beyond these opportunities for self-reflection and developing a deeper awareness of one’s own identity, Gandhi was also fulfilling a second, and more important, purpose by accommodating the other and positioning it as an indispensable element in his idea of community.

In the concluding sections of the previous chapter, we touched upon how, to really grasp the significance of Gandhi’s political thinking, it is necessary to situate his political thought as an attempt to counter certain fundamental assumptions in politics that takes violence as a constitutive feature of the political. And Gandhi’s political project needs to be understood within this backdrop of conceptualizing a nonviolent political order, grounded in an idea of the self and its responsibilities towards the community as opposed to the sovereign and its promise of security. In the latter view of politics that is dependent on the sovereign, the assumption is that

the ‘other’ is something from which the self requires protection, a threat that needs to be countered. And even in those theorizations of politics that are less critical of the other, as found in the liberal political theories of John Locke or John Stuart Mill, the other, though not a threat, is still insignificant for the self and its goals. The self may go on and live a fulfilling life without ever caring to engage with the other. But unlike these theorizations of political community where the other has no significance for the making of the community, except for being a threat, Gandhi’s idea of community stresses on a constructive engagement with the other. The self, in Gandhi’s political thought, is not only responsible for its own wellbeing but also for the wellbeing of the other. The values and practices of the Gandhian self must be sensitive and protective of the concerns of the other. Thus, nonviolent politics by its nature, for Gandhi, must contribute to and devise avenues to further a meaningful engagement between the self and the other, and not exacerbate its differences, both within and beyond a nation. Without the other, there could be no politics of nonviolence in its truest sense. And Gandhi felt it was his constructive program rather than his anti-colonial political activism that best represented the real nature of such nonviolent politics.

Unlike his time in South Africa where his political activism was primarily concerned with securing the wellbeing of Indians in the face of Empire’s discrimination, Gandhi’s politics in India was underpinned by different considerations. While the structures of domination in South Africa was primarily experienced by Gandhi as an imposition of colonial authority, Gandhi felt the social conditions in India were conducive to generating alternative structures of domination in addition to that of British colonialism. He sensed that the increasingly strained relationship between the majority Hindu community and the minority Muslims as well as the continued

practice of untouchability among the dominant Hindu communities were the more significant, if not equally important, challenges in addition to British colonialism that his politics must counter if it was to really emancipate India. Being a proud Hindu himself, once back in India, he was forced to reflect deeply on his identity, but this time not as the oppressed Indian in South Africa, but as an oppressor of the Dalits and Muslims in India. This realization is important because it required him to reflect on his political project from an altogether different vantage point, of being part of a 'majority' in a community that was capable of inflicting violence against its minorities.

The nonviolent political project that he had nurtured over the course of two decades in South Africa had to be revitalized to meet the demands of this complicated political environment, where the victims of colonial violence were in turn perpetrating violence towards the other in their own communities. And Gandhi felt that the nationalist project taking shape in the subcontinent was incapable of addressing this potentially violent and growing divide, between Hindus and Muslims and between Hindus and Dalits. After all, the idea of representative democracy was in itself, Gandhi strongly believed, seeped in a preferential treatment of the majority over the minority. This realization forced him to shift the focus of his ideological project from being a mere politics of nonviolence that is focused on minimizing violence in politics to a larger project of conceptualizing norms and establishing practices that promoted a nonviolent political order that was particularly sensitive to concerns of the other, the Muslim and the Dalits in India.

In 1941, more than two and a half decades after his involvement in the Indian national movement, Gandhi compiled a small pamphlet titled *Constructive Programme - Its meaning and*

place to outline what he considered important to achieving freedom in modern India. Though he wrote in the pamphlet that the items have ‘not been arranged in any order’, it is not surprising that Gandhi identified ‘communal unity’ and ‘abolition of untouchability’ as the first two essential tasks in his list of 18 items to attain freedom or ‘purna Swaraj.’ And any serious reader of Gandhi can appreciate his genuine concern for these causes. This outlook came from his deeper belief, as he had outlined in the same pamphlet, that suggests ‘complete independence through truth and nonviolence means the independence of every unit, be it the humblest of the nation, without distinction of race, colour or creed.’[145] And he stressed that such independence is ‘never exclusive’ and is only compatible with ‘interdependence.’[146] True nonviolent politics, thus, was inherently contradictory to any conception of the self and community that is ‘exclusive’ or self-sufficient in its relationship with the other. The self, in Gandhi’s nonviolent scheme, is as interdependent as the other. And he realized that rather than being the source of threat for the self, it was the other that was likely to be the ‘humblest of the nation’ primarily as a consequence of their social location within a political community that is dominated by self or the majority.

The Social Responsibility of the Self

After his return to India in 1915, Gandhi was instrumental in ensuring that the Non-cooperation movement also accommodated the concerns of the Indian Muslims and, as a result, the pan-Islamic Khilafat movement and the protest against the sanctions against the Ottoman Caliphate

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[145] Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Constructive Programme-Its Meaning and Place* (Prabhat Prakashan, 1945), 5.

[146] Gandhi, 5.

became one of the cornerstones of Gandhi's political campaigns during the Non-cooperation movement. Gandhi, thus, played a significant role in bringing about an alliance between the leaders of the Indian National Congress and the Khilafat leaders by appealing to their mutual interests, and his leadership role during the Khilafat and Non-cooperation movement can be considered as his first major attempt to unite the increasingly distant majority Hindu and minority Muslim communities in India, an endeavour which he would himself, three decades later, deem a 'failure' in the face of religious violence during the country's partition.

For Gandhi, the term 'unity' did not mean 'political unity', which he felt could be 'imposed' from the outside by institutions and legislations. And he saw the offer of the 'separate electorates' by the British as an example of such an imposition from the outside. Gandhi believed the separate electorates created 'artificial incompatibilities' and 'living unity', as opposed to political unity, 'can never come out of these artificial entities.'[147] For Gandhi, mechanisms like the separate electorate and the accompanying politics can 'only be a platform for wrangling and sharing the crumbs of power that may fall from rulers, whoever they may be.'[148] Instead of such political unity, what Gandhi was after was an 'unbreakable heart unity' of the majority and the minority, or as he said, between 'every Hindu and non-Hindu.'[149] And he believed the onus was on the majority within a community to create a conducive environment where the minorities felt safe and secure to not be dependent on 'artificial' institutions and parliamentary politics to

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[147] Gandhi, 8.

[148] Gandhi, 8.

[149] Gandhi, 7.

safeguard their concerns. As a result, and as Gandhi wrote in *Constructive Programme*, it was essential that people cultivated 'personal friendship with persons representing faith other than his own' and maintain 'same regard for the other faiths as he has for his own.'[150] Without such an attitude, he felt, it was impossible for the majority Hindu self to express to the minority other that it truly respects and cares for their wellbeing, which only, in turn, could lead to religious and social harmony in the country.

Gandhi believed that all his politics was directed towards establishing this social harmony. A few years after the Khilafat movement, he confessed, 'I am striving to become the best cement between the two [Hindu and Muslim] communities. My longing is to be able to cement the two with my blood, if necessary. But, before I can do so, I must prove to the Mussalmans that I love them as well as I love the Hindus.'[151] And to move towards this nonviolent order of religious and social harmony, he strenuously advocated a view of community or nation where the other, as much as the self, had the 'same right of self-determination.' He writes, 'From Cape Comorin to Kashmir and from Karachi to Dibrugarh in Assam, all Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, and Jews, who people this vast subcontinent and who have adopted it as their dear motherland, have an equal right to it. No one has right to say that it belongs to the majority community and the minority community can only remain as the underdog.'[152] Unlike Savarkar, who considered those foreigners who migrated to India as non-Hindus and hence non-Indians, Gandhi, since his

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[150] Gandhi, 4.

[151] Young India, 10th December 1939.

[152] Abdul Waheed Khan, *India Wins Freedom: The Other Side* (Pakistan Educational Publishers, 1961), 189.

early years while writing *Hind Swaraj*, maintained that 'India cannot cease to be one nation because people belonging to different religions live in it.' And it is almost as if he anticipates Savarkar's claims of Hindutva even while he was writing Hind Swaraj in 1909. Gandhi goes onto write,

'The introduction of foreigners [i.e., Muslims] does not necessarily destroy the nation; they merge in it. ... That country must have a faculty for assimilation. India has ever been such a country. In reality, there are as many religions as there are individuals; but those who are conscious of the spirit of nationality do not interfere in one another's religion. If they do, they are not fit to be considered a nation. If the Hindus believe that India should be peopled only by Hindus, they are living in dreamland. The Hindus, the Mahomedans, the Parsis and the Christians who have made India their country are fellow 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.'[153]

All through his life, Gandhi remained adamant that India was, and should remain, a religious and culturally diverse community and often compared it to a 'joint family' where all members had a claim to address their grievances. In the midst of the partition riots, and a few months before his assassination, he pleaded with his compatriots to not overlook the concerns and interests of the minorities and wrote,

'If the minority in India ... is made to feel small, I can only say that this India is not the India of my dreams. In the India of whose fashioning I have worked all my life, every man enjoys equality of status whatever his religion is ... What I wish India to do is to assure liberty of religious profession to every single individual. Then only India can be great, for it is perhaps the one nation in the ancient world which has recognized cultural democracy, whereby it is held that the roads to God are many, but the goal is one, because God is one and the same.'[154]

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[153] Gandhi, *Gandhi:'Hind Swaraj'and Other Writings*, 52.

[154] https://www.mkgandhi.org/g_communal/chap28.htm

Unlike Savarkar, for whom it was only the non-Hindu who constituted the 'other', Gandhi also considered the Dalits or 'untouchables' as the 'other' to the Hindu self, in addition to other religious minorities. And just as much as he advocated for the protection and safeguarding of the wellbeing of minorities, he also campaigned for the abolition of untouchability and the upliftment of the untouchables, who he referred to as 'Harijans.' In fact, one wouldn't be entirely wrong to include the untouchables as well other religious minorities within Gandhi's idea of the 'other.' This is because, for Gandhi, what fundamentally characterized the other in the Indian context was a certain vulnerability to violence due to their lack of power and agency, which could be the result of historical, institutional and social exclusion as in the case of the untouchables or the consequence of being socially and politically underrepresented as in the case of Muslims.

Thus, Gandhi understood the terms 'majority' and 'minority' not merely as categories of classification that he relied on to distinguish different religious or cultural communities based on their relative numerical strength in the country. Rather, through these terms, Gandhi was constructing a philosophy of responsibility which he would go on to place at the centre of his critical theory.[155] Rather than associating these terms with numerical strength, as is often done in representative democracies, Gandhi believed that these terms were loaded with ethical overtones and relied on them to make the self aware of the nature of its situatedness within the social milieu of the country. This is because only when the self is sensitive to its subject-position within the larger socioeconomic and political community can it determine the exact attitude it must

[155] For more on this, see Chapter 5, section 'The Ideology of Nonviolence.'

maintain towards power and injustice in society. The vantage point of the situated self thus nurtures the critical theory that the self would rely on to bring about a positive change in the community. Ethics and politics could not be based on a one-size-fits-all approach when it came to a religious and culturally diverse country like India where power was skewed towards communities that not only maintained a numerical but also a socio-economic advantage.

Majority, for Gandhi, when seen from this point of view represented a term that denoted not the numerical strength but a location with the Indian social structure that provided them with power and privileges that were not available to the other. Thus, for Gandhi, the dominant Hindu community best represented the term majority not only because they were numerically superior to Muslims but also because the community in general were socio-economically more privileged than the Muslim community. In a similar vein, Gandhi also considered both the Dalit community as well as the poor or the economically weaker sections of the Indian society as 'minority' primarily due to their vulnerable position within the Indian social milieu. This meant the dominant majority Hindu community was not only responsible for the protection and wellbeing of the Muslims but also the Dalit and the poor in the country. By virtue of being part of a majority i.e. as someone who had inherited power, wealth and social privilege, the self was obligated to use that power to rid the Indian society of all forms of injustice and violence that threatened the wellbeing of the other. With the power of being part of a majority came the responsibilities of ensuring a fair and equal society for the minority and the less privileged. And the onus for bringing about this change was not fairly distributed but skewed towards the self or the majority. This, Gandhi considered to be the social responsibility of the self.

Conclusion

In his writings, political theorist Dennis Dalton pointed out that Gandhi's originality as a political thinker and leader had something to do with the way Gandhi 'forged connections, in theory and in practice,' among political ideas like civic duty, freedom and nonviolence. He pointed out that Gandhi 'usually connected these ideas' to another concept called 'responsibility', a form of 'social obligation to improve society' through nonviolent means.[156] However, the idea of responsibility in Gandhi has received a comparatively lesser focus in comparison to other Gandhian ideas and Dalton highlighted that the concept requires 'more clarification and development' to really highlight the centrality of responsibility in Gandhi's political thought.

This chapter has set the stage for introducing the significance of responsibility in Gandhi's political thought. As we have seen, when Gandhi is read alongside a contemporary of his like Savarkar, we are able to gather a much more clearer view of what he was doing in writing a text like *Hind Swaraj* or *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. A contextual approach to these texts show us that the underlying ideological manoeuvre that motivated Gandhi to write these texts appears to be his need to articulate a more inclusive idea of the self and community that strongly resisted the exclusivist attitude that dominated Savarkar's outlook. Yet, in doing this, Gandhi also succeeded in resisting a conception of the political that was grounded in a view of the 'other' as either antagonistic or indifferent to the pursuits of the self. Instead, in constructing a nonviolent political, Gandhi made the 'other' indispensable by suggesting that the self's moral

[156] Dennis Dalton, *Mahatma Gandhi: Nonviolent Power in Action* (Columbia University Press, 2012), Introduction.

worth is tied to its fulfilment of responsibilities towards the other, the minority and the poor in a society. Gandhi's political philosophy, during his time in India, thus moved its gaze inwards, towards the self and the community, and worked to instil in the majority a spirit of social responsibility that would motivate them to ensure the minorities were treated with dignity, and were extended the same care and affection which one would extend to the members of one's own family. And he achieved this by articulating an idea of a socially responsible self.

Matters concerning the sources of the self were constantly attended to by both Gandhi and Savarkar in their writings. In fact, Savarkar's idea of Hindutva must be seen as his attempt to articulate a theory of the selfhood that evoked its identity from history, culture and kinship limited to a particular geography. But while doing this, Savarkar also reiterated the modern tropes that had dominated political thinking since Hobbes, and like Schmitt, pushed it to an extreme by characterizing the other as hostile and antagonistic to the other. In contrast, Gandhi's pursuit of a nonviolent political provided him an alternative framework to conceptualize the self and trace its roots to moral and ethical sources that is invoked during the self's engagement with the other. Rather than history and culture, the Gandhian self evoked its identity from an ethics of responsibility that the self was obligated to carry out by virtue of its subject-location, its situatedness in an inclusive and diverse community. The task of politics, for Gandhi, thus became the cultivation of this responsible self. The three subsequent chapters of this study will situate Gandhi and his ideas, namely swaraj, satya and ahimsa, within the backdrop of his attempt to cultivate this ethics of a socially responsible self.

Chapter 3

Swaraj and the Ethics of Social Responsibility

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we introduced the centrality of responsibility in Gandhi's political thought. By relying on a contextual reading of Gandhi's texts like *Hind Swaraj* or *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* we have seen how Gandhi used these texts to articulate an inclusive idea of the self and community in modern India, while also resisting a conception of the 'other' as antagonistic to the concerns of the self in political theory. Gandhi's idea of responsibility instead made the wellbeing of this 'other' indispensable to the pursuit of the self, and stressed on the spirit of social responsibility, especially towards the minority and the poor in society, as the foundation of his political philosophy. But what exactly constitutes this idea of social responsibility in Gandhi's philosophy? What ethical practices does Gandhi have in mind when he hints at the cultivation of a socially responsible self? To answer these questions, it is required of us to interrogate the idea of swaraj in Gandhi's writings. And through our study of this idea, this chapter hopes to reveal, clarify and elaborate on the answers to questions concerning social responsibility in Gandhi's philosophy.

The centrality of freedom was a key characteristic of the various political philosophies articulated in modern India, most of which arose as a response to the devastating realities caused by British colonialism. Political thinkers in modern India were provoked by a necessity of enunciating philosophies of freedom that countered narratives that legitimized imperialism or

colonialism. And in this endeavour to provide a distinctive vocabulary and perspective to articulations of freedom in India, political thinkers in India borrowed the terminology of swaraj from the Indian traditions of thinking about freedom. Armed with a corpus of rich religious traditions that had historically highlighted the significance of spiritual liberation, political philosophies in modern India appropriated spiritual perspectives in their articulations of political freedom. And strands of ideas representative of the Enlightenment tradition, which were colloquially addressed as the 'west', naturally became targets of criticism in such a cultural milieu, even though some of these thinkers also found certain strands of the Enlightenment ideas endearing. But what really stood out in the Indian articulations of freedom or swaraj was the closeness between the spiritual and political realms.

Gandhi's idea of swaraj was only one among the many articulated during that time and age, and in fact stood in opposition to philosophies of freedom formulated by nationalist thinkers like Aurobindo Ghosh, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar and even Gandhi's own handpicked heir, and India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. Gurpreet Mahajan, in her analysis of the idea of freedom in modern India, highlighted that the Indian idea of freedom was not merely concerned with questions of political freedom but also what constitutes moral and spiritual freedom for India and its people. And the dominant answer among thinkers in modern India was to posit swaraj as an idea of attaining this moral and spiritual freedom by being 'true to one's own being.'[157] One of the ideas of swaraj, articulated by thinkers like Vivekananda and Aurobindo, stressed on 'abandoning western influences' in order to be true to oneself, thus

[157] Gurpreet Mahajan, *India: Political Ideas and the Making of a Democratic Discourse* (Zed Books Ltd., 2013), 45.

leading to conceptualization of their idea of swadeshi. This notion of swadeshi was less concerned with the ethical domain and focused more on articulating the economic and political concerns associated with swaraj. In contrast, Mahajan suggests that thinkers like Gandhi and Tagore were more concerned with the moral and ethical dimensions of swadeshi and swaraj.

The main argument this chapter intends to put forth is that to better understand Gandhi's idea of swaraj, we need to shift the frame of reference from reading it as an articulation of freedom to that of social responsibility. The chapter reiterates the assumption that duty or responsibility constitutes the central motif that not only runs through Gandhi's idea of swaraj but also his broader political philosophy. To do this, the chapter undertakes a close reading of *Hind Swaraj*, a text written by Gandhi in November 1909 as a response to the then rising revolutionary school of violence, and subsequently conducts a genealogy of some of the central ideas expressed in this text. *Hind Swaraj* has, over the years, gone onto achieve a canonical status in the study of Indian political thought and is often considered to be an important work that articulates Gandhi's idea of swaraj. And keeping in mind the purpose of this chapter, the text is indispensable as it features the most coherent articulation of Gandhi's idea of duty or responsibility that goes onto inform and underscore Gandhi's political philosophy in the later years. A close reading of this text also throws light on Gandhi's idea of swaraj in comparison to other dominant conceptions of swaraj that dominated the Indian consciousness around that time. Finally, perhaps nowhere else has Gandhi so well outlined and highlighted the intricate relationship between his ideas of swaraj, duty, satyagraha and swadeshi, which makes it all the more important for us to trace our investigation of swaraj back to this text.

In the initial sections of the chapter, following a close reading of *Hind Swaraj*, we will make a broader claim that Gandhi's attempt at formulating swaraj as performing our duties or social responsibilities was an ideological manoeuvre to counter the then dominant understandings of political responsibility and religious duty found in the writings of Gandhi's contemporary and revolutionary Vinayak Savarkar.[158] We will see that Gandhi specifically highlights two duties (satyagraha and swadeshi) one must fulfil to attain swaraj, thus positing alternative conceptions of political and religious duty that stands in contrast to Savarkar's ideas. The chapter then delves into what constitutes these Gandhian duties and will propose to read these ideas as being based on two specific ethical outlooks that are central to Gandhi's political thought. The first concerns our responsibility to the community which we fulfil by engaging in a radical criticism of the society we are part of, an ethic of good citizenship that Gandhi identifies in his reading of Plato's *Apology*, Giuseppe Mazzini's *Duties of Man* and John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*. The second strand of responsibility, the prioritization of means over ends, has a complicated legacy and goes back to the influences Socrates and Thomas Carlyle left on Gandhi's thought.

But before we begin our detailed discussion into the different arguments of the chapter, it is important to clarify at this stage that the core argument advocated in the chapter i.e. to read Gandhi and his idea of swaraj within a framework of responsibility, is not a novel proposition and several interpreters of Gandhi have proposed such a reading in the past. In this sense, the chapter only hopes to add to this rich discourse already established by several thinkers in the past. However, in this effort to clarify, critique and reinterpret existing concerns raised by these

[158] In the previous chapter, we had already touched upon the point that *Hind Swaraj* can be seen as Gandhi's opening salvo against the ideas Savarkar popularized in his text 1857. But unlike the last chapter, this chapter undertakes a deeper engagement with the concepts and ideas Savarkar relied on while articulating his view in 1857, thus helping us better grasp Gandhi's counter-concepts and ideas, including swaraj.

interpreters, the chapter intends to uncover new insights related to our understanding of swaraj as well as our study of Gandhi's political philosophy. The chapter, through a genealogical survey of swaraj and the associated concepts, thus, shows that though swaraj in modern India is often understood to be synonymous to and placed alongside political ideas like freedom, self-rule etc., Gandhi's conception of swaraj requires us to shift the frame of reference away from these. Instead, Gandhi's usage of swaraj comes most close to his articulation of a philosophy of responsible citizenship that is primarily concerned with ethical directives that inform our public action.

Responsibility as the Central Concern in Gandhi's Political Thought

In the preface to *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi writes that the ideas presented in the text are 'mine, but not mine' and that he makes no claim to 'originality.' He goes onto say that the text is a product of reflections formed after reading 'several books.' Gandhi writes, in the beginning of this text, 'Indians seem to be eager to acquire rights' and concludes by stressing on the significance of duties. In the final section of this text, he repeats the key ideas in the form of the following four points.[159]

1. Real swaraj is self-rule or self-control.
2. The way to it is satyagraha: that is soul-force or love-force.
3. In order to exert this force, swadeshi in every sense is necessary.
4. What we want to do should be done, not because we object to the English or because we want to retaliate, but because it is our duty to do so.

[159] Mahatma Gandhi, *Gandhi:'Hind Swaraj'and Other Writings*, ed. Anthony J Parel (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 118.

Political theorist Dennis Dalton has referred to the above as ‘Gandhi sutras’ because it is ‘condensed with [the] meaning’ of Gandhi’s philosophy.[160] For Dalton, the above formulation is loaded with key ideas of Gandhi’s moral and political thought and he identified the above as Gandhi’s attempt to make a connection between the concepts of swaraj, duty, satyagraha and swadeshi. In fact, several early theorists like Raghavan Iyer and Thomas Pantham, have previously made a connection between swaraj and duty in their writings. For this early tradition of Gandhi’s interpreters, where one may add Dalton in addition to Iyer and Pantham, Gandhi’s idea of swaraj carried within it a ‘notion of obligation to others, as well as to oneself’ but at the same time ‘retaining the element of voluntariness’ that they termed the ‘very basis of freedom.’[161] Thus, for Iyer, Gandhi’s idea of self-rule is the ‘voluntary internalization of our obligation to others which will be obstructed by our placing ourselves at the mercy of our selfish desires.’[162] And in a similar way, these early theorists of Gandhian thought pointed out this intertwining of freedom and obligation or duty in Gandhi’s moral and political thinking. More recently, Mahajan, in her analysis of Gandhian idea of freedom articulates a similar concern as expressed by thinkers like Iyer, Pantham and Dalton. In her analysis, swaraj, for Gandhi, requires us to act in a ‘responsible way’ voluntarily.[163] This can only be done when we are capable of ‘recalling the other to one’s own moral psyche’, thus recognizing ‘what one owes to other.’

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[160] Dennis Dalton, “Gandhi on Freedom, Rights and Responsibility,” vol. 30, 1998.

[161] Thomas Pantham, “Thinking with Mahatma Gandhi: Beyond Liberal Democracy,” *Political Theory* 11, no. 2 (1983): 165–88.

[162] Raghavan Iyer, “The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi,” 2000, 172.

[163] Mahajan, *India: Political Ideas and the Making of a Democratic Discourse*, 50.

Based on the above interpretations, Gandhi's idea of swaraj appears to be closer to Berlin's conception of positive liberty. From the looks of it, Gandhi seems to be more concerned with the question of 'Who governs me' or 'By whom am I ruled' as opposed to problems of 'interference' and its limits. There is also a clear indication that by relying on concepts like duty and the obligation it accompanies, Gandhi's idea of swaraj is very much prone to Berlin's attack on philosophers of positive liberty who bully the self under the 'metaphysical blanket' of freedom, whereas in reality, what is happening is the submission or coercion of the self.[164] And perhaps it must be to save Gandhian ethics from this susceptibility to coercion that subsequent thinkers like Akeel Bilgrami and Uday Singh Mehta proposed swaraj not in terms of the obligations of the self to the other, but as a framework for exploring the relationship means and ends. In this framework, a free action is one that eschews of any trace of 'universality', 'progressive teleology' or 'instrumentality' and is 'contained in the radical singularity of the act itself.'[165]

Dennis Dalton points out in one his essays how Berlin's championing of negative liberty in his 1958 essay is not that different from a defence of rights and liberty in the works of another liberal thinker a century before Berlin.[166] Dalton highlights that Berlin's arguments for negative liberty can still suffer from the same criticisms John Stuart Mill faced in the face of his publication of *On Liberty*, which is that while both Mill and Berlin are 'muscular' in their advocacy for rights and liberties, their conceptions of freedom continue to be 'weak' when it

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[164] Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered before the University of Oxford on 31 October 1958* (Clarendon, 1959).

[165] Uday Singh Mehta, "Gandhi on Democracy, Politics and the Ethics of Everyday Life," *Modern Intellectual History* 7, no. 2 (2010): 355–71.

[166] Dalton, "Gandhi on Freedom, Rights and Responsibility,"

comes to the ideas of 'political obligation' and 'civic responsibility', which are equally important in the making and functioning of a democratic community. Following Mill and Berlin, in Dalton's view, contemporary democracy suffers from a conundrum where more rights to citizens generally leads to 'less legitimization of civic duty and economic equality.' Michael Walzer, in his writings, also evinces a similar critique of this glorification of negative liberty by suggesting that the militant stress on rights and liberties has led to a disintegration of community as it can no more count on the 'responsible participation of its members.'[167] Thus, as theorists like Walzer and Dalton, among others, have pointed out, one of the major problems that our democratic community face today is the lack of an 'ethic of social responsibility.' And Dalton goes onto then propose Gandhi as an original thinker who redefined freedom by linking it to an idea of duty within the framework of social responsibility.

A more recent intervention in reviving the idea of responsibility in Gandhi's political thought is undertaken by Karuna Mantena. Mantena locates Gandhi's conceptualization of nonviolence within an ethical framework of Weberian political responsibility that stems from holding oneself responsible for the consequences arising out one's own political action.[168] Mantena reads Gandhian nonviolence as an expression of this ethic of responsibility, as opposed to an ethic of conviction, that asks of us to take proactive responsibility for the unintended consequences of our action. And by doing this, Mantena feels Gandhi relocates questions concerning 'means' as

[167] Dalton.

[168] Karuna Mantena, "Another Realism: The Politics of Gandhian Nonviolence," *American Political Science Review*, 2012, 455–70.

opposed to those concerning 'ends', to the heart of political action, which she considers to be Gandhi's most important contribution to political theory.

While Mantena correctly identifies the centrality of means over ends in Gandhi's political philosophy, this chapter argues that the repercussions concerning Gandhi's prioritization of means goes beyond the political and is expressive of broader social ethics that guide our action not merely in the political spheres but also in the economic and social arena. Similarly, while the chapter borrows the terminology of 'social responsibility' as what underpins Gandhian swaraj and equates it to the idea of duty in Gandhi as Dalton does, the considerations of the multiple meanings that arise out of our reading of Gandhi in this chapter forces us to differ from Dalton's idea of social responsibility that is primarily focused on obligations and duties towards the 'other,' similar to those found in the writings of Iyer and Pantham. Instead, this chapter traces an alternative genealogy for Gandhian duty.

Gandhi, Savarkar and the Idea of Duty

In the previous chapter, we had already touched upon how situating Gandhi's ideas alongside those of Savarkar helps us better contextualize what Gandhi is doing in writing a text like *Hind Swaraj*. However, we had only undertaken a cursory comparison between these two thinkers and did not engage in detail to highlight how the overlapping of concepts both Gandhi and Savarkar used in their texts can help us further interrogate the contrasting nature of their political philosophies. And to do this, it requires to dive deep into Savarkar's writings, alongside Gandhi's.

In 1908, a year before Gandhi began writing Hind Swaraj, Savarkar had just finished writing his famous treatise on the 1857 Indian mutiny titled *The Indian War of Independence – 1857* and had started delivering lectures based on select chapters from his book as part of the open weekly meetings of Free India Society, a London based revolutionary political organization with close links to India House. In 1909, the book was translated to English and the ideas represented in the book were gathering greater currency especially among the young Indians in London as well as in India. And one cannot ignore the significance of Savarkar's text, not only in relation to Madan Lal Dhingra's assassination of Curzon Wylie, but also in relation to Gandhi and the intellectual trajectory that led to his conceptualization of swaraj.

In one of the articles published in *Talwar*, a publication run by the Abhinav Bharat Society and founded by Savarkar and his brother, Savarkar wrote that the objective behind writing *1857* was to 'inspire' his fellow countrymen to 'rise again' and 'wage a second and successful war' to 'liberate' India from the British. In the same essay, Savarkar points out that the role of historians like him is to 'preach revolutionary gospels' that can capture the imagination of the present that is legitimized by the past, and at the same time provide 'guidance' for the future.[169] The text stands out for highlighting this strategic significance Savarkar owed to reinterpreting India's history or past. As he wrote in the introduction to this text, 'the nation ought to be the master and not the slave of its own history.'[170] The text also positions 'political independence' and 'armed national conflict' as the foundation on which the anti-colonial movement in India must be built.

[169] Vikram Sampath, *Savarkar: Echoes from a Forgotten Past, 1883–1924* (Penguin Random House India Private Limited, 2019), 484.

[170] Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Indian War of Independence, 1857* (Phoenix Publications, Bombay, 1947), Introduction.

But what stands out and remains significant for this particular chapter concerns the language and concepts Savarkar relied on while writing this book. And this chapter suggests the significance of Gandhi's writing of Hind Swaraj can only be captured when we begin to understand his conceptualization of swaraj and its relationship to duty as a direct response to Savarkar's imagination of duty outlined in his text, 1857.

Savarkar identified 'swadharma' and 'swaraj' as the two 'great principles' on which the 1857 revolt was founded.[171] And these two principles represented to him what Indians ought to fight for. According to Savarkar, because Indians are 'embedded in the bone and marrow' with these ideas, it was inevitable that those in the past revolted against the British. And it was time again for Indians to rely on these ideas to arm themselves and fight against the British to finally overthrow them, thus completing the task with which the 1857 mutiny began. Savarkar located the meaning of these terms in the proclamation made by the Emperor of Delhi in 1857 when he made a call for swaraj. According to Savarkar, both swadharma and swaraj referred to a deep urge within Indians to 'protect one's religion and country.'[172] The former specifically referred to one's duty to protect her religion and the latter was concerned with one's duty to protect her country, thus reiterating the significance of both religious as well as political responsibilities for India's freedom struggle.

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[171] Savarkar, 23.

[172] Savarkar, 24.

Savarkar wrote that just as it was the duty of each and every Indian to fight against the British in 1857, it was time again for Indians to fight and overthrow British to protect India and her religion. Savarkar, in 1857, also made an attempt to highlight how the duty to protect one's religion i.e. swadharma or the religious duty, is not in opposition to the duty to protect one's nation i.e. swaraj or the political duty, and that obtaining one without the other was worthless. According to him, 'swaraj without swadharma is despicable and swadharma without swaraj is powerless.'[173] Savarkar outlined the connection between these concepts as one exhibited by the relationship between 'means and ends' and concluded that the right political conduct for the time was to 'rise for swadharma and acquire swaraj.' Thus, at the heart of Savarkar's treatise seems to be the formulation of a new ethic for the modern Indian self, a prescription of two duties that this Indian self was obligated to undertake, one religious in nature and, the other, a political duty. And it is within this political and cultural context that one must read Hind Swaraj and grasp the ideas Gandhi highlighted in the text.

As we have already seen, Gandhi is writing in a specific ideological context when there was an increasing acceptance of revolutionary violence as the way forward for India's independence movement. The originality of Savarkar's *1857* was to counter the then dominant and prevalent political practice of moderation that informed the activities of the Indian National Congress. And for doing this, he relied on a religious and indigenous language of dharma or duty that was alien to the language of the secular moderates at the time. And he went onto refine and redefine concepts like swaraj to suit the needs of the revolutionaries. Gandhi's conceptualization of

[173] Savarkar, 24.

swaraj needs to be seen as his attempt to counter this new ethic for the modern Indian self popularized by Savarkar. This required Gandhi to reformulate concepts like duty and swaraj that Savarkar had used to suit his own ideology of nonviolence. In doing this, Gandhi also defused the politically and religiously charged, and violent, nature of a concept like duty that for Savarkar meant not only the protection of one's country and religion but also an obligation to be part of an armed revolt to end the British rule in India. Instead of the antagonism towards the British that was embedded in Savarkar's usage of these concepts, Gandhi's reconceptualized duty avoided such antagonisms and also rid the concept of the political agendas of the revolutionaries that were gaining currency.

Gandhi, thus, reformulated this important category of duty not as religious and political responsibility that was primarily concerned with fighting the political other i.e. the British, and, instead, brought in dimensions of social responsibility or obligation towards one's own community. Whereas Savarkar attempted to politicize religion by linking political responsibility to protecting not only one's country but also her religion, Gandhi focused his efforts to spiritualize politics by redefining religious duty as being concerned with the well-being of our community. And this reformulated idea of duty as Gandhian social responsibility entailed no specific acts that one must perform towards the 'other' and was more concerned with an individual's general conduct in society.

Finally, locating this text and its ideas as a response to *1857* and Savarkar's revolutionary ideology also explains why Gandhi relied on a range of Western thinkers like Socrates, Ruskin, Mazzini and Carlyle to put across his idea of swaraj. Such a reading helps us understand that

Gandhi's consistent references to Mazzini in *Hind Swaraj*, as well as his strong engagement with Western thinkers during this period, was an attempt to counter and delegitimize Savarkar's ideas, which were significantly influenced by the West, and in particular by Mazzini. Savarkar, since his childhood, considered Mazzini to be his role-model and his political vision borrowed heavily from Mazzini's ideas and political practices.[174] Gandhi's reliance on a very western intellectual genealogy to conceptualize his idea of duty during this time, as shown in the subsequent sections of the chapter, thus needs to be perceived as an ideological response to delegitimize Savarkar's political project as well as his appropriation of Western thinkers like Mazzini.

Locating the Idea of Duty in Gandhi's writings

As we have already seen, Gandhi makes it clear in the preface to *Hind Swaraj* that the ideas represented in this text emerged as a result of his reading and reflection of several books. We are told in *Hind Swaraj* that good civilization is 'that mode of conduct which points to man the path of duty.'[175] He also goes onto say that 'performance of duty and observance of morality are convertible terms', thus indicating an intertwined relationship between duty and morality. In one of his letters to his son Manilal Gandhi written from a Transvaal prison in March 1909, several months before he penned *Hind Swaraj*, he wrote that he 'read a great deal' in the prison and particularly highlighted that he has been reading 'Emerson, Ruskin and Mazzini.'[176] He writes in

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[174] Abhinav Bharat, an organization founded by Savarkar and his brother, was modelled on Mazzini's idea of 'Young Italy' and Mazzini's revolutionary ideas were frequently discussed during the Free India Society lectures in London organized by Savarkar. Later on, Savarkar went onto translate Mazzini's autobiography into Marathi and published it in 1906.

[175] Gandhi, *Gandhi:'Hind Swaraj'and Other Writings*, 78.

[176] Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, 100 Vols*, vol. 10 (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1958), 249.

the letter that all these thinkers ‘confirm the view’ that real education means ‘a knowledge of duty.’

Gandhi was vocal in his preference for duty over rights throughout his life. His most famous remark on the significance of duties came in the short letter he wrote in 1947 to Julian Huxley, then Director General of UNESCO, who had written to Gandhi to share some suggestions for the then upcoming Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In his response, Gandhi wrote to Huxley that in his belief system, inherited from his mother, ‘all rights to be deserved and preserved came from duty well done.’[177] He went onto even claim that ‘the very right to live accrues to us, only when we do the duty of citizenship of the world’ and that this ‘fundamental statement’ was enough to formulate our duties as human beings. He ended the letter to Huxley by concluding that ‘every right’ evolved as a consequence of ‘some corresponding duty to be first performed.’ Such was the centrality of duty in Gandhi’s moral and political outlook that he neglected the concept of rights, which is often seen as the bedrock of freedom in a modern liberal democracy. And the passion and authenticity with which Gandhi argued for duties over rights is somewhat reminiscent of the critique of rights Karl Marx exhibited when he termed modern conception of rights as an instrument that made man into an ‘isolated monad’, withdrawn from the community.

[177] https://plus.google.com/+UNESCO, “Ahmisa (Non-Violence), Gandhi and Global Citizenship Education (GCED),” UNESCO, June 25, 2020, https://en.unesco.org/news/ahmisa-non-violence-gandhi-and-global-citizenship-education-gced.

While we have previously touched upon the illocutionary meanings associated with Gandhi's idea of duty through a contextual reading of Hind Swaraj, a holistic understanding of the term also requires of us to take into account the locutionary meanings associated with the term. To understand this meaning of 'duty' that Gandhi writes is at the core of Gandhian swaraj, it is required of us to go back to the time before Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj*, when he had started articulating certain ideas of duty in his writings. In fact, one can claim that Gandhi does not detail his idea of duty in *Hind Swaraj* precisely because some of his previous writings have been detailed meditations on the idea of duty. And among these writings that came out before *Hind Swaraj* in December 1909, two meditations particularly stand out. The first is his summary of Plato's *Apology* that was serialized in six parts in his journal Indian Opinion between April and May 1908. And the second is his 'paraphrasing' of John Ruskin's book *Unto This Last* titled *Sarvodaya*, that was serialized in nine parts in Indian Opinion between May and July 1908.

The impact Ruskin's *Unto This Last* had on Gandhi's moral and political philosophy is very well known. Gandhi wrote in his autobiography that the book had a profound influence on him and that he decided to change his life 'in accordance with the ideals of the book.' It is even more interesting to note that Gandhi, while introducing *Unto This Last* to the readers of Indian Opinion, wrote of the text as a continuation of Socrates' ideas. He writes,

‘Socrates in Plato’s Apology gives us some idea of our duty as men. And he was as good as his word. I feel that Ruskin’s Unto This Last is an expansion of Socrates’ ideas; he tells us how men in various walks of life should behave if they intend to translate these ideas into action.’[178]

And, within this intellectual legacy of Gandhi’s reading of thinkers like Plato, Ruskin and Mazzini, we will uncover Gandhi’s idea of duty, and, in turn, swaraj. By a close reading of Gandhi’s appropriation of these thinkers, we will see how Gandhi departed from Savarkar’s exclusivist understanding of religious and political duties that was founded on ‘protecting’ India from the British, and how Gandhi redefined the idea of duty within a rubric of ‘social responsibility’, thus putting forward an alternative inclusive social and political ethic for the modern Indian self.

The Political Duty of Satyagraha

Reading Plato’s rendering of Socrates’ apology, Gandhi wrote that he was publishing the same in the Indian Opinion because he considered Socrates to be a role model for its readers and that Indians should ‘learn to live and die like him.’[179] He went onto call Socrates a ‘satyagrahi’, the one who adopted satyagraha ‘against his own people’ and titled his summary of Plato’s *Apology* as *Soldier of Truth*. In a short note that preceded the first part of this summary, Gandhi introduced Socrates to his readers as a ‘reformer’ who strove to ‘cleanse Athens’ by ridding the

[178] Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, 100 Vols*, vol. 8 (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1958), 437.

[179] Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, 100 Vols*, 1958, 10:245.

‘evil that had entered its political life.’ This notion of ‘cleansing’ is substantially explored by Gandhi later in his writings when he writes about his mission of entering the political life as an attempt to ‘purify’ politics. Gandhi was most fascinated by Socrates’ mission in Athens which he felt was to cleanse the political life of its evil. And Gandhi reads *Apology* as Socrates’ determined questioning and criticism of traditional authority, beliefs and values that the Athenian society held at the time.

In Gandhi’s introductory note to *Apology*, he seems to be suggesting that Socrates’s mission carried with it a certain ethical sensibility of responsible citizenship towards his fellow-citizens of Athens by performing an act of social criticism. And it was precisely in this attitude of questioning and criticizing the assumptions of the Athenian society that Gandhi found Socrates embracing satyagraha against his own people, which in turn in Gandhi’s interpretation, helped the Greeks become a glorious civilization. For Gandhi, the idea of duty embedded in Socrates’ actions was to ‘examine’ his community’s ‘shortcomings’ and ‘drawing attention to them.’ Or to put it in Plato’s words, the responsibility of becoming a ‘gadfly’ to stir up the ‘great and noble horse’ which had now become ‘sluggish’, as he writes in Apology.[180]

In addition to Socrates, Gandhi also appears to have been significantly influenced by Mazzini and appropriates the ideas of the Italian nationalist thinker, albeit for a similar reason of his

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[180] Plato and Benjamin Jowlett, *The Complete Works of Plato* (Akasha Publishing, 2008), 167.

embrace of Socrates. Among the many texts Gandhi recommends to the reader in order to further explore ideas outlined in *Hind Swaraj*, one find's Mazzini's short text *Duties of Man*. Gandhi was inspired by Mazzini's vision of freedom and writes about the Socratic responsibility Mazzini exercised towards his own people in Italy. According to Gandhi, Mazzini pointed out to his fellow countrymen that being governed by the 'King of Italy and his henchmen' in the place of a foreign power like Austria is no indicator of freedom for Italy. As Gandhi writes in *Hind Swaraj*, Italy for Mazzini meant the 'whole of the Italian people' and not just a few elites who exercised all the power.[181] In Gandhi's understanding, like Socrates who carried out his responsibility of showing the Athenians their own hypocrisies even at the cost of his own life, Mazzini intended to highlight the fallacy of thinking that assumed the Italians to be free because the Austrian army withdrew from their country, while in actuality, Italy continued to remain in a 'state of slavery.' This recurrence of an ethic of responsible citizenship driven by a critical attitude towards one's own community, to bring attention to the fallacies in one's own conception of freedom and nation or community, beginning from Socrates and later expressed in Mazzini's thought, Gandhi took forward in *Hind Swaraj*. Gandhi, thus began to read into his idea of satyagraha this dimension of social criticism and he formulated this as an important political duty, a social responsibility each and every Indian must maintain towards his community. And unlike Savarkar's conception of political responsibility that relied on taking up arms to protect India from the British, Gandhi advocated a social responsibility that required one to maintain a critical attitude towards her own community, thus examining the community's shortcomings and bringing them to the attention of her country men.

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[181] Gandhi, *Gandhi:'Hind Swaraj'and Other Writings*, 52.

A year before the publication of *Soldier of Truth* in the *Indian Opinion*, Gandhi published a summary of American thinker Henry David Thoreau's famous essay *The duty of civil disobedience*. Based on Gandhi's reading of Thoreau, he considered civil disobedience to be a philosophy of resistance that could not only resist the unjust authority of the state but also the societal injustice. As Gandhi points out in an essay, often times, 'society is as wrong as the government' and Gandhi following Thoreau's theory of civil disobedience endorsed that if a societal norm violated one's conscience, one has an obligation to disobey it.[182] While it is generally assumed that Gandhi located his idea of satyagraha within this tradition of civil disobedience and understood Socrates as its ancient proponent, the concept appears to be much more than an act of civil disobedience.

For Gandhi, satyagraha was not just a responsibility that could be fulfilled by standing up to injustice in society or through a performance of social criticism. Gandhi understood the Socratic ethic embedded in satyagraha also as a mode of fulfilling a deeper ethical commitment, something very fundamental and foundational to Gandhi's moral and political philosophy. By steadfastly sticking to one's own truth or by pursuing her conception of a good life, even if that is in conflict with the majority, one is forced to engage in a dialogue with the 'other', or in this case enter into a dialogue with other conceptions of good life that inhabits one's community or society. By engaging in such dialogue, we are forced to define and redefine our own ends as an

[182] Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, 100 Vols*, 1958, 8:248.

individual or as a community, thus enriching or at least helping us better understand our own self and community. Looking at it from this vantage point, it seems Gandhi's satyagraha has some commonalities with Socratic dialectics in its workings when it comes to resolving a conflict. Perhaps, one wouldn't be even be far off to suggest the act of satyagraha is most close to a process of hermeneutics, of interpreting and reinterpreting the self and the community.

Thus, for Gandhi, satyagraha ultimately was a means, an avenue for public engagement particularly in conditions ridden with conflict or antagonism. It merely served as a condition that provided some possibilities, with no clear end in sight. It provided room for one to enter into a dialogue with the society, whereby one may attempt to negotiate the disagreement, whatever the scope of it. And this possibility, this availability of a means to navigate disagreements with the state, the society or with any form of authority is as important to satyagraha as the performance of social criticism. This sustained effort to enter into a negotiation with the other is of huge significance in Gandhi's thought. There are three reasons for this. The first is that Gandhi considered negotiation to be nonviolent, which he took to be the natural way of life. For Gandhi, nonviolence is something that is embedded in actual history unlike what historians and their narratives make us believe and served as the foundation for his political ideology.[183] Secondly, the process of negotiation is inherently inclusive and involves all parties, if not at least most of the concerned parties. And finally, it is an exercise in the principle of prioritizing means over ends, something the Gandhian idea of swadeshi is also indebted to.

[183] For more on this, see chapter 5 of this study.

Locating Swadeshi in Gandhi's Political Thought

It is not clear whether, at the time of writing *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi's idea of swadeshi had evolved into the full concept that we have come to know of today or even during Gandhi's time in India. A review of Gandhi's writings suggests that his concept of swadeshi between 1907-09 more or less contained within it an understanding of the ideas broadly representative of the intellectual underpinnings that informed the Home Rule movement that emerged in India a few years earlier under the leadership of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Annie Besant and others. But the pivotal role Gandhi's concept of swadeshi took in his philosophy and the significance of Khadi and spinning in his politics emerged post *Hind Swaraj*. Yet, there is enough evidence in his writings to suggest that swadeshi still played a key role and that he understood it differently from the then contemporary understandings of this term.

Gandhi had previously highlighted the interconnectedness between swadeshi and satyagraha in one of his articles in *Indian Opinion*, which was published in January 1909, several months before *Hind Swaraj*. In this article, Gandhi wrote that the word swadeshi did not mean 'merely the use of what is produced in one's own country.'[184] Instead, he elaborated 'a far greater and much more important' meaning and defined swadeshi as the 'reliance on our own strength.'

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[184] Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, 100 Vols*, 1958, 10:142.

Beyond these, Gandhi's references to swadeshi or self-reliance in his early years seem quite limited.[185]

As we have already seen, Gandhi's conceptualization of swaraj as the performance of our duties was an attempt to challenge Savarkar and his revolutionary ideology. And Gandhi's use of swadeshi, within this context, needs to be understood as his way of reclaiming the idea of religious duty from Savarkar, in a way similar to how he used satyagraha to redefine political duty in modern India. Savarkar's originality as an ideologue in early twentieth century in India was his ability to inspire Indians by fusing their religious and political duties. Savarkar's intervention in the Indian national political discourse made it possible to articulate instances of religious valorisation in the past as acts of political resistance against the colonial contamination of India's rich history and culture. Savarkar successfully reframed the duty to protect one's religion as a political duty and identified in such acts not merely political power but also the spirit of nationalism, thus politicizing religion.

For Gandhi, then, the task at hand while conceptualizing his idea of religious duty was two-fold. He not only needed to minimize the exclusivity in the nationalistic spirit Savarkar fostered in his writing, he also needed to counter the politicization of religion that Savarkar had brought about.

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[185] It is important to point out here that conventionally, the term swadeshi in Gandhi's philosophy stands for local self-reliance that stresses on using local knowledge and capabilities. And Gandhi's use of charkha and his insistence of khadi are often viewed as expressions of Gandhian swadeshi outlook. In contrast to this meaning of the term, this chapter is interested in making sense of alternative meanings of the term that emerge from a closer analysis of the early intellectual context around which Gandhi began articulating his idea of swadeshi. And in doing this, this chapter intends to put forward aspects of this idea that have often received lesser attention while studying Gandhi.

In contrast to Savarkar's nationalism, Gandhi intended to spark a spirit of community, which he felt was more inclusive in nature than that of the idea of a nation. And instead of politicizing religion, as Savarkar had done, Gandhi attempted to spiritualize politics. While Savarkar aimed to valorise religious acts as instance of resistance and saw them as being infused with political morality, Gandhi advocated for the performance of political acts infused with religious morality, thus moralizing politics. And in this project of spiritualizing politics and fostering a community spirit, he relied on Ruskin, Mazzini and Carlyle.

The Religious Duty of Swadeshi

Charles Freer Andrews, a long-time associate and a close friend of Gandhi, in his writings introduced the concept of swadeshi as something very 'elemental' in Gandhi's thought. For Andrews, Gandhi understood swadeshi as having the character of a 'religious duty.'[186] According to Andrews, this nature of religious duty in Gandhi's conception of swadeshi is best reflected in his choosing of 'swadeshi' as the subject of his talk at the Christian Missionary Conference in Madras in 1916, when he was asked to address the missionaries there. And in this speech, Gandhi defined swadeshi as 'that spirit within us which restricts us to use and service our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote.'[187] Andrews has written on how this principle of swadeshi went onto influence Gandhi's religious outlook but for our concerns in this chapter, Andrews' reflection on the basic character of swadeshi and its negative tendency to

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[186] Charles F Andrews, *Mahatma Gandhi: His Life and Ideas*, vol. 1428 (Jaico Publishing House, 2005), 63.

[187] Andrews, 65.

'restrict us to the use and service of our immediate surrounding' is of particular importance. In fact, one could say the idea of swadeshi was as basic and significant as the idea of nonviolence in Gandhi's philosophy. And it is interesting that like nonviolence, Gandhi almost ends up defining swadeshi negatively, or if not a negation then at least as an instance of 'restriction.'

Gandhi consciously borrowed the term 'religious duty' from Ruskin's Unto This Last, which for Ruskin, meant the dictates of our own morality as he believed morality to be the essence of all religion. But what Andrews called the 'elemental' idea in Gandhi's swadeshi appears to be a strand of thought that may have been, consciously or unconsciously, absorbed from Carlyle's theory of duty and the idea of community it fosters. This reinterpretation of religious duty as morality arising out of the concern for the wellbeing for one's community made it possible for Gandhi to reconceptualize the idea of religious duty in modern India. However, before we get to Gandhi's appropriation of Ruskin and Carlyle, it is important to discuss Mazzini's conception of duty as both these thinkers were in some ways engaging with Mazzini's ideas.[188]

Mazzini's intention in delivering a speech titled the *Duties of Man*, which then went onto become a short influential text, was to critique the framework of rights that had come to

[188] While Ruskin's idea of duty appears to be building on Mazzini's conception of a protean nature of social responsibility, Carlyle and Mazzini disagreed over the nature of duty itself. Mazzini understood duty to be expansive and accommodative of the collective, and hence tending towards the universal, whereas Carlyle understood duty to be what is achievable within the confines of the self and hence within the realms of the private and the particular. Gandhi, after reading these thinkers and being influenced by their ideas, reconciles the differences between the various strands of duty available in the thought of these three European thinkers.

dominate the European political imagination in 19th Century. Mazzini pointed out the importance of 'mutual responsibility of men' living in a society and argued it is this lack of responsibility that erodes the social net of duty, which according to him, not only supported the society but also limited the wielding of arbitrary power and influence among people.[189] For Mazzini, power and duty are antithetical to each other, devolution of the latter resulted in concentration of the former. And because of this parasitic nature of power feeding off on eroding duties, Mazzini felt it was important for people to be considerate not merely of the social conditions they live in but also be aware of their own position within the society or community.[190] Because, only when people are conscious of the power or influence they wield in society can they actually act responsibly. Responsibility, according to Mazzini, requires us to be aware and educated of the social matrix we are part of. And, in his schema, duty or responsibility is protean in nature, and is determined by our social position and context. As he points out, duty requires us at times to 'die like Socrates' and at other times it asks of us to 'struggle like Washington.'[191] Gandhi imbibed this protean nature of responsibility from Mazzini and later found the most vehement expression of this awareness of social relations and the social responsibility it put on us in the writings of Ruskin.

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[189] Giuseppe Mazzini, *An Essay on the Duties of Man: Addressed to Workingmen* (Funk & Wagnalls, 1892).

[190] Sauro Mattarelli, "Duties and Rights in the Thought of Giuseppe Mazzini," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 13, no. 4 (2008): 480–85.

[191] Giuseppe Mazzini, *The Duties of Man and Other Essays* (Cosimo, Inc., 2005).

Ruskin's *Unto This Last* is a strong statement against what he calls the 'universality of self-interest' which has come to define ethics in modern life. This universality of self-interest, according to Gandhi, in his reading of Ruskin, assumes that the interests of the master and the servant are the same, as if both wanted the same things in life. It takes the 'principle of accumulation of the wealth' as the principle on which people lead their lives.[192] This universalization of self-interest or accumulation of wealth, according to Gandhi, is also the consequence of maintaining a scientific approach to the social world where the aim is to formulate objective or universal principles that explain how society functions. In Gandhi's outlook, this view of the social makes it seem as if man's duty is to pursue happiness which so happens to be attained by pursuing what is in his self-interest, thus legitimizing our endeavours to accumulate wealth as a moral pursuit. This is, according to Ruskin, a corruption of the idea of duty, which at the core of it is the pursuit of a different kind of duty, a 'religious duty', by which he meant the duty that requires us to follow the 'real moral law' or 'morality'. And for Ruskin, morality or the real moral law is not concerned with the pursuit of self-interest or the accumulation of wealth but with the well-being of the community. Religious duty, thus for Gandhi following Ruskin, is to ensure the welfare of one's community.

Like Mazzini who hinted at the protean nature of duty, Ruskin also suggested that our responsibility is often determined by what profession we engage in and used the term

[192] Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, 100 Vols*, 1958, 10:381.

'professional responsibilities' to underscore his idea of duty.[193] For Ruskin, the duties of the lawyer differ from that of the pastor, just as the duties of a soldier differs from that of a physician. And all professions have a responsibility of contributing towards the wellbeing of a community, but perhaps none as much as the merchants. This is because merchants not only provide for the community but also employs a large part of the community. Both Gandhi and Ruskin seem to be suggesting that the merchant, because of his unique position in the society, is very much responsible for his community's wellbeing. However, the way in which the role of the merchant has historically been defined in a community is problematic because unlike other professions, there is no 'sacrifice' built into the morality of the merchant's profession, as in the case of a pastor or a soldier. This leads to a belief that all actions of the merchant should be a reflection of profit or loss. As Gandhi points out in his paraphrasing of Ruskin, 'in true commerce, as in true preaching or true fighting, it is necessary to admit the idea of the occasional voluntary loss.'[194]

Gandhi appears to be in complete agreement with Ruskin's criticism of the merchant and the mercantile economy that perpetrates an attitude that views profit-making as a virtue in society. Following Ruskin, Gandhi claims that a merchant's motive is accepted to be 'wholly personal', and this adversely impacts the wellbeing of the community. Thus, in both Ruskin and Gandhi's social thought, the merchant must hold himself responsible for creating enabling conditions for a

[193] Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and John Ruskin, *Ruskin: Unto His Last: A Paraphrase* (Navajivan Publishing House, 1956).

[194] Gandhi and Ruskin, 24.

just society to thrive. Ultimately, the merchant's function is 'to provide for the nation' and he must hold himself responsible for the 'many lives and hands' that 'falls on him', Gandhi noted pointing out at the large number of workers a merchant employs in the process of production of a commodity.[195] Gandhi advocates the merchant to develop a 'paternal authority and responsibility' whereby he holds himself responsible for the kind of life his workers lead.

Gandhi is well aware that the existing mercantile economy, or what we call capitalism, is not only at odds with the welfare of the community but fundamentally thrives on some people maintaining 'advantage' over others. In his analysis, the lack of responsibility towards the overall wellbeing of the community in mercantilism makes it a means for some to attain a 'legal claim' for maintaining 'power over' others, resulting in poverty or debt on one side and riches or rights on the other. Capitalism, for Gandhi, is rooted in the idea of accumulating wealth and legitimizes extraction and exploitation of the many by the few. It is an 'art of establishing inequality' in Gandhi's understanding.[196] In Gandhi's analysis, mercantilism or capitalism is ultimately a system of 'political diminution', a means for making people powerless. And being part of such system, our task at hand is to make it possible for the powerless to shift from the 'mercantile economy' to 'political economy.' Gandhi, following Ruskin, sees it as our religious duty to attain power to effect this transformation and to bring about a decentralization of power in society.

[195] Gandhi and Ruskin, 27.

[196] Gandhi and Ruskin, 32.

Thus, following Mazzini and Ruskin, Gandhi seems to be suggesting that it is our duty to not only be well-informed of our social standing but also to partake in power negotiations and counter forces that concentrate power in the hands of a few. In this framework, it becomes our responsibility to limit the mercantile economy's power over the people. And this idea of the Gandhian political is inherently at odds with the idea of a social contract that prizes profits and relies on a sovereign that legitimizes the privileges of the many over a few, the rich over the poor or the capitalists over the workers. Whereas the political foundations of the liberal contractarian tradition are founded on an idea of cooperation amongst its various constituents, the making of the political in Gandhian tradition is primarily an act of non-cooperation, another instance of negation or restriction which seems to be a characteristic feature that echoes throughout Gandhi's philosophy. It thrives on self-reliance and an awareness of the self's duty to ensure the overall wellbeing of the community.

Ideologiekritik and Prioritization of Means over Ends

Up until now, it has been argued that our reading of *Hind Swaraj* calls for an understanding of satyagraha and swadeshi as Gandhian duties that can lead us to swaraj. Following his reading of Plato's *Apology*, Gandhi identified satyagraha as a political duty every member of a community must undertake. And we have seen that this political duty requires us to maintain a critical engagement with the society that we are part of in contrast to taking up arms or engaging in violence as Savarkar had advocated. Instead, it calls for a radical criticism that helps us to 'examine' our society's 'shortcomings' by drawing attention to them. In a similar vein, we have also seen that what Gandhi called the 'religious' or 'moral' aspect of swadeshi demands of us to

remain critical of rules and norms in our societies that leads to concentration of power and exploitation. Swadeshi, thus, though driven by a moral duty, demands of us to promote norms that decentralize power from the few to the many and asks of us to engage politically within our community to ensure its well-being. Our religious duty, when seen through this framework, is ultimately the individual's commitment to his community to work towards its welfare. And, both these expressions, the political as well as the religious duties, appears to be laden with what contemporary philosopher Raymond Geuss has termed an attitude of Ideologiekritik, a 'radical criticism of society and criticism of its dominant ideology' to destabilize structures of power and authority through social critique.[197] By asking his countrymen to inculcate this spirit of social criticism, Gandhi successfully countered Savarkar's politicization of religion and instead moralized our political engagements through a vocabulary of religiosity that he borrowed from Ruskin. However, in our discussions, we are yet to touch upon the other 'elemental' idea in swadeshi that Andrews highlighted earlier. We are yet to delve into how the idea of swadeshi, like satyagraha, is also an expression of a much simpler and fundamental idea in Gandhi's thought, which is the prioritization of means over ends.

It is already well known that Carlyle, like Mazzini, influenced Gandhi, especially during the time he wrote *Hind Swaraj*. But, Carlyle's idea of duty differed from that of Mazzini's. The former focused on the self while the latter, as we have seen, stressed on the community. Mazzini believed that Carlyle's idea of duty was best represented in his incomplete novel *Sartor*

[197] Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), Introduction.

Resartus, which was written as a parody of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's life and ideas. Mazzini understood the essence of Carlyle's idea of duty to be 'do the duty which lies nearest to thee', a precept that Mazzini in his analysis of Carlyle locates in the tradition of duty that goes back to German thinker Johan Wolfgang van Goethe.[198] He suggests Carlyle to have maintained a fairly liberal conception of duty and made his criticisms public in a letter to Carlyle, pointing out that duties should focus on the community and not be dependent on the vanities of the self, and criticized Carlyle for maintaining an individual-centric idea of a good life.

It is unclear whether Gandhi read Carlyle's novel or whether he was aware of Mazzini's critique of Carlyle. But, his conceptualization of certain aspects of swadeshi in the later years seem to indicate an attempt on his part to reconcile this nearness or private-ness of duty with the responsibilities towards the community. For Gandhi, the 'first duty' for the individual is the 'service of his immediate neighbour', a view reminiscent of Carlyle's proposition. Gandhi called this the 'law of swadeshi' and considered it to be the duty of every citizen.[199]

As noted earlier in our discussion of satyagraha, Gandhi holds the belief that we are ethically obligated to enter into a negotiation with the other in order to exhaust all the means available with us, before transcending into the realms of non-negotiation or aggression. In a similar vein, the principle of swadeshi can also be considered as an obligation to our context, a commitment to

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[198] Mattarelli, "Duties and Rights in the Thought of Giuseppe Mazzini."

[199] Raghavan Narasimhan Iyer, *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1991), 421.

make the most of what we are given or endowed with, a restriction that forces us to exhaust them before transcending them. As in satyagraha, a similar hermeneutic relationship is at play here when we enter into a negotiation with our context, whether it be our history, religion or our indigenous political and cultural institutions i.e. the tradition to which we belong to. Swadeshi requires of us to enter into a negotiation with our indigenous culture and tradition before denying or abandoning it, and in this way, helps us make the most of, or exhaust, our means. Seen from this light, Gandhi's stress on Indic traditions, from his unshakeable belief in Hinduism to his idea of village republics founded on indigenous economic and political practices, seems to stem out of his commitment to engage with the context and history he is situated in. It does not stem from a reactionary impulse or a romantic idea of a pre-modern past but instead arises out of an ethical outlook that forces him to engage with the means his historical context has provided him with, before transcending them. It makes us more attentive of our immediate surroundings and requires to recognize what we owe to it.

Gandhi, later on in life, went onto define swadeshi as 'the only doctrine consistent with humility and love.'[200] And it is interesting to point out that he referred to the idea of satyagraha in similar terms, as being expressive of humility and love. And this must be so because he sensed the same logic to be at play when it came to both these ideas, which is the prioritization of means over ends. Gandhi perceived a sense of arrogance or anger in our discarding or abandoning of means without any attempts to engage with it. And the idea of negotiation i.e. our engagement with

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[200] Iyer, 417.

other individuals as well as our tradition, is an expression of prioritizing the means we are endowed with. For Gandhi, this signified humility in our engagement with the world. Thus, those acts that are embedded with the spirit of swadeshi are those that are driven by a consideration for means over ends.

Conclusion

Mantena, in her writings on Gandhi, accurately portrayed the idea of swaraj as being isomorphic in nature, in that it extends from the self to the community, and from the village republic to the nation, and from one nation to many nations. And it is this same logic of isomorphism at play in his argument that one cannot be free when others are not. As Gandhi wrote in his conclusion to *Sarvodaya*, 'you do not want swaraj for yourself alone, but for your neighbour too.' And this, he argued, is neither 'metaphysical' nor 'philosophical' but plain 'common-sense.' For Gandhi, the 'good of the individual is contained in the good of all.'[201] The self and the community, in Gandhi's view, does not exist as disconnected and separate entities but are instead to be made and remade through the techniques and practices of the self. As a result, freedom, for both the self and the community, are not to be provided by the sovereign or the political authority. Instead, Gandhi believes, freedom must be found in these practices of the self and should be affirmed in the performance of our duties. True freedom is thus, in the Gandhian framework, synonymous with the performance of our social responsibilities as it is only in carrying out our obligations voluntarily that we become really free. A life without interference that is devoid of any responsibilities cannot lead to swaraj. And swaraj is neither in any way connected to the

[201] Gandhi and Ruskin, *Ruskin: Unto His Last: A Paraphrase*.

discourse of rights that state and its institutions protect. In fact, Gandhi finds both these institutions and the language of rights dispensable to our exercise of swaraj but what is indispensable is the recognition of our duties to the community we belong.

Conceptions of freedom that are reliant on the rights discourse, and the protection of such rights by institutions of authority, while having their advantages lie within the paradigm of violence for Gandhi. This is because the sovereign that establishes and enforces such rights is ultimately, as we have already discussed in the previous chapters, part of a political that is built on violent foundations. This violent foundation does not merely represent the actual means of violence that the sovereign commands but also the immanent propensity for violence that the self can perpetrate against the other or its indifference to the wellbeing of the other, both of which are written into the shaping of the political.

From the above discussions, it is clear that Gandhian swaraj appears to be less concerned with both the conventional ideas of liberty and non-interference that dominates contemporary political theory as well as the conceptions of self-rule and self-government that dominated the minds of several Indian thinkers during the early 20th century. Whereas contemporary debates on freedom are primarily focused on the question 'who governs me?' Gandhi appears to be more interested in making sense of 'what does it mean to be free?' and 'how would such a free being act in society?' And Gandhi's idea of swaraj laid the groundwork for answering these questions. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Gandhi's idea of swaraj had less to do with claims for

India's political independence or attaining freedom from the British. Instead, swaraj, for Gandhi, served as a concept that could help him mediate the demands of social responsibility placed on our everyday action. It is concerned with freedom in that it stresses on the agency of the self and its voluntariness to perform her duties towards her community. And it is concerned with responsibility because the crux of the idea rests on the social obligations of a responsible self. The first of these obligations concerns the self and its responsibility to engage in the practice of Ideologiekritik while the second obligation requires a commitment to negotiation and the prioritization of means over ends.

Writing about Gandhi, James Tully writes that Gandhi's intervention, through his politics, has been to 'reform the idea of citizenship' as being something that is granted to them by the state for their obedience to the sovereign into a more 'dialogic and hermeneutic engagement of intersubjectivity.'[202] Gandhi's formulations of the political and religious duties of the responsible self we have previously discussed in this chapter echoes Tully's sentiment and comes most close to Gandhi's articulation of an idea of 'responsible citizenship' that is independent of state or the sovereign. Gandhi's articulation of swaraj and its manifestations in the acts of ideologiekritik opens us the floor for questions concerning legitimacy and justification, without which the self is forced to call out the wrongs, as a satyagrahi, like Socrates. In a similar vein, by stressing on the prioritization of swadeshi sentiment, Gandhi wants us to pay heed to our immediate surroundings and care for the wellbeing of those within our community. Prioritization of means over ends and the underlying attitude of Swadeshi asks us to pay attention to what is already present and what

[202] James Tully, "The Crisis of Global Citizenship," *Radical Politics Today*, 2009, 1–31.

can be sought and attended to within our horizons before transcending them. Thus, by building into swaraj these important practices of satyagraha and swadeshi, Gandhi can be seen to have seriously put a check on power and its unjust imposition without due justifications and negotiations while at the same time directing us towards an idea of democratic life that is less dependent on institutions and more dependent on relations the self develops with the others in the community.

Chapter 4

Truth, Political Judgment and the Idea of the Inner Voice

Introduction

Perhaps truth is the most difficult concept to uncover in Gandhi's political thought. And, what may be required is not merely an uncovering but an unravelling of the various layers of meaning embedded within a concept that Gandhi himself considered to be the most important idea in his philosophical system. For without truth, Gandhian philosophy disintegrates.

Truth, along with its 'twin' idea of nonviolence, are often understood to be at the heart of Gandhi's moral and political thinking. And because of its centrality, a significant corpus of his writing is dedicated to these ideas. However, as Gandhi was not a philosopher in the conventional sense, they lack the argumentative clarity that may help us understand what these concepts really mean in his discourse. In fact, the trouble in interpreting these concepts arise not from the lack of availability of meanings associated with these terms, but due to the multiplicity of meanings one can glean when we read Gandhi. For example, truth, for Gandhi, represents a whole array of concepts ranging from what he calls morality, duty or a divine voice. As a result, in the course of interpreting Gandhi's political philosophy, a student of his political ideas is forced to tease-out and clarify what these Gandhian concepts really mean and, in the process, ease this cobweb of conceptual ambiguity associated with these ideas. The purpose of this chapter is to contribute to such an attempt to clarify the idea of truth in Gandhi's political

thought. A similar investigation into nonviolence will only be undertaken in the subsequent chapter.

We begin this chapter by discussing how interpreters of Gandhi have previously understood the idea of truth in his writings. Our analysis reveals that interpreters of Gandhi's philosophy have often focused on reading the concept of truth within contours of a pursuit of the Gandhian self to attain truth. While one section of interpreters suggest Gandhi to have understood truth as something that is unattainable and, hence, as something that can only be pursued, another group of interpreters maintain that such an understanding of Gandhian truth based on an epistemological scepticism undermines Gandhi's moral and political philosophy, which they believe is very much rooted in moral convictions, as opposed to an attitude of scepticism. They oppose the argument that Gandhi's truth is rooted in a fragmented episteme, as some have claimed, and propose an understanding of truth as a moral experience, and hence, as something that is entirely attainable. They stress on the significance of subjectivity and the convictions of the self as the foundation on which Gandhian truth rests, while the other camp attacks such foundations that is based on the self's subjectivity and views it as something that hinders Gandhi's pursuit of truth.

This chapter contends that these dominant tendencies of reading truth in Gandhi, though sensitive to some parts of his writings, presents an inadequate backdrop for understanding truth in Gandhi. This is primarily because such arguments make their case through a pure textual reading of Gandhi without taking into consideration the historical context in which he articulates such conceptions of truth i.e. preexisting readings of Gandhian truth exhibit a lack of sensitivity

for the illocutionary meanings associated with Gandhi's utterances concerning truth. In addition to this, existing interpretations of truth in Gandhi, often don't provide us with a convincing justification of why a certain text or a section in his writing or a specific action must be prioritized over other contradictory utterances that one may also uncover from Gandhi's discourse. This chapter assumes that interpretations of truth in Gandhi must take into account both the locutionary and illocutionary meanings associated with his utterances and hopes to uncover a justificatory framework to account for these contradictory tendencies in Gandhi's thought.

For someone who advocates truth as the ultimate value that guides his action in all spheres of life, interpreters of Gandhi have failed to give us a picture of the comprehensive role truth played in shaping his politics on the ground. This is because in most interpretations, Gandhi's politics is often essentialized and represented to be an expression of nonviolence and the focus has been to provide an explanatory framework that establishes an understanding of truth as something that justifies or explains this tendency of nonviolence, an idealized account of truth and its role in Gandhi's philosophy. This chapter advocates that to grasp the idea of truth in Gandhi, one must attempt at a contextual reading of the concept of Gandhian truth that is not only historically sensitive, but also takes into account his political journey. Only such a reading will help us locate and place the various tendencies in Gandhi's truth we previously touched upon and can aid us in comprehending its significance for his political thinking. The chapter thus hopes to provide a framework that will help us better grasp not only the place of truth in his philosophical outlook but also explain to us the significant role it played in shaping the course of his politics.

Interpreting Truth in Gandhi's Writings

One doesn't need to dig deep into Gandhi's writings to get a sense of the significance of truth in his weltanschauung. In fact, Gandhi titled his autobiography *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* hinting at the centrality of this concept in his life. After making a reference to truth in the title of the autobiography, he goes on to write in the introduction to this text compiled in November 1925 that 'the experiments I am about to relate' in the text are 'spiritual, or rather moral' in nature, highlighting the intertwined relationship between truth and morality.[203] He wrote that one of the purposes of his autobiography was to showcase to the world his engagements not just with truth but also his experiments with nonviolence, celibacy and 'other principles of conduct' that are 'distinct' from truth. He then goes on to make a conscious effort to underline the distinctness of truth in contrast to these other principles he spoke about, and writes in the same introduction

> 'truth is the sovereign principle, which includes numerous other principles. This truth is not only truthfulness in word, but truthfulness in thought also, and not only the relative truth of our conception, but the Absolute Truth, the Eternal Principle, that is God…I have not yet found Him, but I am seeking after Him…..But as long as I have not realized this Absolute Truth, so long must I hold by the relative truth as I have conceived it. That relative truth must meanwhile, be my beacon, my shield and buckler.'[204]

From the above excerpt, it is clear that Gandhi considers truth to be the sovereign principle, from which other principles within Gandhi's philosophical system can be derived. And it is within this

[203] Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, "An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments With Truth, Trans," *By Mahadev Desai, Ahmedabad: Navjivan Publishing House*, 1927, 7.

[204] Gandhi, 8.

framework that Gandhi seems to be deriving both his ideas of morality as well as religion. Commenting on the idea of religion, Gandhi writes in his autobiography that ‘the essence of religion is morality’ and that ‘morality is the basis of all [religious] things.’ He identifies truth as being the ‘substance’ of all morality and because of this close interconnectedness between truth, morality and religion, he writes ‘truth became my sole objective.’

However, in the latter half of the excerpted section above, Gandhi goes onto then differentiate truth into the ideas of ‘relative’ and ‘absolute.’ He refers to both these terms as manifestations of truth and exhibiting its characteristics. This conceptualization of truth, as being both relative and absolute has significantly impacted the way we have understood Gandhi’s idea of truth. Ever since the publication of *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict* by Joan Bondurant, one of the early books written on Gandhi, debates concerning Gandhian philosophy has tended to take cognizance of her grounding of nonviolence in an episteme of truth.[205] In Bondurant’s understanding, which has now become a view that is shared by many of the subsequent thinkers, the room for possibility of conflict resolution in Gandhi’s thought arises because of his belief in the unattainability of, what he referred to in his writings as, the absolute truth.

As we have seen, Gandhi takes a nuanced approach to truth by qualifying it as two-dimensional and refers to these as relative truth and absolute truth. Bondurant builds upon the interpretative room provided by truth’s multi-dimensionality and takes a view that though the satyagrahi

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[205] Joan Valérie Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict*, (Univ of California Press, 1965), Introduction.

completely grasps the relative truths arising out of her subjective or personal experiences and believes that she is in possession of truth, the satyagrahi also endorses a possibility that he or she may be wrong because absolute truth is not attainable, and hence resolves to engage in a dialogue with the adversary so that the final truth that prevails takes cognizance of both the relative or subjective and the absolute aspects of truth. Following Bondurant's intervention, writers have taken forward this suggestion of grounding Gandhian nonviolence in the idea of multi-dimensionality of truth and our subjective limitations to grasp the absolute truth. In this view, truth takes the place of a first-principle in Gandhi's political thought, as a result of which nonviolence appears to be a derivative or consequence of truth.

In an essay titled Mahatma Gandhi, in his book *Modern India 1885-1947*, historian Sumit Sarkar takes forward this Bondurantian pessimism associated with an inability to attain truth as the basis for Gandhian nonviolence. Sarkar attributes to Gandhi a realization that no one could be sure of having attained the ultimate truth.[206] And if that is the case, to enforce one's truth over others and to use violence in that endeavor, informed only by a partial understanding of truth, is problematic. It is within this rubric of our ability to only see the partial truth as opposed to the entire truth that writers like Susan and Lloyd Rudolph, in their interpretation of Gandhi, read him as advocating an idea of fragmented truth, something that has also been picked up by Nicolas Gier, who like the Rudolphs read Gandhi as a precursor to post-modernism.[207]

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[206] A Raghuramaraju, ed., *Debating Gandhi* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 163.

[207] Lloyd I Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *Postmodern Gandhi and Other Essays: Gandhi in the World and at Home* (University of Chicago Press, 2010).

Interpreters attributing a view of fragmented truth to Gandhi often advocate their case by relying on the limits of the self and its subjectivity when it comes to attaining truth. However, as Akeel Bilgrami has pointed out, if truth was unattainable for the Gandhian self, how do we make sense of Gandhi's consistent advocacy of the importance of believing in truth to others, as well as to himself? The first plausible answer is that Gandhi was a hypocrite when it came to matters of truth, advocating others to believe in truth at the same time very well knowing himself that truth was unattainable, thus ultimately believing in no truth himself. This is a possibility that Bilgrami himself considers and rejects, thus deeming the fragmented and sceptical attitude to truth in Gandhi as untenable within a system of thought that maintains a philosophical coherency, or what he calls the 'integrity' in Gandhi's philosophy.[208] Bilgrami's response, and a more plausible answer to the question, is to think differently about truth, moving away from this entrenched cognitive understanding of truth and its resulting fragmented nature. Gandhian truth, for Bilgrami, ceases to be a cognitive or fragmented category and is reinterpreted as a 'moral experience.' In Bilgrami's framework, Gandhi's truth is not founded on the self's epistemic limitation and the accompanying scepticism but is to be located in the self's subjectivity and the moral convictions that arise out of it. Subsequent writers have interpreted Bilgrami's stress on the Gandhian self and its convictions as an expression of egoism or as opening up possibilities of reading Gandhi as a relativist, both of which appear to be inconsistent with Gandhi's larger philosophical outlook that celebrates humility and idealism.

[208] Akeel Bilgrami, "Gandhi, the Philosopher," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2003, 4159–65.

But one does not need to read the celebration of the subjective dimensions of the self in Gandhi's thought as egoistic or relativistic. As Margaret Chatterjee has highlighted in her writings, Gandhi's stress on the subjective is rooted in a way of living that prizes and prioritizes the duties or responsibilities of the self. Unlike a reading of Gandhi's truth within the rubric of a moral or cognitive category, Chatterjee claims that Gandhi understood truth differently. According to her, a point she articulated even before the arguments raised by Bilgrami or the Rudolphs, Gandhi's truth is a 'unique combination of a personal style of life and a technique for tackling injustices.'[209] She highlighted in her writings that for Gandhi, satya, inspired by the articulation of truth in the Indian traditions, was not a moral ideal or a shared objective idea of reality. Rather, the essence of satya, for Gandhi, is to be found in the word 'sat' which means 'to be.' In her interpretation, Gandhi primarily understood satya or truth as a state of being. And by interpreting truth within this existential category, she reads Gandhi's insistence of a duty-driven personal lifestyle and his political engagements as his way of living a life of truth.

What is evident from our survey of Gandhi's writings and his interpreters is that debates concerning truth in Gandhian philosophy often tend to fluctuate between two ends. At one end, we have theorists like Bondurant and Rudolphs who understand Gandhi's truth as an expression of epistemological scepticism and reads it as something elusive and unattainable or at most fragmented. At the other end we have writers like Bilgrami and Chatterjee who reads Gandhian truth as a moral or existential category that is experiential, attainable and founded on the first-person experiences of the self. One of the key tasks ahead of us if we are to uncover the idea of

[209] Margaret Chatterjee, *Gandhi's Religious Thought* (Springer, 1983), 59.

truth in Gandhi is to revisit this debate, albeit from a different vantage point that helps us to move beyond this interpretative conundrum we otherwise face.

In the sections that follow, we first attempt at a comprehensive survey of Gandhi's writings concerning truth, from his early days in South Africa to his time in India. Such a historical and chronological approach to understanding truth is necessary because it helps the reader to appreciate the various articulations of truth that is evident in his writings. In this reading that focuses on the locutionary meanings associated with his writings on truth, we find that during his time in South Africa, Gandhi's understanding of truth was primarily loaded with moral concerns. During this phase of his life, Gandhi assumed truth to be ontologically dependent on duty and held the belief that to perform one's duty is to pursue truth, a framing of truth driven by considerations of personal obligations and moral responsibility. The reasoning and justification for one's actions are rooted in one's first-person subjective experiences of the world. And the best example that articulates such a conception of truth is found in his idea of the inner voice that he developed during his time in South Africa.

However, his subsequent writings on truth, especially after taking the leadership mantle of the Indian national movement, starts voicing a shift in his perspective, providing more room for articulating a conception of truth that is less concerned with the personal and more rooted in social and political considerations, thus stressing on the performance of our political responsibilities as opposed to personal obligations or moral responsibilities. Such a shift in Gandhi's thought, as will be revealed in our contextual reading, is a conscious one and must not be understood as a break in his thought or a rupture with ideas he previously associated truth

with. As we shall see below, social considerations inform Gandhi's understanding of truth early on in his life but it does not appear to be the central concern when it comes to his politics during his early days in South Africa. Instead, this shift in his thought must be understood as more of an ideological positioning or posturing that Gandhi undertook as a response to counter other prevailing articulations of truth that were violent and exclusionary in its nature. And it is within this backdrop, the chapter hopes to show how Gandhi's idea of the inner voice must not be understood as an expression of subjective truths and moral imperatives, as some have claimed, and must be understood as an idea of political judgment that informs the dilemmas of conduct in one's political life.

The Moral Dimensions of Truth in Gandhi's Thought

One of the earliest articulations of truth and its relationship to morality is found in Gandhi's summarization of the American philosopher William Mackintire Salter's book *Ethical Religion*. Between the months of January and February 1906, Gandhi published summaries of eight of the fifteen chapters of the text in his journal 'The Indian Opinion' and wrote that the book significantly impacted his idea of religion and its relationship to morality. Introducing this text to the Indian readers, Gandhi wrote that the investigations in the book revealed that all religions are concerned with teaching morality and that man must obey the dictates of morality in order to preserve a moral order in the world, the lack of which may lead to ultimate destruction. Gandhi, following Salter, wrote in these summaries that religion 'cannot subsist' without morality, and that any individual who observes moral rules for its own sake and 'not for any selfish end' can be

considered ‘religious.’[210] He also wrote that all acts undertaken to ‘improve ourselves and do good to others’ are to be considered as expressions of true morality and that underneath all moral laws is this ‘attempt to do good to mankind’, which is the ‘highest morality.’

Influence of Salter’s work on Gandhi’s philosophical outlook was not merely limited to his borrowing or reiteration of the strong intertwined relationship between morality and religion. Salter also highlighted to Gandhi the significance of the self or the individual in the pursuit of morality. This is because both Salter and Gandhi hold the view that unlike unintentional action, moral actions must arise out of one’s own willing and, hence, are intentional actions. Gandhi points out in his summary that a moral man will not let himself be ‘swept long like a log of wood by a current’ and instead will rely on his will to reign in on one’s ‘mechanical’ lifestyle.[211] However, to make use of this will, one needs to apply his own ‘intelligence and power of thought’ as it is only intellect that can help us identify the moral quality of an action.

For Gandhi, a moral action is one which is devoid of ‘self-interest’ and leads us toward ‘the path which we know to be true.’ Such acts may, at times, require one to defy established norms and conventions in order to ‘act on his own with a view to [doing] absolute good.’ What determines this ‘absolute good’ or the ‘true path’ for Gandhi, from this view, is less concerned with the cognitive faculties or subjective perceptions i.e. what the self holds to be good or true from his or her vantage point, and instead is a moral-ethical idea that is concerned with the wellbeing of

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[210] Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, 100 Vols*, vol. 6 (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1958), 213.

[211] Gandhi, 6:221.

society and its various elements, especially the weak and the powerless. This is articulated more clearly in Gandhi's subsequent summaries of the text where he emphasizes the 'social' nature of morality.

According to Gandhi, following his reading of Salter, 'all moral actions involve social relations' and morality takes into consideration 'our relationship to mankind.'[212] Such a perspective flows from his deep-seated conviction that the moral order of a political community is constituted by the moral nature of its individual constituents. As he points outs in these summaries, 'if the people in a democratic state are selfish, that state comes to no good. Moreover, according to this law, the stronger members of a state or a community have to protect, not oppress, the weaker ones.'[213]

By framing morality within the paradigm of a social or a political community, Gandhi is urging us to locate the quality of a moral act not in any abstract notion of good but by assessing whether one's intentions that drive an act are rooted in a concern for the 'weaker ones' in the community. In doing this, Gandhi consciously or unconsciously gives us room to read his understanding of morality, at least at this point in his life, as similar to that of a deontologist like Kant whose ethical foundations rests on a principle or rule following, that is willed by the actor himself. And such a conceptualization of morality as following a principle like 'protecting the weak' was not just an exercise in thought for Gandhi.

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[212] Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, 100 Vols*. 6:247

[213] Gandhi, 6:284.

Being a 'practical-idealist', as he called himself, Gandhi was not only practicing the moral injunctions he found to be good or true, but he also closely observed whether these principles were put into practice by other people as well as social and political institutions.[214] For example, his opinion of the British colonial state as an institution capable of doing good was not just based on his conviction in the potential moral goodness of men who inhabited these institutions. And often times, critics of Gandhi take this mellowed approach of his to the colonial state, which stands in stark contrast to his critical approach during the later years in India, as evidence for Gandhi being a colonial apologist in his early years. Rather, our survey into Gandhi's writings during his time in South Africa suggests that Gandhi's support for the colonial state during his early years in South Africa was not merely based on the abstract potential for good he saw in these institutions and its people but he genuinely believed them to be practicing principles that he himself understood to be at the heart of morality. A good example related to this is found in his text *Satyagraha in South Africa* which was published later in 1928. In this text that primarily focuses on his time in South Africa, Gandhi narrates an incident that may help us grasp how important this principle of protecting the weak played not only in his moral outlook but also in his conceptualization of truth.

After providing a brief history of how the British Empire established its rule in South Africa, Gandhi, in this text, meditates on a particular dispute between representatives of the British empire and General Louis Botha, a Boer leader. The Boers were originally descendants of the Dutch who arrived with imperial ambitions and settled in South Africa. They were later defeated

[214] https://mettacenter.org/daily-metta/practical-idealism/

by the English in a tussle between empires for supremacy in South Africa. The Second Boer war that took place from 1899 to 1902 was fought between the British Empire and the two Boer states of Transvaal and the Free State in South Africa, led by General Botha. Following over two and a half years of war, the Treaty of Vereeniging was signed in 1902 between the General Botha and Lord Alfred Milner, the British administrator for colonies in South Africa. However, a major disagreement existed between General Botha and the Empire concerning interpretation of the terms of the peace treaty. In General Botha's interpretation of the treaty, the Boers were entitled to 'immediate' and 'complete internal autonomy', while the British interpreted the terms of surrender as provisions for granting 'gradual' self-government 'as they proved their loyalty' to the British Empire.[215]

Gandhi wants us to pay close attention to how this dispute was settled by the British. In his understanding, it would have been impossible to judge the truthfulness associated with each of these positions as there is no way the claims could have been verified. Yet, Gandhi sees in this process of dispute settlement an expression of truth in the Empire's decision to follow the moral injunction that suggests 'the stronger party should accept the interpretation of the agreement put upon it by the other and weaker party', thus resolving disputes in accordance with the 'principles of truth.'[216] In Gandhi's understanding, the Empire, by accepting General Botha's interpretation

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[215] Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Valji Govindji Desai, *Satyagraha in South Africa* (S Ganesan, Madras, 1928), 24.

[216] Gandhi and Desai, 24.

of the treaty, upheld the higher moral law of 'protecting the weak', thus resulting in a situation where truth 'fully triumphed.'[217]

From the above discussions, it is clear that during his initial years in South Africa, and even before he read Salter, Gandhi held an understanding that suggests an intertwined relationship between truth and morality. These examples make it evident that for Gandhi, 'true' action is moral action and consequentially, the highest moral principle, of protecting the weak, expressed the highest truth. And any reader of Gandhi can easily agree that this social rootedness of morality and a reading of truth within this framework of morality that is sensitive to the concerns of the vulnerable in society, remained a feature of his moral and political philosophy throughout his life. In fact, several months before his death in 1948, Gandhi wrote a short note that he believed could serve as an aid to our decision making in social matters. In this brief note that has come to be called today as 'Gandhi's talisman,' Gandhi asks us to recall the face of the 'weakest man' we have seen and asks us to ponder whether the action we are contemplating to undertake will empower the weak or the powerless in any way. And he believed that putting our decisions through this 'test' will help us make right judgments about matters concerning others. Truth, according to Gandhi, in this reading, is not something that is attainable for the self just within the confines of the personal or the private. It requires a responsible engagement with the social and is embedded in the willingness of this self to accommodate the vulnerable 'other' in its decision making, with a view to protect or empower the weak or the powerless.

[217] Gandhi and Desai, 24.

Duty and the Subjective Dimensions of Truth

It is well-known that Gandhi established the Natal Indian Ambulance Corps to serve the British during the Second Boer War. This decision of his, not only to take part in this war but also to extend support to the British, was controversial not just because it was opposed by many Indians in South Africa but also because it appears to be in conflict with the articulation of truth as an expression of a universal principle founded on our social responsibility to protect the weak, who in this case were the Boers, as Gandhi admitted. Yet, he remained steadfast on his decision to support the Empire by serving them in war, a decision which he subsequently reiterated in 1914 when he took the mantle of not only supporting but also actively recruiting young Indians to serve the British forces during the first world war.

Concerns were raised then by Gandhi's critics, including his dear and near ones. Gandhi elaborates in his autobiography that Henry Polak, Gandhi's friend and close confidante, questioned the 'consistency' of Gandhi's action with his 'profession of ahimsa' after Polak came to hear about Gandhi's decision to support the British during the Second Boer War. Gandhi has, on several occasions, written about his decision to be a part of the wars. He pointed out that the rationale and conviction for participating in wars for him has always been the same, which he developed during his time in South Africa. And in *Satyagraha in South Africa*, Gandhi claims 'truth' to be the 'underlying principle' that prompted him to support the British during the second Boer war.[218] This is significant because Gandhi seems to be hinting that truth, as he understood it, was not just a moral principle rooted in our social responsibility as we had

[218] Gandhi and Desai, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, 74.

discussed previously. Though that, for Gandhi, is still an articulation of truth, we can conclude that such an understanding of truth does not encompass the concept in its entirety.

When the second Boer war began, there was an overwhelming opinion among Indians in South Africa that both the British and the Boers equally oppressed the Indians there and that the difference between the two was 'only one of degree.' Being treated like slaves in South Africa, fellow-Indians asked Gandhi, why they should be instrumental in the destruction of the Boers, after hearing of Gandhi's support for the Empire. Further, they also raised a more practical question about why Gandhi was convinced that the Boers would be defeated, because if not so, they 'will never fail to wreak vengeance upon us.'[219] And Gandhi took it upon himself to clarify his position and refute some of the criticisms raised by his fellow Indian friends.

Gandhi refuted the assumption that to implicate himself in the Second Boer war was to take sides and contribute to the victory of the Empire. Instead, Gandhi suggests that we move away from this framework of viewing his partaking in war as contributing to the victory or defeat of an involved party and wants us to see this act as an expression of his duty. This is because in Gandhi's understanding, despite the imperialistic tendencies of the Empire, he was indebted to the protection or security the Empire extended to him during his time in England as a student as well as during the occasional travels he made to England. Gandhi's logic was that as he had always enjoyed the 'protection' extended by the British Fleet and was 'taking shelter in its armed might', he considered it to be his duty to serve the Empire in its time of need.[220] And in doing

[219] Gandhi and Desai, 72.

[220] Gandhi and Desai, 131.

this, Gandhi locates duty or the moral obligations of the self at the heart of this underlying truth that led to this decision.

Following our discussions on truth, it is important at this stage to ask a few questions and clarify Gandhi's position concerning these questions. Based on our analysis up until now, Gandhi seems to hold the view that to pursue truth is to ultimately perform the duties of the self, and hence tied to moral actions. This indicates that Gandhi assumes an ontological connection between truth and duty. However, what constitutes this duty is still not entirely clear at this stage. At one point, he considers duty to be a social responsibility to work towards the welfare of the weak. In this definition, duty appears to be a universal principle that demands the obedience of the self to a norm, an understanding of duty that is in line with Kantian moral philosophy which is primarily a form of rule following. And in this notion of truth as a universal duty to protect the weak, pursuit of truth requires Gandhi to come to the aid of the weaker, and in this case the Boers. But he does not act by this understanding of truth.

Instead, he decides to abide by his personal obligations to the Empire that is based on his own life experiences of travelling to and living in England, a duty arising out of his location in a particular socio-political context. According to Gandhi, by claiming the rights he exercised as a subject or citizen of the Empire during the course of his life, he was bound by a duty to come to the aid of Empire in its time of need. Within this framework, there is no possibility of formulating general demands or common rules that could be attributed to the self as all of us are located in varied socio-political contexts, undergo different life experiences and maintain diverse interpersonal relationships. However, what is universal here is the idea that all of us are bound by

duties i.e. our embeddedness in a particular context and the accompanying experiences are bound to generate obligations arising out of the self's subject-location. Thus, within this second framework of Gandhian truth which he ultimately follows, it is not the substance of the moral obligation or the content of duty that is universal but the idea that we are all bound by various duties by virtue of our position in society. To fulfil these duties, for Gandhi, is to pursue truth.

As we have previously touched upon, Margaret Chatterjee must be credited with highlighting the existential dimensions of truth in Gandhi. Chatterjee points out in her writings that the best way to understand truth in Gandhi's thought is to look at how serious Gandhi was about his duties and vows. According to her, Gandhi always considered the story of King Harishchandra to embody what truth meant in his philosophy. Chatterjee calls Harishchandra a 'Hindu counterpart' to the Biblical Job and represents him as a man 'who keeps his vows' and undergoes 'all manner of ordeals' in order to keep them.[221] Going by her reading, the significance of truth, for Harishchandra, as well as for Gandhi, is not embedded in merely following a rule but is to be found in the 'self-committal' that accompanies such obligations. Chatterjee concludes that for Gandhi, duties and vows are closer to an 'existential pledge' that we undertake, a commitment we make to our own selves.[222] She reads Gandhi's truth as a way of life that is driven by an ethical drive to follow one's duties and vows. Chatterjee, thus, not only reiterates the findings of our above investigation that highlights the intertwined relationship between duty and truth but she also points us towards a way of thinking about Gandhian truth from an existential

[221] Chatterjee, *Gandhi's Religious Thought*, 60.

[222] Chatterjee, 62.

perspective that has mostly been overlooked in our eagerness to read him as either a moralist or a precursor to postmodern thinking.

As Dale Cannon points out in his attempt to trace an existential theory of truth, what matters more in such conceptualizations of truth is not the 'what' but the 'how' of things.[223] Cannon writes that existentialists tend to find it important to concentrate on the 'mode and manner in which we are related' to a thing as opposed to the thing-in-itself or its correspondence to an objective reality that we have of that thing.[224] While this is not true of all existentialists, such an explanation for truth in the writings of a philosopher like Soren Kierkegaard holds true. Kierkegaard, as Cannon suggests, is more concerned with the mode and manner of our relationship with the world and Kierkegaard's notion of truth is hence reflective of how we conceive of our existence in relation to the world. In such an understanding, objectivity is irrelevant to discussions concerning truth and what matters is the experiential and existential dimensions. Truth, within this framework, is a 'self-determined relationship', a first-person activity that helps us deepen our rapport with the world around us and is by nature subjective.[225]

The purpose of the above detour is not to claim that Gandhi is an existentialist. Rather, the goal is to bring to our attention to the similarities or affinities in the thought of thinkers like Gandhi and Kierkegaard, and contrast that to the philosophy of a moralist like Kant. Often times,

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[223] Dale Cannon, "An Existential Theory of Truth," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 49, no. 4 (1993): 775–85.

[224] Cannon, 779.

[225] Cannon, 778.

discussions on Gandhian duty and truth are laden with moral and ascetic overtones. The vulnerability of our will to act according to our self-interest is generally portrayed as the biggest challenge we face in this pursuit of truth, and hence the significance of self-control in Gandhi's moral philosophy. Such an interpretation pitches the inclinations of the self against the demands of duty or obligations of the self, a view that is not far from that of Kant who sees a fundamental opposition between duties and inclinations. However, such a reading is fraught with problems and overlooks one of the more significant aspects of Gandhian duty and the accompanying truth.

For Gandhi, the bigger, and more important, challenge concerning the performance of our duties is not the temptations of our inclinations, but the sheer weight of choice our wills face. This is because Gandhi holds a benign view of human nature. While he does recognize the need to nurture our inclinations towards valuing and performing duties over promoting self-interest, he does not see a fundamental opposition between duties and inclinations. Unlike Kant, and more in line with Kierkegaard, Gandhi sees inclinations as something that can aid our judgment, especially when presented with a situation of choosing one among the many mutually exclusive duties or obligations we must undertake in society.[226] For Gandhi, inclinations or subjective dispositions are not antithetical to our moral purpose. Instead, and because of our internal moral drive, he thinks the more difficult task concerns the question of choice our wills must make when presented with an array of duties i.e. which among the several duties I am obligated to perform should I attend to immediately. Like Kierkegaard, Gandhi regards 'choice' as one of the most important constituents in moral decision making and treats our 'subjectivity' as a 'prompting'

[226] A comprehensive comparison of the moral philosophies of Kant and Gandhi is a worthy endeavor but is beyond the purview of this study. However, what comes across from our preliminary investigation is that whereas Kant's ethical outlook is principle-driven, Gandhi's ethical outlook appears to be driven by the agent's own experiences, a version of 'situated-ethics' that takes into account the agent's subject-position within his society.

within us that helps us to make a decisive choice between mutually exclusive actions. In this Gandhian framework, the self and its subjectivities are not something that must be forcibly reigned in but is something to be tapped onto if we are to really live a life in pursuit of truth. And, the key task at hand for the Gandhian self is not to merely follow moral injunctions but to prioritize a course of action after paying due consideration to the many seemingly ethical and moral propositions in front us. Truth, in this view, is something to be arrived at through a reflective process. Truth, for Gandhi, in this view is thus a judgment the self must undertake, in dialogue with our subjectivity. And what is revealed to us after this is what Gandhi called the 'inner prompting,' which during his later years becomes what is popularly known as the 'inner voice.'

Early Instances of Inner Voice in Gandhi's Writings

One of the earliest instances of articulation of inner voice in Gandhi's writings happened during his time in South Africa. In September 1906, a mass meeting of Indians was held to protest against the Asiatic Amendment Law Ordinance and Gandhi was one of the speakers at the meeting who was tasked with speaking against the amendment. One of the aims of Gandhi's address was to convince those who had gathered there to take a pledge or oath to oppose the ordinance. During the course of this address, Gandhi went onto explain that to 'pledge' was not a trifling matter and the one who 'deliberately and intelligently takes a pledge and then breaks it, forfeits his manhood.'[227] It is important to recognize here that Gandhi does not use the term 'manhood' as is conventionally used in contemporary settings to denote masculinity, but he is

[227] Gandhi and Desai, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, 102.

using it here to highlight the idea that we cease to be a man i.e. human being, when we wilfully neglect our pledge.

As evident from this as well as our previous discussion, for Gandhi, the idea of taking a pledge or an oath is a conscious choice that requires deliberation, an existential act in its nature. He explains that everyone must think for himself whether he has the 'will and the ability to pledge himself' and that pledges are not taken with a view to 'produce an effect on the outsiders.'[228] Instead, everyone must search deep within and listen to the 'inner voice' that will provide assurance on whether one has the strength to take a pledge or not.

It is relevant at this stage to note that the above narrative of these events in South Africa was provided by Gandhi in *Satyagraha in South Africa* that was written in 1928 when he had already developed a concrete idea of the 'inner voice' and was actively promoting it as a medium for realizing truth in political situations. A survey of his early writings will reveal that Gandhi coined the term inner voice and popularized it more proactively only when he got back to India form South Africa and his early references to the idea of the inner voice was limited to referring to it as a 'virtuous prompting' from the 'inner self', 'inner being', 'the conscience' or 'God.'

Gandhi returned to India from South Africa in July 1914 and rose to prominence in the country as a national leader when he organized Satyagrahas in Champaran, Ahmedabad and Kheda supporting the rights of the peasants and workers in these regions. In 1919, he assumed the

[228] Gandhi and Desai, 101.

leadership of the Khilafat movement against the Empire and was elected as the president of the All India Home Rule League thus establishing his position as one of the most important leaders in the country. Following this, the Home Rule League merged with the Indian National Congress, which had already established an alliance with Khilafat leaders thus unifying the various dimensions of India's struggle for independence and eventually launched the Non-cooperation movement in September 1920.

As part of the Khilafat and Non-cooperation movements, Gandhi travelled across the country and gave speeches calling for his compatriots to undertake non-cooperation and civil disobedience against the British. And in several of his speeches during these years, as is the case with his call to pledge opposition to the Asiatic Amendment Law Ordinance in South Africa, Gandhi asked his fellow participants of these movements to be part of this resistance not because anyone compelled them to partake but because that is what their inner voice prompted. While addressing the students in Rawalpindi in 1920 as part of the campaign for Khilafat and Non-cooperation movement, Gandhi tells that 'God tells me through my inner voice' to not cooperate with the British regime. In a similar tone, while speaking to students in Ahmedabad and Patna, he asks them to heed to and act according to their own 'inner voice', also referring to it as the 'voice of conscience' or the 'voice of God' within them, thus almost consciously conflating and loading the idea of the inner voice with moral and subjective as well as divine or religious overtones.[229]

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[229] In their attempts to counter the various dominant ideologies in the West and to establish an idea of India, as distinctive from the West's conception of India, several Indian thinkers relied on indigenous philosophical traditions to posit counter-ideologies to those espoused by Britain and the West. And in this endeavor, the idea of truth gathered significance in the political sphere. Thinkers like Vivekananda, Aurobindo Ghosh, Rabindranath Tagore etc. stressed on recovering a uniquely 'Indian' perspective on truth which stressed the importance of self in the pursuit of truth, a spiritual understanding of truth that stood in stark contrast to an objective pursuit of truth independent of the self, a view popularized by a scientific worldview that was predominantly Western. Founding political actions on truth thus became a strategic objective amongst ideologues in India because of the legitimacy it

This conflation of the moral and the religious by claiming conscience to be a divine voice deep within us should come as no surprise and seems to be in continuity with the views he held during his time in South Africa, especially as seen in his reading of Salter's Ethical Religion. However, a closer reading of his writings and politics suggest that it was also around this time that Gandhi started realizing that his articulation of inner voice as an expression of a moral judgment linked to subjectivity was fraught with certain problems.[230] And his attempt at conceptualizing truth as being both relative and absolute, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, must be understood within the backdrop of his ideological shift from positioning inner voice as a moral judgment rooted in duty or obligation, which he developed during his time in South Africa, to an idea of inner voice as political judgment driven by concerns of leadership and responsibility in politics. Gandhi's experience as a national leader had taught him that moral reasoning served as an inadequate and untenable standard of judgment in the face of compulsions and uncertainties that is characteristic of political environment. And truth and the accompanying inner voice must,

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could bestow on their political acts, at least in the minds of the masses. Gandhi's reliance on truth as a fundamental aspect of his political thinking in India needs to be understood within this framework of gaining legitimacy during the Indian national movement.

[230] In 1924, Gandhi published in his journal *Navajivan* that his idea of truth as the inner voice or conscience has been misunderstood and misused. In the article, Gandhi claimed that several injustices were being "perpetrated" by people in the name of conscience and inner voice. The article appears to be a veiled reference to the Indian revolutionaries' attempts to justify their violence by relying on concepts and categories Gandhi often invoked in his discourse. Gandhi, in the article, referred to these revolutionaries as people who propagate untruth under the garb of truth and wrote that their "injustice cannot be justified" in the name of conscience or inner voice. In similar articles written during the 1920s, Gandhi's primary target appears to be the Hindustan Republican Association (HRA), a revolutionary organization founded in early 1920s that evolved over the course of the decade to become the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA) in 1928, of which some of the foremost revolutionaries of the Indian national movement were part of. The HRA's 1924 manifesto written by Sachindra Nath Sanyal claimed that the efforts of the revolutionaries were directed towards "establishing truth and preaching it" in ways similar to how Gandhi claimed truth was the primary objective of his politics. This tussle for truth between Gandhi and the revolutionaries, and their appropriation of truth-related concepts like inner voice and conscience, revealed to Gandhi the vulnerabilities of his articulation of truth that prioritized the subjective dimensions of the self.

Gandhi believed, hereafter address the newfound challenges of political judgment and political leadership.

Politics and Reflective Judgment

Truth, for Gandhi, revealed through the inner voice, is thus the result of a reflective judgment.[231] While it is a process of engaging in a dialogue with one's subjectivity, one of the important characteristics of the inner voice concerns the act of choosing or prioritizing one among the many available courses of action, while recognizing that the correctness or rightness associated with one's choice cannot be ascertained with certainty. Listening to our inner voice is, thus, a cognitive process that requires us to take into account our own moral convictions alongside our epistemological uncertainties, and then engaging in an act of comparison, or in some cases even a synthesis, of the different options available to us at a particular moment. It employs a mode of reasoning that is primarily concerned with practical matters and results in an act that lacks both the clarity and parameters through which its quality and effectiveness can be grasped accurately, except, may be, through its consequences. What is arrived at after such a process of reflective judgment, through the inner voice, is for Gandhi the truth. But what does all of this mean for his politics?

All political action, for Gandhi, must take into account the plurality of the political domain. This is because the arena of politics is comprised of disagreements and difference and is, ultimately, a

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[231] The term 'reflective judgment' as used here is more indebted to John Dewey's usage of this term in his writings and is less influenced by Kant's use of the term in his Critique of Judgment. Reflective judgment, for Dewey, refers to a state of epistemic cognition that recognizes and accepts uncertainty when it comes to certain matters. It reflects an attitude that suggests 'some problems cannot be solved with certainty.' For more on this, see John Dewey's *How we think*.

site of negotiation. He understands that these differences are constituted by the numerous relative or subjective truths of different people who inhabit the sphere of politics but does not believe reason and rational arguments can aid us in this process to move from this diversity of truths to a condition of objective truth that is accepted by all. In fact, this appears to be one of his considerations in approving pluralism and tolerance as key constituents of a political life. And the best example for Gandhi, when it comes to pluralism, is the coexistence of different religions in a community. Religions, by nature, differ from one another in its metaphysical truths. Yet the coexistence of various religions in a community is proof of how human communities live together with particular differences while at the same time maintaining a shared truth that underlines all religions. This unique political character of Indian civilization, of being a community that valued and preserved diversity throughout its history, and the belief that diversity or the presence of the other is not corruptive but constitutive of the absolute truth, alongside the realization that truth is ultimately something that is to be shared not in a search for objectivity but through a spirit of accommodation, was deeply etched into in Gandhi's political thinking from his early years.

Perhaps, it is Arendt who echoes this Gandhian sense of judgement best in contemporary political theory when she wrote in 1957 that all judgments are concerned with 'going beyond oneself in order to make present the judgment of others by means of imagination.'[232] And like Arendt, this 'other' in the Gandhian scheme is not limited to the ontological other. Rather, Gandhian political judgment has a deep concern for general wellbeing and is especially sensitive

[232] David L Marshall, "The Origin and Character of Hannah Arendt's Theory of Judgment," *Political Theory* 38, no. 3 (2010): 367–93.

to the role and responsibilities of a political leader, something he believed the revolutionary movement in India lacked. Gandhi's biggest problem with the revolutionaries was not primarily concerned with their use of violence. Though that was part of a broader disagreement, the roots of that disagreement went deeper and was concerned with fundamental differences over political ethics and epistemology, over the character of judgment exercised by revolutionary leadership and Gandhi's need for a reflective judgment that must inform our political actions.

The role of reflective judgment in Gandhi's politics becomes apparent when we take a closer look at how he employed inner voice during the early and later periods of his political discourse, the former representative of his early political career and the latter indicative of the time he assumed responsibility as the leader of the Indian national movement and the period thereafter. The concept of inner voice, as we have already discussed, was developed by him during his time in South Africa and popularized in India during his early years in the country. In this early phase, his articulation of the inner voice served as a tool or a means to ponder our obligation to support a political cause, be it the protest against Asiatic Amendment Law Ordinance or the call for Non-cooperation movement against the British Empire as in Gandhi's case. Such uses are primarily concerned with invoking in people an opportunity to reflect and hear their own voices or subjectivity.

The judgment, in this case, Gandhi asks of himself and others to undertake is concerned with the moral quality of a law, decision or a practice that affects them. Even though it calls for judgments concerning political obligation i.e. whether one must disobey political authority, such judgments rely primarily on moral-ethical categories like duty, conscience or personal

conceptions of what is good, just or divine. There appears to be nothing uniquely political about such judgments except that the target of such judgments are political matters. The ‘reflective’ nature of judgment, in this case, is narrow and limited to meditating on our personal circumstances to extend support to this or that cause or to participate in the political movement in face of our existential uncertainty, that may or may not arise as a result of our choice of action. But political judgments, according to Gandhi, are not possible within this purview of a narrow model of reflection focused on the personal. Sound political judgements, instead, require one to think beyond the self and its subjectivities and move from the domain of relative truth to that of absolute truth, from epistemic conviction to uncertainty, from self to the social, thus, from narrow to a broad exercise of reflective judgment. And this is exactly what, according to Gandhi, the revolutionaries failed to inculcate in their politics.

Taking leadership of a political movement, in contrast to extending support to a political movement or being a participant in its activities require substantively different qualities and attributes. While a supporter may navigate his way through a movement by merely showcasing his faculty of moral judgment, a leader must exhibit a sense of judgment that goes far beyond the moralism of a supporter. To begin with, he must not only acknowledge the environment of plurality associated with political action but also must take into account the epistemological uncertainty that is built into the activity of politics. Leaders, thus, need to be held responsible to ensure they devise means and methods of participation not just for a small minority but for a diverse majority, and that too with varied dispositions, attitudes and skillset. This is a quality of leadership that is indispensable to Gandhi because only such leaders can claim to have attempted to preserve the plural nature of politics.

Also, the actions and initiatives of such a leader must be held accountable to the epistemic standards that are specific to the political. Gandhi believed that political action, by nature, is unpredictable and hence the true efficacy of a political activity cannot be determined. Or to put it in other words, there is an epistemological uncertainty built into the activity of politics and political actions must be reasoned and political judgements should be taken after considering this factor of indeterminacy or unknowability associated with an action and its outcome in the political sphere. A leader that fails to recognize this and falls upon the outcomes or consequences of his action to justify his act has failed to apply a fundamental sense of political judgment to his decisions, and should be held accountable for violating the standards of judgment that is expected of a capable political leader. Reflective judgement in politics i.e. true political judgment, thus for Gandhi, is an indispensable quality of political leadership that helps one remain sensitive to the realities of the political - the plural nature of political action as well as the indeterminate nature of an act and its outcome.

One of the landmark instances of Gandhi's reliance on inner voice as a source of reflective judgment is evident in his discontinuation of the Non-cooperation movement at Bardoli in 1922 following brutal killings of civilians and policemen in Chauri Chaura. According to Gandhi, the inner voice had 'spoken clearly' through Chauri Chaura that situations were not conducive for continuing the political movement. Though this is often interpreted as either an expression of Gandhi's nonviolent absolutism or otherwise seen as his strategic withdrawal to blunt the revolutionary potential of mass movement, such interpretations overlook the leadership ethic and political judgment Gandhi employed to come to such a decision. In the following days after his

withdrawal of the Non-cooperation movement, Gandhi was interviewed by *The Bombay Chronicle*, a newspaper, on his decision to call off the movement. In this interview, Gandhi pointed out that the belief that India could attain independence through an armed conflict is an 'impossible dream,' at least for 'several generations', primarily because of the asymmetric relationship of armed power between India and the Empire.

Gandhi clarified in the interview that he is not naïve to believe there would be no violence in the world and confirmed that he would not be perturbed by 'stray cases of violence.' However, he made a categorical differentiation between violence committed in response to a personal wrong and popular violence expressed as a response to a political wrong, the instance at Chauri Chaura representing the latter case in his understanding.[233] Gandhi was against such acts of popular violence, not because it is morally reprehensible to engage in violence but because such acts violate the basic standards and criteria of judgment a political actor must be sensitive to. Violent political action, for Gandhi, is not inclusive by nature. This is because not everyone might have the moral appetite or political knowhow that can enable them to participate in violent acts, thus adversely affecting the plural nature of politics.

Secondly, Gandhi believed that leaders who glorify and perpetrate such acts of violence are abdicating their responsibility which requires of them to ensure the wellbeing of the people in their communities or constituencies. Often times, the result of such an act of violence is increased repression or counter-violence that is unleashed not just on those who perpetrate

[233] Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, 100 Vols*, vol. 26 (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1958), 167–70.

violence but on the community as a whole. By implicating everyone in the political community to face the consequences of an act of a select minority, the apostles of violence provide no room for their constituents to disagree or non-cooperate with such acts of violence as it is often conceived and performed outside of the common man's domain of knowledge and influence, usually planned and operated in secrecy. In Gandhi's view, a process of decision-making, like the one practiced among revolutionaries, that does not take into account the point of view of others, even if by means of imagination, is an abdication of political responsibility.

Finally, Gandhi is perturbed by the epistemological certainty revolutionaries attribute to their actions. The revolutionaries, for Gandhi, act as if they are precisely aware of the causal complexities and delineate the roles and the responsibilities of a specific actor in such a way as if they are certain of the responsibility of that individual in relation to a particular event. This assured certainty of culpability of their targets is something the revolutionaries take for granted when it comes to their targeted nature of assassinations or acts of violence. And this is how, for example, the revolutionaries of HSRA attribute responsibility to someone like JP Saunders for the death of Lala Lajpat Rai. Gandhi was against this method of attributing responsibility and inflicting punishment by invoking certainty where one could not claim to be certain of the other's role and culpability in an event. And if all of this did not add up to fallible political judgment, Gandhi was convinced that the revolutionaries had abandoned any room for reflective judgment in their acts by upholding a simplistic action-outcome relationship that was insensitive to the indeterminate nature of political action. The conviction among revolutionaries that their acts would inevitably lead to India's independence was for Gandhi violative of the epistemic

uncertainty attributable to political action, thus disregarding all standards and criteria for political judgment and responsible leadership.

Over the next quarter of a century, Gandhi heeded to the wisdom of his inner voice many a number of times, acting by the truth of its reflective judgments. He invoked this voice of truth to orchestrate some of the most significant and, at times, controversial moments in Indian history. The iconic Dandi Salt March of 1930 that kicked off the Civil Disobedience movement under his leadership as well as the contentious calling off of this movement four years later were inspired by the inner voice. And so were the Rajkot fast of 1939 as well as his nonviolent activism in the face of a bloody partition in 1947. Even his advocacy of the spinning wheel and his support for the Khadi programme is often attributed by Gandhi to his intuitive inner voice, all of these actions representative of not just one but various political considerations our judgments must pay attention to if we are to act politically. To reduce the practice of politics to a teleological movement towards freedom, equality or whatever is the prioritized value, to conceive and justify the means employed by invoking these self-prioritized ends or values is to simplify the numerous nuances of reflective judgment and the complexities associated with the art and ethic of responsible leadership.

Conclusion

We began this chapter by discussing the two dominant tendencies of understanding truth in Gandhi, one rooted in the self's subjectivity and the other grounded in an epistemic scepticism. While the latter reading sees truth as something elusive and unattainable, the former sees it as a moral-existential category that is attainable. Our attempt has been to locate these two contrasting

tendencies within a linguistic and ideological context that helps us see Gandhi's truth not as one thing or the other but as an idea that has evolved on its own over a period of time. The chapter, in the early sections, have highlighted that during his early years in South Africa, Gandhi's truth appears to be strongly rooted in a moral-existential paradigm that prioritizes the self and its subjectivity. His early use of the idea of inner voice as moral judgment also reiterates the significance of the self and its moral experience when it comes to realizing truth.

Gandhi's involvement in the Indian national movement, and his taking up of leadership of mass movements like the Non-cooperation and Civil Disobedience movement in the 1920s and 30s however appears to have shifted his position slightly when it comes to truth and its place in politics. And his writings indicate that Gandhi is less welcoming of the unfiltered application of moral standards of the self in the political sphere. Though he continued to use the term inner voice to highlight how truth is intertwined with the self and the voices within, it does not merely indicate subjectivity. Rather, the dilemmas and complexities of political action had driven him to rethink the idea of inner voice, and in turn truth, not as a moral judgement but a political judgment.

Moral norms could no longer be simply reiterated as it is in the political realm. Instead what is required is an application of morality in such a way that it is sensitive to political concerns. Rather than a displacement of political norms, the morality of the self, Gandhi believed, must only act as a directive that helps us to reorder established political norms, and that too keeping in line with the wellbeing of the overall community and not just the self. Morality permeating the political can thus lead to a new political morality, rather than supplanting all the political traces

with the self’s moral standard. And a sound political judgment is one in which the inner voice succeeds in reflecting not pure subjectivity but a political morality that arises out of a reflection that takes into account the perspectives of both the self and the other. Truth, understood as political judgment, is thus the culmination of this process, constituted by this complex interplay between moral and political demands.

Chapter 5

Nonviolence and the Philosophy of History

Introduction

If there is one thing the legacy of Gandhi has come to be synonymous with, it is the idea of ahimsa or nonviolence. This chapter is an attempt to interrogate the meaning and significance of this idea in Gandhi's political thought by placing ahimsa and its articulation by Gandhi in a specific context. Conventional interpretations of the idea of ahimsa have often made sense of it by situating it within the ethical realm, by which I mean an attempt to understand nonviolence as an ethical disposition that informs our conduct in the moral and political sphere. While such interpretations have aided us in developing a nuanced understanding of nonviolence, these interesting takes often shift our focus away from the context and history in which Gandhi was articulating his idea of ahimsa. And in our attempts to grab hold of the universal significance of Gandhian nonviolence to our everyday political struggles, or in our attempts to outline the contours of Gandhian ethics in contrast to established ethical schools like deontology or consequentialism, we often tend to overlook the historical development of the idea itself and view Gandhian ahimsa as an unchanging entity that remains in the same form from the initial articulations in his thought in the early years until Gandhi's death in 1948.

This chapter problematizes the above approach and undertakes a contextual reading of the idea of nonviolence. The chapter will show that the story of Gandhian ahimsa, like many of his other ideas, is ultimately wedded to his larger project of conceptualizing a political that is nonviolent.

To do this, Gandhi focuses his efforts on a critique of modern civilization, its institutions and most importantly its philosophy of history, thereby highlighting the intricate connections between its ideas of progress, politics and its embedded propensity to perpetrate violence towards the 'other.' In this effort, Gandhian ahimsa or nonviolence ends up becoming a comprehensive worldview, a 'positive-ideology' that the self and its community must adopt to keep open the possibility of politics devoid of the violence that informs conventional everyday modern representative politics. In this sense, this chapter narrates a story of the evolution of Gandhi's ideology of nonviolence as an alternative philosophy of history. But before we outline the specificities of this ideology, it is important that we survey and understand how some of the existing interpreters of Gandhi have made sense of nonviolence so that we establish the significant departure an ideological interpretation of nonviolence makes with the existing take on nonviolence as a political or moral idea.

Interpreting Nonviolence as Political Action or Moral Response

We began this study by highlighting that the dominant mode of reading Gandhi and his philosophy has been to situate his thinking within the rubric of moralism-realism. Perhaps nowhere is this dichotomous framework as easily evident as in the study of Gandhian nonviolence. Historians, political theorists and philosophers have interpreted Gandhi and his idea of nonviolence in manifold ways. But for matters of generalization, it is safe to assume that these interpretations tend to fluctuate between two polarities. For some, Gandhian nonviolence is primarily a political idea and is best understood as strategic political action. For others, Gandhi and his idea of nonviolence must not be denied of its moral kernel and is ultimately a moral response. This diversity in interpretation of nonviolence, this breakdown of a core idea of

Gandhian philosophy into its moral and political constituents, is not to be blamed entirely on Gandhi's interpreters as Gandhi himself paved way, at least early on, into making his readers recognize the political realism associated with his philosophy of nonviolence.[234] However, this dichotomy of the moral and political usage of nonviolence comes out more clearer in the works of Gandhi's interpreters and is hence a useful starting point to understand how nonviolence has been conceptualized in contemporary interpretations of Gandhi and his political thought.

A good place to start our analysis of ahimsa as a political idea or nonviolence as strategic political action is to look at Gene Sharp's work on Gandhi. Sharp most clearly articulated his understanding of Gandhian nonviolence in his book *Gandhi as a Political Strategist* and this study was instrumental in establishing Sharp as one of the foremost theorists of nonviolence. Sharp's book, published in 1979, is one of the earliest wholesome assessments of Gandhi as a political strategist and reads nonviolence primarily as a political idea. Sharp's work was received as a valuable addition to an already academically rich repository of assessments of Gandhi and his philosophy of nonviolence, thanks to the works of Joan Bondurant, Erik Erikson, Susan and Lloyd Rudolph, Martin Green, Raghavan Iyer etc. but stood out from these interpretations of nonviolence. This was because while most of the thinkers who wrote on Gandhi always stressed on the ethical and moral dimensions of Gandhi's ideas, Sharp brought to the fore the political significance of nonviolence, especially in terms of viewing it as a strategy or tactic that can shape the power dynamics in a conflict. Sharp successfully detached nonviolence from the inherent moralism that is deep-rooted in the idea and posited nonviolence as strategic political action, an action that is to be prized for its ability to alter power relations.

[234] For a detailed discussion of Gandhi's moralism and realism, refer Chapter 1.

Before Sharp, Susan and Lloyd Rudolph, in their work on Gandhi, had advocated a view that stressed on Gandhi's use of nonviolence as a tactic to gain legitimacy amongst the masses who associated the idea with its traditional and religious roots.[235] Unlike the Rudolphs, Sharp's primary concern in his reading of Gandhi was driven by a need to understand Gandhi's reasoning regarding his unanimous adoption of nonviolence as the preferred political strategy.[236] In his study, Sharp portrays Gandhi as an astute and experienced politician who is well-versed in the art of politics. Sharp sees in Gandhi a 'master strategist' who devised techniques and tools that could ensure impactful political interventions, thus reshaping our own understanding of the dynamics of political action. And Gandhi succeeded in doing this, according to Sharp, because he was one of the first political leaders to realize the significance of 'co-operation' when it came to power and politics.

Sharp traces Gandhi's realization of the power of co-operation, and its antithesis non-cooperation, to his time in South Africa. Sharp locates the root of Gandhi's nonviolent politics in something Gandhi noted in 1905, 'for even the most powerful cannot rule without the co-operation of the ruled,' something reminiscent of his later writings in *Hind Swaraj* where he pointed out 'The English have not taken India; we have given it to them. They are not in India because of their

[235] In *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India* published in 1967, Rudolphs' traced how Gandhi became the Mahatma he is revered to be. In this study, the Rudolphs saw Gandhi's success as the leader of the Indian national movement and the political support he derived from the masses as a consequence of his 'traditional roots of charisma', following the classification provided by Weber. They write, 'Gandhi's charismatic leadership was itself in part historically determined, rooted in the aspects of tradition he interpreted for his time…he used traditional symbols and language to convey new meaning and to reconstitute social action.'

[236] T. K.Oommen, review of. "*Gandhi as a Political Strategist*." By Gene Sharp, Indian Sociological review (1980): 96-99.

strength, but because we keep them.'[237] Sharp thus locates the idea of co-operation as the central feature that sustains power relations and reads Gandhi as a theorist of power whose nuanced intervention in political theory was to develop tactics and strategies of resistance against arbitrary and unjust powers by breaking this chain of co-operation, the foundation of asymmetric power relationships. And to do this, Gandhi relied on a range of methods like non-cooperation and civil disobedience that have since then dominated the discourse on nonviolent politics. Sharp considers Gandhi's non-violent politics as a 'political weapon' whose use is not limited to individuals but as something that can be used by social collectives in their resistance against oppressors and tyrants.[238] In contrast to the early generation of Gandhi scholars who stressed on Gandhi's nonviolence as having strong religious and moral overtones, Sharp saw Gandhi's nonviolence as purely political in its genesis and practice. Thus, for Sharp, Gandhi is both a theoretician of politics who was able to grasp the logic of power politics as well as a smart political actor who founded a practice of nonviolence underpinned in this political reality of asymmetric power, thus developing strategies to undo the cooperative structures that perpetrated injustice.

Indian historian Bipin Chandra follows Sharp in his reading of nonviolence as strategic political action that resists structures of unjust power. Chandra's detailed study of the Indian national movement serve as a valuable resource to undertake a deeper assessment of nonviolence as a political strategy. Chandra's analysis of Gandhi's nonviolent movements as part of the India's freedom struggle is best articulated in his landmark work *Indian National Movement: The Long-*

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[237] MK Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* (Ahmedabad: Navjivan Publishing House, 2011), 34

[238] T. K.Oommen, review of. "*Gandhi as a Political Strategist*." By Gene Sharp, Indian Sociological review (1980): 96-99.

term Dynamics. In this book, Chandra moves away from the conventional interpretation of Marxist and subaltern historians who view Gandhi and the Indian national movement as a bourgeois phenomenon. He argues that for Gandhi it was of utmost importance that these political movements were not only multiclass but also provided an opportunity for all Indians to be part of it thus making it truly national in character.

In Chandra's analysis, the non-violent Indian national movement of the Indian National Congress (INC) under Gandhi's leadership exhibited what he referred to as the nonviolent strategy 'Struggle-Truce-Struggle' (S-T-S). Chandra's position regarding Gandhi's use of an S-T-S strategy was a development from his earlier position on Congress and Gandhi's strategy in 1972, which he referred to as 'Pressure-Compromise-Pressure' (P-C-P).[239] According to Chandra, the S-T-S strategy refers to 'phases of vigorous extra-legal mass movements, which were combined with phases of truce where the movement paused, regenerated itself through mass programs like Gandhiji's constructive work, so that another phase of struggle could be launched at a higher level.'[240] In Chandra's interpretation, through this method, Gandhi felt that the movement would keep 'growing and strengthening itself in an upward spiralling circle till victory was achieved.' According to Chandra, Gandhi decided to adopt the S-T-S strategy because he did not want to impose a continuous struggle on its participants. Chandra suggests that Gandhi's rationale in making the struggle discontinuous, with options to retreat after a struggle, suited the demands of a

[239] P-C-P strategy was viewed as non-revolutionary and as a movement that fit the bourgeois as there were no periods of suspension of the movement, making it difficult for all classes to participate.

[240] Bipan,Chandra, Indian national movement: the long-term dynamics (New Delhi: Har Anand Publications, 2008), page 27-34

multi-class mass movement and gave options for people to join the struggle or retreat at times for recouping energy, thus giving the movement a mass character that attracted millions.

Chandra held the Indian national movement in very high esteem and went on to say that the 'strategic practice of the Congress-led and Gandhi-guided national movement (has) a certain significance in world history being the only actual historical example of a semi-democratic or democratic-type state structure being replaced or transformed, of the broadly Gramscian theoretical perspective of a war of position being successfully practiced.'[241] According to Chandra, Gandhi's use of non-violence was a consequence of the 'hegemonic struggle' that had to also take place in the 'terrain of moral force' and not just on the ground.[242] Further, Chandra sees Gandhi's decision to base his movement on nonviolence instead of violence as a consequence of Gandhi's feeling that violent movement would not involve the millions and only a limited few. Gandhi, as Chandra writes, must not have wanted the Indian national movement to be a 'guerrilla movement or a movement led by a revolutionary army.' Thus, for Chandra, Gandhi's use of nonviolence was a twofold strategy. Firstly, it was politically realistic and effective in involving millions as opposed to the few in a violent revolution. Secondly, by using nonviolence, Gandhi was also locking horns with the colonial state in both the 'moral and political terrain' and putting the state into a dilemma. Repression using brute force would put the state in a bad light and the state would soon lose the legitimacy it had, at least among some sections of the society. By refusing to use brute force, the anti-colonial movement would thrive, thus undermining the authority of the colonial state's ability to deal with the resistance movement. Thus, Gandhi's leadership of the Indian national movement

[241] http://www.mainstreamweekly.net/article5172.html

[242] http://www.mainstreamweekly.net/article5172.html

and his strategic use of methods of nonviolence and non-cooperation put the colonial state on the back foot in terms of its ability to deal with the situation.

Alongside those who saw Gandhian nonviolence as strategic political action, there were many who viewed nonviolence primarily as belonging to the moral domain, as opposed to the political. For these interpreters, nonviolence is primarily a moral response and the political expressions of this idea are only a consequence of the more comprehensive ethical outlook that feeds its moral kernel. But they disagreed over what exactly constituted this ethical outlook that underpinned nonviolence. One of the important interventions in situating nonviolence as an ethical idea was that of Akeel Bilgrami. Writing on nonviolence, Bilgrami notes, 'Ahimsa is not the crude thing it is made to appear. Not to hurt any living thing is no doubt part of ahimsa. But it is its least expression. It is hurt by hatred of any kind, by wishing ill of anybody, by making negative criticisms of others.'[243] For Gandhi, in Bilgrami's understanding, 'To show hostility and contempt, and to speak or even to think negatively and critically, would be to give into the spiritual flaws that underlie violence'.

In Bilgrami's interpretation, Gandhi's philosophy avoids the 'assumed theoretical connections between moral judgment and moral criticism'. According to Bilgrami, in moral philosophy, the feature of universalizing is inherently entailed in moral judgment i.e. by choosing a particular action, one is choosing not only for himself, but for everyone. Thus, each action of an individual has an 'ought' attached to it that is applicable to others. As Bilgrami rightly points out, such ought

[243] Akeel Bilgrami, "Gandhi, the Philosopher," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2003, 4159–65.

imperatives or moral values exist universally and are independent of the holder of such a value. Bilgrami reads Gandhi as someone who 'repudiates' this tradition of moral philosophy and argues that Gandhian morality is devoid of such universalizing tendencies. Instead, Bilgrami views Gandhi as reinterpreting the common maxim of 'when one chooses, he chooses for everyone' as 'when one chooses, one sets an example for everyone.' Moving away from the 'ought' moralism of his predecessors, Bilgrami reads Gandhian morality within the framework of that of a 'moral exemplar,' an alternative morality that is different to a moral philosophy that prizes universalizing tendencies, best represented by Kantian categorical imperatives. This Gandhian juxtaposition, in conceptualizing morality within the sphere of the exemplar, does not leave any room for 'moralizing against others' and negates other psychological attitudes of resentment and hostility that can lead to violence.

Another instance of an interesting reading of Gandhi as a moralist can be found in the writings of Vinit Haksar. Haksar's analysis is driven by certain lack of consistencies in Gandhi's thought and his work attempts to lay clear on what ethical grounds an apostle of peace like Gandhi supported partaking in violent wars during his time. Haksar begins by differentiating Gandhi from other peace or non-violent absolutists as he understands Gandhi's nonviolence as an idea that reconciles a need for violence within itself, in contrast to a categorical rejection of violence. For Haksar, Gandhi had put a lot of thought into nonviolence and understood that there will be circumstances when violence becomes a necessity. In fact, in Haksar's understanding, Gandhi's problem with violence stems from our usage of violence as an expedience. When necessary, Gandhi permits violence but that violence needs to be 'administered with compassion.' For Gandhi, the use of

violence, even out of necessity may never be justified, but it can be pardoned or forgiven.[244] Haksar goes on to make a differentiation between outward and inward violence to further our understanding of Gandhi's ambivalent approach to violence. To simplify, outward violence is the physical violence that can inflict injury on someone. War can be seen as the ultimate expression of this outward violence. Inward violence is more concerned with negative emotions of hatred, ill-will or malice that one feels for another. In the standard interpretations of Gandhi, both forms of violence are taken to be wrong or morally incorrect. In Haksar's interpretation, Gandhi's understanding of violence is more complex and he claims that for Gandhi, even though nonviolence is the ideal, a departure from the ideal does not necessarily make it morally wrong.

Haksar, in his analysis, differentiates between two kinds of Gandhian nonviolence, the demanding and the less-demanding versions of violence. The latter version is best represented by the majority of interpretations of Gandhi which rejects both inward and outward violence. Generally, in this interpretation, violence is defined by the outcome and not by the intention behind the act. In the less-demanding version, Gandhi can be seen as someone who is primarily against inward violence while he is ambivalent in terms of outward violence, which will need a situation specific judgment. The less-demanding version relies on the idea that violence is to be located in the motive behind the act, and in the intention of the actor, rather than the act in itself whereas the demanding version of nonviolence concerns less with the motivation for the act and is more concerned with absolutist formulation of moral principles like 'violence is always wrong.' For Haksar, fundamental to Gandhian morality is the need to negate the egoistic motivations rooted in one's actions. The less

[244] Vinit Haksar, "Violence in a spirit of love: Gandhi and the limits of non-violence," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, Vol. 15, 3 (2012): 303-24.

demanding version in this sense may end up becoming more demanding as it requires selfless action, even when under attack. It locates violence in the heart of the individual. This may be why Gandhi did not find problems with supporting wars, be it the World wars or the Boer war as he was able to read these as demanded by the necessities of situations.

Uday Singh Mehta, like the previous interpreters we have seen, reads nonviolence as a moral response. Mehta locates nonviolence in Gandhi's attitude to daily life. Unlike the political logic of forming a political community to prevent oneself against corporeal vulnerability, Mehta reads Gandhi as someone embracing this contingency of life. Rather than looking up to a sovereign to provide the escape from this and establish peace and security, Gandhi was keen on the individual facing this vulnerability head-on, with fearlessness.[245] Mehta reads Gandhi as, hence, conceptualizing nonviolence as a moral response founded on courage and self-sacrifice. Mehta feels that Gandhi further extended the ambit of this nonviolent moral action to daily life. For Mehta, courage to deal with one's contingency in the face of this earth did not require a plan or motive. In fact, in Mehta's reading, Gandhi was deeply disturbed by the plans and motives behind politics for establishing the so called just and equal society. In Mehta's reading Gandhian ethics like spinning, fasting, silence etc. are rebellious responses to the rational and motivated actions, that is a trademark of political activity. These actions have no motivations on their own and exist by themselves making little or no impact on the world, a negative approach and one of withdrawal, to the 'self and its quotidian surroundings.' The effects these actions produce are on the self, not the world. And it is within this backdrop that Mehta locates Gandhi's nonviolence. Gandhian

[245] Uday Singh Mehta, "Gandhi on Democracy, Politics and the Ethics of Everyday Life," *Modern Intellectual History* 7, no. 2 (2010): 355–71.

morality in Mehta's words can be best expressed as a 'private subjective conviction utterly devoid of any larger purposefulness.'

Interpreting Nonviolence as Positive Ideology

Our discussions until now have focused on how ahimsa can be understood when placed within a moral and political domain. What comes across from these interpretations is that those who read nonviolence as strategic political action often tend to read within the idea its implications for countering asymmetric power and injustice in a community whereas those who view it as a moral practice tend to see within ahimsa an alternative ethical way of life that is less judgmental of outward violence and is more focused on inward violence And from these interpretations, they make comparisons between Gandhi and other thinkers in the history of moral and political philosophy. For example, Chandra draws to our attention between Gandhi's nonviolent tactics and Gramsci's war of position while Bilgrami, Haksar and Mehta draws comparisons between Gandhi and Kant's moral philosophy. Yet, a deeper meditation on Gandhi and nonviolence can lead to further questions.

Gandhi is extremely particular in stressing that nonviolence is not merely an attitude towards minimizing violence in life, whether it be in the public or private, or the political or the moral sphere. He writes, 'I cannot be nonviolent about one activity of mine and violent about others. That would be a policy, not a life-force.'[246] Throughout his life, Gandhi remained adamant that nonviolence is a 'life-force.' And he further wrote,

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[246] Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, ed. Raghavan Iyer (Oxford University Press, USA, 1991), 263.

'Nonviolence for me is not a mere experiment. It is part of my life and the whole of the creed of satyagraha, non-cooperation, civil disobedience, and the like are necessary deductions from the fundamental proposition that nonviolence is the law of life for human beings. For me it is both a means and an end.'[247]

Gandhi often used the term 'creed' to differentiate his version of ahimsa from the other commonplace conventional usages of nonviolence which primarily had to do with some form of negating violence. As the term 'creed' indicates, Gandhi understood ahimsa as faith, or a belief-system, and his version of nonviolence extended beyond the scope of a negation of conventional violence. In this sense, philosophers like Bilgrami and Mehta are accurate in referring to Gandhian nonviolence as a way of being-in-the-world. Yet, these articulations are often slightly upended from the context and history itself in which Gandhi articulated the 'life-force' he calls nonviolence. And while the political interpretations are often sensitive to this anti-colonial context, they fail to read into it the larger belief-system that accompanies Gandhian ahimsa. As a result, it is important that we ponder on a mode of understanding nonviolence that is both sensitive to the context while at the same time also exports the moral backbone that forms the creed of nonviolence. The task at hand then consists in uncovering the foundations of this belief-system that Gandhi called ahimsa.

Writing about the term 'ideology,' Raymond Geuss points out that 'ideology' as a category can be understood in three different ways.[248] According to Geuss, ideology has often been used in

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[247] Raghavan Iyer, "The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi," 2000, 186.

[248] Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), 32.

social science primarily in, what he terms, the ‘descriptive’ and ‘pejorative’ senses. In his understanding, to use ideology in a descriptive fashion is to rely on the category for explanatory purposes, often times as a hypothetical postulate that can help us ‘find’ or understand something. In contrast to this, to use ideology in a pejorative framework is to ‘isolate’ what has been found so that we can ‘criticize’ it. But unlike these two ways, Geuss tells us that it is also possible to use ideology in a ‘positive’ sense. He suggests the term ‘world-view’ as being close to this positive usage of ideology and in such a usage ideology, as a category, is primarily concerned with identifying ‘what world-view would be most appropriate’ for the group or the individual so that they are enabled and empowered to satisfy their needs and wants. However, such positive ideology is not pre-given, and according to Geuss, ‘is something to be constructed, created or invented.’

For Geuss, Vladimir Lenin’s text *What is to be Done* serves one of the first instances of ‘constructing an ideology in the positive sense for a human group.’[249] This is because Lenin, in this text, according to Geuss, is not concerned with what ‘beliefs and attitudes’ the working class actually holds but instead articulates the beliefs and attitudes ‘which would best enable the workers to restructure society’ in line with their own interests. And in this sense, Lenin relies on ‘ideology’ in a positive manner to enable the agents i.e. the working class, to ‘effectively satisfy’ their own needs and wants. The beliefs accompanying positive ideology is not merely ‘useful’ for the agent but is ‘indispensable’ to reorganize society in the interests of the agent.

[249] Geuss, 35.

Taken at face value, viewing nonviolence as an 'ideology' in the positive sense, as Geuss formulates, may make it seem like the idea is removed from its applicability to Gandhi as he does not appear to be a thinker who is concerned with adopting an 'appropriate' world-view that secures one's self-interest. But it is evident that Gandhi's politics is not entirely alien to 'interests' and, as we have already seen in the previous chapters, Gandhi is very much concerned with protecting the interests of the powerless or the weak in a community. And what he is against is a form of self-interest that is indifferent to the wellbeing of the other. Given this scenario, it is indeed important to contemplate the possibility of a world-view in Gandhi which aims at balancing out the concerns of the self with that of society and how nonviolence fits into his construction of this larger world-view that is accommodative of the interests of the vulnerable other. And when we begin to think about nonviolence as a set of belief-systems through these lenses and start locating it in this particular context of interests, of that of the self and the other, it makes us wonder how this ideology of nonviolence plays out in the two significant archetypical self-other relationships that troubled Gandhi - the relationship between the Indian and the Englishman, and the relationship between the Hindu and the Muslim.

When it came to the relationship between the Indian and Englishman, Gandhi very early on understood that this relationship was hierarchical, and the dominant modality that captured the nature of this relationship was a feeling of inferiority that pervaded the Indian self and its pre-colonial identity while encountering its other, the British. This inferiority or backwardness of the desi-self was seen as the result of a history and tradition that had failed to grow out its primitivity while the West, the other, had developed into a civilization fit for modern era, a civilization that stood for science and technology, secularism and representative democracy, all of which

exemplified progress, not just in material but also in moral terms. The 'essential cultural difference' between the East and the West, to borrow a phrase from Partha Chatterjee, was understood by the colonized self not as an instance of value-pluralism but as a case of lack of progress, and hence adversely impacted its self-worth. And the conclusion was that this desi-self could only regain its moral worth by shedding off its own primitive tradition and by appropriating the culture and history of the other. It is only science, secularism and self-government that could enable both the material and moral progress the Indian self was in dire need of.

In contrast to the above, the relationship between the dominant Hindu majority and the minority Muslim community operated on an entirely different self-other dynamic. Where the Indian self, in relationship to the British, aimed to redefine its identity and moral worth by associating with the progressive dimensions of the other, the desi Hindu self, in its relationship to the Muslim, aimed to recover its self-worth by dissociating with the historical and cultural dimensions of the other.[250] Gandhi, early on in his political life, recognized that it was this need for dissociation which preoccupied the Hindu self that morphed into antagonisms in practice thus positing the Muslim and Hindu in opposition to each other.

The relationship between the Hindus and Muslims in India had always been a concern that occupied Gandhi's mind and he found it ridiculous to endorse an exclusionary conception of the

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[250] It is important at this stage to clarify that the archetypical self-other formulations mentioned here are only expressive of some of the many modes of characterizing the relationship between Indians-Britishers and Hindus-Muslim. What is being argued here is not that this was the most prevalent or dominant modality of the self-other relationship when it comes to these social relationships but that these were the modes that captured Gandhi's imagination and hence these formulations are key to understanding his own ideology.

Indian self that prioritized Hindu concerns over those of other religions, including Islam. After he got back to India from South Africa and assumed the leadership of the Indian national movement, he considered his mission to proactively resist this increasingly prevalent othering of the Muslim community and the theme of Hindu-Muslim unity dominated his politics. However, from the 1920s onwards, the rift between certain Hindu and Muslim elements in the Indian national movement became very palpable and this volatility was further exacerbated by instances of riots that triggered further distancing between the two communities. The fissure that hovered over these two communities continued even after the independence and reached a peak following the partition of India into the Hindu dominated India and Muslim dominated Pakistan, an event that triggered communal violence at a scale before unseen. And it is not incidental that Gandhi found himself at the centre of this violence following the partition, appealing to the violent parties to resort to peace. In fact, Gandhi considered this mission of his, of establishing harmony between the Hindu and Muslim communities following the violent partition, the most important engagement of his life, the most important battle he had ever fought.

Renowned sociologist Michael Mann made a remarkable claim in 2004 when he argued in his book that 'evil does not arrive from outside of our civilization.'[251] Instead, Mann claimed that the evil of ethnic cleansing was primarily a modern problem indicating an intricate connection between modern civilization, its conceptions of progress and the instances of ethnic conflicts that arise as a consequence of democratizing a community or a nation and its people. This is because, according to Mann, democracies are vulnerable to the 'possibility that the majority might

[251] Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2-4.

tyrannize minorities' and that this possibility carries 'more ominous consequences in certain types of multiethnic environments.' Violence is thus, for Mann, seated in the space between the majority and the minority.[252]

Gandhi was obviously no sociologist like Mann. However, several of Gandhi's apprehensions concerning modern civilization seem to find its way to Mann's own conclusion about the modern world and its propensity for 'evil.' Gandhi's comprehensive analysis of modern civilization can be traced back to *Hind Swaraj* in 1909 but he began to express his dissatisfaction much earlier on. Discussing about it in as early as in 1903 in his journal *Indian Opinion*, Gandhi writes,

'Nothing that modern civilization can offer in the way of stability can ever make any more certain that which is inherently uncertain; that, when we come to think of it, the boast about the wonderful discoveries and the marvellous inventions of science, good as they are in themselves, is, after all, an empty boast. They offer nothing substantial to the struggling humanity.'[253]

Gandhi never shied away throughout his life from the above view of western modernity as a 'empty boast' that offer nothing to humanity. Gandhi was absolutely convinced that what his compatriots termed progress was instead a state of degeneration and the modern civilization that propagated this must be fuelled by a centre that is 'satanic' in nature. In one of his letters

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[252] In his landmark work titled *The Dark Side of Democracy*, Mann studied ethnic conflicts across different parts of the world. He noted that 'premeditations' were rare in such occurrences and the escalation of conflicts was neither attributable to the responsible few who occupied positions of power nor were these handiworks of the so-called barbarians. Instead, a complex interplay of varied forces is at play during a conflict and the devastating scenes of violence that accompanied an ethnic conflict were performed by individuals who were 'not unlike ourselves' but felt were 'forced into a series of moral choices' that resulted in acts of violence. Violence made its way into a situation when the weaker side (mostly minorities) fights rather than submits to the stronger side (majority) or when the majority believes it can impose 'sudden, overwhelming force' on the minorities to ensure the latter submits to the demands of the former.

[253] Gandhi, *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, 279.

published in his journal *Young India* decades later, Gandhi echoed this view that he first hinted in *Hind Swaraj* and wrote,

> 'I have ventured utterly to condemn modern civilization because I hold that the spirit of it is evil. It is possible to show that some of its incidents are good, but I have examined its tendency in its scale of ethics.…[modern civilization] is a blasting influence that threatens to overwhelm the world.'[254]

Gandhi's assumptions concerning what constituted a civilization had to do with the idea that morality and ethics are central to any conceptualization of civilization. To be civil or moral, for Gandhi, was not a matter of dressing up and using roads, railways or machinery and instead entailed a way of life that directed us towards a path of duty and service, a tendency he felt was lacking in the ideas of modern progress. Instead of duty, what constituted civilization in the modern era, according to Gandhi, was the establishment of a regime of science and technology, a state of irreligiousness in order to be more secular, and an unreflective adoption of western political institutions including democracy, which Gandhi felt, like Mann would later, was vulnerable to violence. Close to a decade after he wrote *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi remarked the following at a speech in Indore to further elaborate his point,

> 'Our leaders say that in order to fight the west, we have to adopt the ways of the west. But please rest assured that it will mean the end of Indian civilization...The Congress League Scheme, or any other scheme which is even better, will not get us swaraj...We can never gain it through copying the Europe.'[255]

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[254] Gandhi, 268.

[255] Iyer, "The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi," 220.

At another instance in 1925, he went onto further point out the violence embedded in modernity in his journal *Young India* when he claimed that 'Asian and African races are exploited' by west in the name of modern civilization and that democracy was a sham in which 'the ruling class or caste' was 'being exploited...under the sacred name of democracy.'[256] Thus, modern civilization, for Gandhi, was working towards creating a political order that not only undermined the moral worth of the indigenous traditions that it came in contact with but this new-found representative democratic political order was also fundamentally skewed towards the interests of the majority, often times at the cost of the wellbeing of the minority.

It is within this backdrop that Gandhi begins to construct a positive-ideological framework that would instead prioritize the interests of the minor or the powerless. And when Gandhi began to meditate on a world-view that would help further the interests of the Indians in relation to the British or the interests of the minority Muslim community in relation to the majority Hindus, he realized that it was essential to the project that he provide a systematic critique of modern civilization that would make it evident to its participants, to both the self and the other, the problematic aspects western modernity and the troubling interconnections between the various elements of this civilization like the nation-state, democracy, its conception of progress etc. Gandhi realized his critique of modern civilization would ultimately be a critique of its philosophy of history.[257] And nonviolence, hereafter would no more be a mere moral or political

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[256] Gandhi, *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, 265.

[257] By the term 'philosophy of history,' I refer to structured meditations on questions concerning, but not limited to, what constitutes history, how it progresses and how our understanding of history influences or shapes our contemporary moral and ethical considerations. Seen from this point of view, it is easy to understand the centrality of a category like the philosophy of history to make sense of our own human agency and social progress as the definition of these value laden terms are often entangled and accompanied by corresponding favourable conceptions of history and progress. As a result, the philosophy of history forms an essential component in the construction of

practice but an ideological counter to the west and its approach to progress and history. Because it is the inherent historicism that is wedded to the western conception of progress that legitimized both an inherently violent political order and a constant othering, whether it be in the form of the colonized in the case of imperialism or the minorities in the case of a democracy.

Nonviolence and the Philosophy of History

To trace the roots of ahimsa or nonviolence as a positive ideology, as an alternative philosophy of history, it is required of us to go back to the immediate period after Gandhi's writing of *Hind Swaraj*. For it is in response to some of the critical reviews he received in journals and newspapers which reviewed *Hind Swaraj* that he begins to articulate his philosophy of nonviolence as a distinct political ideology that stood in stark contrast to the post-Enlightenment modern predisposition that had then dominated the imagination of the west. This is best evident in Gandhi's response to a critical assessment of *Hind Swaraj* published in *Transvaal Leader*, a South African newspaper, undertaken by one of his acquaintance Edward Dallow, who was sympathetic towards the Indian cause in Transvaal. Ramachandra Guha, in his biography of Gandhi, further notes that Dallow was also a signatory to the letter written in January 1909 that urged the then British Colonial Secretary to receive the Gandhi-led Indian deputation and address their concerns by ameliorating the law which discriminated against Indians. As a result, Dallow's assessment of *Hind Swaraj* can be taken to be devoid of any polemics to tarnish the text and hence a serious and worthy intellectual critique of Gandhi and his writing.

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any positive ideology. And in the ongoing case, if we are to move beyond reading nonviolence with the moral-political rubric and fit it within the domain of ideology, it is inevitable that we need to uncover within this ideology of nonviolence an accompanying philosophy of history, which in turn furnishes the groundwork for the larger nonviolent world-view.

Dallow, in his review, termed the text 'an undercover of a dissertation on modern civilization' but felt *Hind Swaraj* must be seen as belonging to a tradition of propaganda literature that aimed to tarnish the image of English people by portraying the modern civilization, which was predominantly accepted in the British world, as something 'abominable.'[258] As a result, and because of Gandhi's inability to delineate the British from his critique of the west, Dallow felt Gandhi's text would end up further antagonizing the relationship between Englishmen and Indians and hence supported the ban on the book by the British led Indian government had brought about in India. According to Dallow, 'all his [Gandhi's] illustrations of the degrading effects of modern civilization are taken from English government , from English life, from English ministers, Parliament and people' and 'a cultivated man and a scholar will keep the subtle distinction [between the English and the west] in mind.' In contrast, he found Gandhi's approach to be lacking such nuanced distinctions and felt such a text would only serve to 'raise hatred not only of modern civilization but of the English people in India as its particular exponents.' Finally, Dallow felt Gandhi's critique of modern civilization was fundamentally flawed because he 'overlooked masters of modern philosophy' like 'Mill' and 'Kant' among others. He concluded his assessment by pointing out that 'under the guidance of English rule, India is gradually adopting representative institutions,' stressing on the beginning of establishing a system of representative government as British colonialism's significant contribution to the Indian society.

[258] Ramachandra Guha, *Gandhi before India* (Penguin UK, 2013), 377.

For Dallow, British colonialism was merely setting the stage, preparing the Indian society towards a time, 'as yet still far distant' when India will 'take upon her shoulders the burden of government.' And his defence of colonialism almost appears to be a reiteration of British thinker John Stuart Mill's views when it came to colonialism in India. Gandhi responded to Dallow's review of *Hind Swaraj* by clarifying that he was 'aquatinted' with the writings of Mill but rejected his view as he found such works to be mere 'glosses of modern civilization.' And countering Dallow's call to read other 'masters of modern philosophy,' Gandhi believed that his appendix to the text included works of enough western thinkers he consulted while writing *Hind Swaraj*, including thinkers like Leo Tolstoy, John Ruskin, Giuseppe Mazzini, Edward Carpenter and Henry Manie, and brushed aside Dallow's call for a deeper engagement with the so called 'masters of modern philosophy.'

A quick survey of Gandhi's writings around this time does not record any serious engagement Gandhi maintained with the works of Mill. But from what can be gathered from *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi particularly disagreed with Mill's view of the representative form of government though it is unclear whether he read Mill's writings on the topic. In *Hind Swaraj*, the 'reader' points out to the 'editor,' Gandhi's alter-ego in this literary world, that if the education Indians have received be of any use and 'if the works of Spencer, Mill and others be of any importance,' it must be accepted that the English Parliament is the 'Mother of all Parliaments' and 'What they have done in their country has not been done in any other country' and hence India must 'copy them.' The reader goes onto suggest that with all that thinkers like Mill have taught them, the English achievements are worth emulating and 'it is, therefore, proper for us [Indians] to import

their institutions,' a view that Gandhi vehemently disagreed with not just in *Hind Swaraj* but throughout his life.

Writing about the possibility of Gandhi's closer engagement with Mill's ideas, Anthony Parel too suggests that it is not possible from available works of Gandhi to identify which works of Mill Gandhi had read during this period. However, Parel highlights that Gandhi continued his critical engagement with Mill further into his life and points out that at a speech Gandhi gave at a university in 1920, Gandhi further elaborated on his disagreement with Mill by pointing out,

> 'I know that in the West there is a powerful trend towards license. But I have no desire to see students in India take to such license...I want to tell you that the man who has not received education for freedom- and you may be sure this is not to be had by reading Mill on liberty- cannot be taken to be a free man.'[259]

Thus, one can assume that Gandhi did not hold's Mill's ideas favourably, whether it be concerning the representative government or his views on liberty and freedom.

One of the works Gandhi highlighted in his appendix to *Hind Swaraj* as an influence on his own work was *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* by Dadabhai Naoroji, a founding member of the Indian National Congress. The book delves into the adverse impacts of British colonial rule in India and it is clear from Gandhi's own writings that he studied Naoroji's work closely and held it in high regard. Interestingly, though Naoroji's text is critical of the British rule in India, unlike Gandhi, the writer is sympathetic towards the views of some of the proponents of 'modern

[259] Gandhi, *Gandhi:'Hind Swaraj'and Other Writings*, Introduction.

civilization' and takes a favourable view of Mill positions on political economy.[260] Yet, despite Naoroji's positive portrayal of Mill's contribution to make his own claims of 'drain-theory' and the economic exploitation of India by the British, Gandhi's attitude towards Mill, as we have seen, continued to be entirely critical. This careful outright rejection of Mill makes one wonder whether Gandhi's disagreements with the nineteenth century liberal thinker extends far beyond issues concerning freedom or representative government and has to do with something more fundamental.

In recent years, Mill's ideas have come under significant critical scrutiny. And among several of his ideas, it is his philosophy of history and his idea of progress that have been at the receiving end of the most stringent of criticisms. And a lot of this owes to not just his writings but is also attributed to his association with the British empire – first as the son of James Mill, one of the empire's staunch proponents in India, and then as an employee of the East India Company, the imperial vehicle in the Indian subcontinent. It is unlikely that Gandhi's rejection of Mill's ideas, as we have seen earlier, is in any ways informed by his awareness of Mill's entanglements with the empire and hence an instance of premature dismissal. Rather, it is likely that Gandhi's attitude towards Mill is more of a studied indifference to the latter's largely modern outlook as Gandhi believed Mill was just one more of those famous European masters who were interested in painting a picture of 'modern civilization' as the be-all end-all of human realization. And it is in this club he also included Kant.

[260] Naoroji's drain-theory relies not only on the political-economy related assumptions made by John Stuart Mill but also reiterates certain views held by James Mill, the father of John Stuart Mill. Both their works are cited by Naoroji in his treatise.

Contemporary discussions on liberal thought have often focused on issues like liberty, justice, equality etc. and are more concerned with debates surrounding the nitty-gritties of political and socio-economic rights in society. But unlike the preoccupations of contemporary liberal thought, thinkers of the liberal tradition belonging to the Enlightenment era, and those that immediately followed this period, were also interested in basic questions concerning history, colonialism and progress. Reading Gandhi as a critic of modern civilization and his conceptualization of nonviolence as a positive ideology requires us to trace some of these assumptions, and then situate Gandhi as responding to and critically engaging with these proponents of a 'modern' world-view. Gandhi's critique of modern civilization and his overlooking of the 'masters of modern philosophy,' as suggested by Dallow, must thus be understood within this backdrop of Gandhi's rejection of certain fundamental premises of a modern civilization that advocated a philosophy of history and progress that legitimized a form of insensitivity and undermining of both indigenous and minority interests, and instead celebrated an imperial and majoritarian outlook. In Gandhi's world-view, the idea of history and the concept of progress did not carry the significance these ideas were accorded to within the Enlightenment tradition, and especially within the works of someone like Kant or Mill. Instead, Gandhi's manoeuvre consisted in constructing an ideology that countered this 'modern' view of the world and its philosophy of history that is sympathetic to a particular idea of progress and the constitutional representative democratic politics that accompanied it. Thus, reiterating what we have previously argued, Gandhi's conceptualization of nonviolence was to be transformed from a mere negation of violence in the private and public spheres to a proactive world-view that countered certain dominant precepts of political thinking that had consolidated during the Enlightenment period. And these counter-Enlightenment positions that Gandhi adopted as part of his rejection of the

‘masters of modern philosophy’ ends up becoming the core of ideas that informs his own ideology of nonviolence. Even though thinkers like Kant and Mill shared some similarities in their approach to progress and politics, they can be seen to be entertaining slightly distinct philosophies of history. And by delineating their similarities and differences, we will be in a better position to situate Gandhi’s own approach to questions concerning history, progress and the political.

Kant, Mill, Progress and the Political

Kant’s serious engagement with the idea of history and progress began in the 1780s. As Allan Wood points out, Kant’s reflections on history was ‘excited’ by the works of his ‘sometime student’ JG Herder.[261] The latter had written a multi-volume work titled *Ideas Toward a Philosophy of History of Humanity* which Kant reviewed. Herder’s work was reflective of his larger critical approach to Enlightenment rationalism which Kant held dearly. Kant’s review of Herder’s work, as well as his subsequent writings on history, thus must be seen as part of his larger effort to ‘vindicate the cause of Enlightenment’ in the face of criticisms raised by Herder and the like.[262] And two of Kant’s essays published in 1784 can help us make sense of the ‘historical presuppositions’ he held and advocated. The first, and the more direct, response to Herder’s focus on the ‘innerness of history’s participants’ in his works is evident in Kant’s *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent*. And placing Kant’s *What is Enlightenment?*

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[261] Immanuel Kant, *Basic Writings of Kant* (Modern Library Classics, 2001), Introduction.

[262] Kant, Introduction.

alongside this essay, one can very well begin to tease out Kant's philosophy of history and his approach to the idea of progress.

As he mentions at the beginning of the essay, Kant's purpose in writing *Ideas* is to discover 'a guide' to history. And he posits 'reason' as this guide that will help us make sense of history as opposed to viewing it as a series of hapless accidents. And reason, he suggested was the 'capacity to enlarge the rules and purposes' of man's resources at a level beyond his 'natural instincts.' And, we can see already see here Kant's initial intervention to posit 'reason' as something that is placed in opposition to or as something that must transcend man's 'instinct.' Kant's text goes onto articulate a series of nine propositions through which he intends to show that this transcendence takes place because it is part of nature's plan. He writes, 'Nature has intended that man develop everything which transcends the mechanical ordering of his animal existence' and the means with which it establishes this 'development' of man's faculties is the 'antagonism of men in society.'[263] This is because, for Kant, this 'unsociable sociability' that men are born into drives his 'propensity' to 'enter into a society.' As he notes, 'this antagonism becomes, in the end, the cause of a lawful order of this society.' Nature in this Kantian view is all knowing and is best represented in his view that 'Man wants concord, but nature knows better what is good for his kind; nature wants discord.' For Kant, nature 'forces' man to establish a 'civil society' with a 'just civil constitution,' one that is capable of administering 'right [recht].' Thus, viewing the world through such a lens, Kant believed that 'the history of mankind' could be seen as the 'realization of a hidden plan of nature' to bring about a 'perfect constitution,' both

[263] Kant, 122.

internally and externally, as it is only in such a state that ‘nature can develop all predispositions of mankind.’ And, such an approach to history, he referred to as ‘universal history’ of mankind, one that is applicable to all men.

Kant’s universal history can be interpreted as an example of a teleological approach to history. Nature does not do anything in vain in this view. And he reads into the universe a ‘formal unity’ and sees the world as if originating from the ‘purpose’ embodied in a ‘supreme reason.’ The teleological laws of nature can thus help us reason out and make associations between our various experiences and as a result may open to us ‘altogether new views as how things of the world may be connected.’ This is important to Kant because the ‘worst’ that can happen would be that ‘where we expected a teleological connection we find only a mechanical or physical connection.’ But as Burleigh Taylor Wilkins notes in his exegesis of *Idea*, the fact that we failed to discover such connections is not necessarily the failure of the teleological approach for Kant. Our failing to find ‘additional unity’ in our ‘empirical employments’ in the world does not ‘destroy’ the unity that pervades it for Kant.[264]

It is important at this stage to delineate further the uniqueness of Kant’s teleology and his approach to history. This attribution of purpose to nature in Kant is ultimately for the ‘good’ of man and his kind. Thus, teleology in Kant, following Wilkins can be termed as an instance of ‘harmless anthropomorphism,’ which he refers to as a mode of ‘reasoning by analogy from man’s purposeful pursuit of certain ends.’ The nature, and in turn the accompanying ‘universal

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[264] Burleigh Taylor Wilkins, “Teleology in Kant’s Philosophy of History,” *History and Theory* 5, no. 2 (1966): 172–85.

history' is in the end an 'object of reason' that aids men in achieving their ends. Thus, to read Kant as a thinker of history for our purpose here is not to put forward the idea that his approach is teleological, rather it is to highlight that the 'ends' of man lie at the centre of his philosophy of history, and this end is primarily 'moral' in nature. History, for Kant, is to be understood from a 'moral' viewpoint. This moral flavour of history goes onto inform Kant's theory of progress as well.

In *What is Enlightenment?* Kant points out that the 'original destiny' of human nature is to attain such a progress in which a community makes it possible for them to 'enlarge' its knowledge and 'eliminate' errors of the preceding generations. Only such a progress is to Kant a 'progress in enlightenment.' To achieve this, what matters is to come to a condition in which 'people could impose such a law upon itself' that can not only allow but also cast them 'entirely justified' in discarding 'unauthorized and criminal' pacts of the past that prevents humanity's progress.[265] And this is the only way forward for man as he considers a resignation from such enlightenment as trampling underfoot 'the sacred rights of mankind.' But how is one to attain such a progress in enlightenment? And it is here that Kant's philosophy of history and his understanding of progress come together and put forward politics as the indispensable ingredient in the way forward for man's universal history. Kant considers the 'touchstone' of such an enlightened age the creation of a 'law for people' that is not prescribed by a 'persisting constitution' that cannot be 'publicly doubted' or written by a 'tolerant' prince but by establishing of a 'perfect civil constitution' that will not only pertain to domestic matters but also matters concerning the

[265] Kant, *Basic Writings of Kant*, 139.

‘lawful external relationship of the states.’ For Kant, man’s universal history will achieve true progress when the ‘supreme task nature has set for mankind’ is realized. And this requires man to bring about a ‘perfectly just civil constitution,’ an external law through which society can realize ‘freedom.’

From the above discussion, it can be deduced that Kant gave due importance to politics in his philosophy of history. In fact, Kant’s teleological approach to history and progress entails within it a conceptualization of the political that prioritizes a particular mode of social order, a constitutional order, that helps man accrue the ‘fruits’ of his unsocial sociability by disciplining his instincts. Such disciplining, for Kant, is in no way a curtailment of freedom but a prerequisite for its enactment. Though this reasoned forward movement of ‘general world history’ to a ‘cosmopolitan condition’, as per the plans of nature, will ultimately aim at a ‘perfect civil association’ of all mankind and thus lead to an ‘enlightened age,’ a starting point to this universal history is the establishment of such a civil association within one’s own community. True progress, in Kant’s version, involves a political that forces the ‘wild man’ to ‘give up his brutal freedom’ through a ‘lawful constitution,’ thus making all men ‘truly ethicized.’ The states, in Kant’s universal history, must focus not on ‘violent designs for expansion’ but instead turn toward the ‘inner shaping of the minds of the citizens,’ thus underscoring its ethical spirit. Kant refers to this as a form of morality that pervades his conceptions of the political as well as his philosophy of history, ‘an idea of morality...which amounts only to something similar to ethics...in the form of a love of honour and external decency which constitutes civilization.’[266] Politics and ethics thus become central to Kant’s philosophy of history and his idea of progress.

[266] Kant, 128.

Politics is the means through which moral progress can be attained and history is this journey of man's moral perfection. And political institutions, as he notes, is the 'adroit' means through which man furthers his history. For Kant, what mankind hopes to do and what mankind ought to do are the same and his conception of history evolves from this hope of ethical progress and not from any past or present experiences. And by doing this, man, in Kant's formulation, becomes this 'moral agent' who is free from 'conditions of time and place.' And both his ethics and philosophy of history are thus ultimately decontextualized from his time and space.

In contrast to Kant, Mill's philosophy of history is more empirical, experience driven and does not attribute any purposeful movement to history. And his detailed exposition into history and progress can be seen in parts of his 1861 treatise *Considerations on Representative Government*. Over 18 chapters in the text, Mill argues that representative government is 'the ideally best form of government' but warned that it may not be suitable for 'all situations and all societies.'[267] This is because not all people have the 'will or the capacity' to 'fulfil the part which belongs to them in a representative government.' In these cases, Mill prescribed a form despotism as the way forward for such societies. At the heart of Mill's claims in the text lies his belief that 'the best government is that which is most conducive to progress,' thus outlining the centrality of both 'government' and 'progress' to his philosophical project.[268] For Mill, in ways similar to Kant, the

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[267] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty, Utilitarianism, and Other Essays* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2015), 127–29.

[268] Mill, 129.

political and the form of government it entails is the most potent means of preparing a community for progress. But what does Mill mean by progress?

In the second chapter of *Considerations*, Mill contrasts 'progress' with 'order, to make us understand certain connections between these two concepts. Order, for Mill, in relation to a community and its government, does not merely mean a condition of obedience where people abide by government's ordinances. Rather, he wants a 'somewhat more enlarged' definition of order and he goes on to write,

> 'Order means the preservation of peace by the cessation of private violence…But..[this] expresses only one of the conditions of the government…If we intend to comprise in the idea of Order all that society requires of government…we must describe Order as the preservation of all kinds of good which already exist.'[269]

Following from this, progress, for Mill, is to be defined as 'consisting in the increase' of order i.e. the good which already exists. He clarifies elsewhere in the same chapter 'Progress includes order, but order does not include progress' and that progress is 'a greater degree of that of which order is less.'[270] Progress when spoken in terms of human society, thus denotes, to Mill the 'improvement' of society or community. A good government, then for Mill, is one that is conducive to establishing conditions for a community's improvement. However, not all communities are the same and at a time in history, one can find several 'states of society' in different parts of the world. As a result, different forms of governments are suitable for different states of society.

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[269] Mill, 138.

[270] Mill, 137.

Towards the end of *Considerations*, Mill dedicates a chapter to discussions on the suitability of having a representative government for people in the colonies of the British empire, or as he referred to them, the 'dependencies.' According to Mill, only a population in a 'sufficiently advanced stage' are fit enough to have a representative government according to Mill and despite its merits, such a government could not be extended to all dependencies. He goes on to write, 'others [dependencies] which have not attained that state...must be governed by the dominant country.'[271] This is often interpreted as Mill's legitimation of the empire's rule over the Indian subcontinent, and in turn the rule of the Englishmen over Indians, because Mill wrote that only under the dominant country could the dependencies 'transition' from their 'existing state of civilization' to a 'higher stage of improvement.' Several postcolonial theorists have rightly lambasted Mill for holding such a highly exclusionary view of 'progress' and 'improvement,' and in turn 'history,' when it came to the colonies of the British empire. For example, Dipesh Chakrabarty in *Provincializing Europe* points out how Mill ascribes to a particular mode of 'historicism' and refers to Mill's texts like *On Liberty* and *Considerations* as 'classic liberal but historicistic essays' that converted 'history' into a 'version of waiting room.'[272] In this version, all of us are heading in the same direction but 'some people were to arrive earlier than others.' Dependencies like India, in Chakrabarty's reading of Mill, were destined to wait until they

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[271] Mill, 352–55.

[272] By the term "historicism," Chakrabarty refers to a mode of thinking that exhibits some specific characteristics. A historicist view of the world believes that to understand the nature of things in the world, we must see it as a "historically developing entity" that is "first, as an individual and unique whole," and second as "something that develops over time." While historicism, according to Charkarvarthy, can accommodate "complexities and zig-zags" in this development, it aims to identify the "general in the particular" though it does not entail any teleology. But the notion of "development" over a period of time is essential to the historicist view.

acquired a particular ‘historical consciousness’ that sensitized them to the demands of ‘progress.’[273]

A more vehement criticism of Mill is detailed by Uday Singh Mehta in his writings when he calls Mill’s views a mode of ‘civilizational classification’ that is keen on determining whether or not ‘savages,’ a category that is central to Mill’s analysis, can be ‘members of independent societies,’ a hierarchical view of the world and its people that Mehta traces back to the ideas of Mill’s father, James Mill. In Mehta’s analysis, for both the Mills, ‘the societal development is a matter of the improvement of individual’s cognitive capabilities.’ Mehta goes onto write that, in Mill’s case, ‘what represents or speaks for the savage is the location of the civilization of which he is deemed to be a part...a simple binary scale of civilized or backward.’[274] What is evident from a cursory reading of Mill’s own writings, as well the subsequent readings of his writings by postcolonial theorists like Chakrabarty and Mehta, is Mill’s narrow-mindedness to accommodate the moral worth of a significant population of a colony like India. For a thinker of freedom and individuality, Mill’s own conception of these terms when seen in the backdrop of his idea of progress seems extremely narrow.

As we have already seen, Mill justified imperialism on grounds of his idea of progress. And, as in Kant’s case, Mill’s idea of progress too sits on the edifice of a philosophy of history. For Mill, as highlighted in the *Considerations*, it is the state of the people that determines what

[273] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2008), 8.

[274] Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (University of Chicago Press, 2018), 101.

government they deserve. And this assumption, is associated with what Chakrabarty accurately referred to as a strong strain of historicism in Mill's political thought. For Mill, a community is capable of being a 'historically developing entity' and oftentimes the history of a people is a 'history of its cultural or civilizational development.' However, this history is not necessarily rigid, mono-logical or linear as it is been made to seem by his critics.[275] And when contrasted with Kant's vision of history, it becomes clearer that Mill's conception of history avoids the purposefulness that Kant's approach possesses. For Kant, all history is one history, teleological in nature, which is the universal history of mankind. For Mill, this is not the case. History can take different directions. History can be both the progress of the civilized or the degeneration of the savage.

Unlike Kant, Mill thinks it is premature to assume historical development will ultimately lead to a civilizational development and the both are not necessarily synonymous with each other. Civilizational development must be consciously pursued whereas historical development is what just happens. For civilizational development to happen, a good government is indispensable. While representative governments are best suited for civilizational development, it may not fit all societies, especially those in the dependencies. In those cases, the ideal government is either a

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[275] As Inder Marwah noted in his recent reinterpretation of Mill's philosophy of history in his book *Liberalism, Diversity and Domination: Kant, Mill and the Government of Difference*, conventional interpreters of Mill have often attributed an "aggregative conception of development" to his thought. By this, he meant scholars often viewed Mill as someone who treats societies comprised of various internal elements like political, economic, social etc. as moving through 'historical stages' as a 'composite whole.' For Marwah, while this may be true of the father Mill, this is not the case for the son, and hence puts forth a 'disaggregative reading' of Mill's approach to history. In his reading, it is unfair to treat Mills categories of the 'savage' and the 'civilized' as fixed and he argues that for Mill, the categories of the civilized and the uncivilized are 'fluid and interpenetrating.' Rather, for Marwah, Mill maintained a vision of social development that was 'variable and contingent' and he outrightly rejected an idea of civilization that was rooted in a 'biological determinism' that framed the non-Europeans in a poorer light, a fault that is often attributed to his approach to progress. And a close reading of Mill's own writing, at least in *Considerations*, supports Marwah's claims of a disaggregative approach to history in Mill.

rule by native despotism or a rule by a superior people, like the British empire. Because unlike a representative government in these communities, the despotic rule will succeed in carrying the people 'rapidly through several stages of progress,' and 'clearing away obstacles to improvement' which otherwise might have lasted 'indefinitely' if the 'subject population had been left unassisted to its native tendencies and chances.' However, in this historical journey, it is likely that the community may slip back into a state of savagery and no government can guarantee it a civilization, the highest form of progress.

Thus, in Mill's philosophy of history, it is clear that he fixes savagism and civilization as the two opposite poles of history. And between these lie his other categories like slavery, barbarism etc. And his disaggregated history is open to all these courses. And it cannot be taken for granted that even a representative government or a despotic government will eventually push forward a community from lower to higher forms of progress and civilization. On the contrary, it may lead to a stagnation that lacks any progress. And in some cases, even a backward development where a representative government may degenerate to a lower form of government.

Unlike Kant, history is not at all teleological for Mill. Instead, the direction of history and the possibility of progress are highly dependent on the people and their moral and civilizational calibre. They must strive for the next civilizational stage while striving alongside for the conducive political order that can move them towards a better civilization. Man, his attitude to politics and his proactive efforts to create a conducive political order will determine his history. History does not reveal itself to man, as in Kant, but man must carve out his history in Mill's philosophy. For Mill, it is naïve to think history is converging towards a state of perpetual peace.

It is less deterministic and universal unlike Kant. Progress is never a given and often times indeterminate. But where he agrees with Kant is in holding the establishment of a political order as indispensable to making progress. Whereas for Kant it is the establishment of a 'civil society with a just civil constitution' that will lead to man's moral progress, Mill believes man will be better civilized when his community brings forth a 'representative government,' which he took to be the apogee of modern civilization. For both these thinkers, societies that did not establish or inherit such political institutions are not deemed to have progressed morally enough and its people are yet to become true 'moral agents.'

Gandhi's Anti-historicism and the Real History of Nonviolence

Perhaps what annoyed Gandhi most about the philosophy of history, especially of the kind Kant, Mill and other proponents of modern civilization advocated, was its seemingly harmless conflation between historical progress, scientific progress, moral progress and political progress, in which, for Gandhi, lay the root of many of its faults. Such a correlation, by virtue of its accompanying assumptions made it seem like people who lived at a time before the arrival of modern civilization were less morally developed. The philosophy of history that came out the Enlightenment, by its nature, degraded the past in order to position itself as the embodiment of progress. Only by partaking in its narrative of history could humanity progress and anything and everything excluded from it were to be deemed less developed and uncivilized, the domain of the savages. And this exclusion, the failure to arrive, could not only be temporal but also spatial. The ancient people, going by these assumptions, appeared to the modern European as less morally and intellectually developed by virtue of their temporal dislocation from the progressive philosophy of history of the Enlightenment. And so were the people who ascribed to customs and

cultures different from those of the Empire. Their spatial distance from the civilized cultures of those of the Empire would cause them to be deemed savages, an inevitable fate that dependencies like India would find itself in within this philosophy of history. Thus, countering the ills of modern civilization entailed delegitimizing its philosophy of history and the whole edifice that came with it. Gandhi's ideological war hereafter would be a resistance, not against modern people, but their idea of history, progress and the institutions that came with it. And nonviolence, the weapon he would draw upon to wage his war against the 'masters of modern civilization' and their philosophy of history.

Writing about Gandhi's approach to history, Ashis Nandy correctly points out that Gandhi 'rejected history' and instead 'affirmed the primacy of myths over historical chronicles,' thereby 'circumventing the unilinear pathway from primitivism to modernity.'[276] One of the core assumptions associated with Gandhi's philosophy of history is, according to Nandy, 'a specific orientation to myth' that viewed it more as a mode of 'public consciousness,' thus rupturing the stark difference that modern civilization made between historical events enumerated by a framework of causality and other events rooted in 'non-causally' religious folklores as well as in 'memories and anti-memories.' In this view, unlike how history unfolds in the case of Kant and Mill, for Gandhi, what is before us, the present, is never , and cannot be ever, detached from what has been in the past, and is hence 'an all embracing permanent present' that could be 'interpreted and reinterpreted,' as the experience of this present is likely to be different and diverse, dependent on the past experiences of the self and the context in which it is situated in the

[276] Ashis Nandy, *Intimate Enemy* (Oxford University Press Oxford, 1989), 57.

present. History, like his idea of truth, in this vein can only be a deeply personal idea. And it is in this sense that moral progress and historical progress are interconnected, and not in the way others have conjoined history and moral progress by culling the self out of it. Thus, the 'ancient' and the 'modern' or the 'religious' and the 'secular' are not comprehensively distinct categories through which one can understand progress of a community, and especially its moral progress. To do that, as several proponents of modern civilization have done, is to create false dichotomies that would lack any truth. Countering such falsehoods required a reaffirmation of truth in history, just like how myths were affirmed in history again.

Gandhi's scepticism towards conventional ideas of history is not entirely novel and has a longer precedence. And among these proponents of an anti-historicism, who Gandhi collectively referred to as being part of the 'other west,' perhaps none was as dearer to him as Tolstoy. Gandhi is often considered to be Tolstoy's 'spiritual heir.' However, not enough attention has been paid to the legacy of Tolstoy's ideas in Gandhi's thinking. Analysis of this legacy has been limited to tracing Tolstoian moralism, a form of passive resistance rooted in the Christian ethic of love, in Gandhian nonviolence. While this may seem like a connection strong enough to withstand the scrutiny of claims assessing the continuity of Tolstoy's project in Gandhi's politics, it begs the question whether this Christian ethic of love is the only accessible marker, that stands for a confluence of ideas held by Gandhi and Tolstoy. And in a closer reading of these two thinkers, it appears that Gandhian nonviolence owes less to Tolstoy's passive resistance and perhaps borrows more from Tolstoy's philosophy of history.[277] Because,

[277] According to Isaiah Berlin, Tolstoy was deeply concerned with the problems of history and its relationship to truth. And in his reading of *War and Peace*, Berlin sees in this novel Tolstoy's 'most obsessive' expression of this concern. Berlin characterizes Tolstoy's thought as 'violently unhistorical', and reads *War and Peace* as Tolstoy's 'anti-historical rejection of all efforts to explain or justify human action' in terms of having roots in the past or in

nonviolence, in its ideological origins, can be traced back to this deep-rooted anti-historicism that flows through to Gandhi from Tolstoy.

Tolstoy's concern is that we, the modern society, invokes history from a desire to penetrate first causes, without taking into account the multiplicity and complexities in causation involved in the making of events. For Tolstoy, history does not reveal actual causes but a blank succession of events. And the patterns and narratives of truth we develop are usually based on an arbitrary selection of causes, a method of prioritization that isn't based on the truth of actual experience. The real truth will always take into account one's inner experience, domains of the moral, religious and spiritual, and Tolstoy's biggest problem with those invoking history to justify their actions is that they tend to engage in a 'fragmented representation' of reality. As Tolstoy says, 'the public or the political events are favoured' in narratives of history as opposed to the 'real and the most immediate experience of human beings.'[278] Like Tolstoy, Gandhi also believed that the truths of the self, or what Tolstoy referred to as inner experience, should ground conceptions of truth and history. And like Tolstoy, as we have already seen, Gandhi too denied the precision, accuracy and surety that is guaranteed to us today by history. But unlike Tolstoy, Gandhi held that history does offer us a truth. But this is not the truth of progress but the truth of nonviolence.

Writing about nonviolence, Gandhi once mentioned, 'all society is held together by nonviolence...as the earth is held in her position by gravitation,' indicating how he understood

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history. Berlin understands Tolstoy's conceptualization of history as 'the sum of the concrete events in times and space- the sum of the actual experience of actual men and women in their relation to one another and to actual three dimensional , empirically experienced, physical environment.' And it is only in this 'sum of the actual experiences' that truth, can be found. And it is in these truths that genuine answers can be found to questions concerning history.

[278] Berlin, Isaiah,, Hardy, Henry.Kelly, Aileen. Russian Thinkers. New York : Viking Press, 1978. 232-7.

nonviolence not just as something that can help us lead a moral life but as a much significant force on a planetary scale. And it connects with what we touched upon, in one of the earlier sections, when Gandhi referred to nonviolence as a 'life-force.' This is because, for Gandhi, nonviolence is indeed what sustains life in this world yet he feels this force is somehow rendered invisible to all of us because of our modern outlook. And most blind, for Gandhi, are these proponents of modern civilization who cannot see in history the omnipresent force of nonviolence which, for Gandhi, defines true progress. When one becomes sensitive to this history of nonviolence, as opposed to the history of violence that modern civilization articulates, we can understand that moral progress cannot be the handmaiden of just modern civilization. And the excluded civilizations, be it the temporally distant ancient or the spatially distant people of the dependencies, have equal claim to moral progress, and as much as the Europeans, for all human societies are sustained by their adherence to nonviolence, irrespective of whether they are religious or secular, modern or pre-modern, or have a government or not. Nonviolence, thus for Gandhi, trivialises the story of modern progress as it makes evident even to a child that the pursuit of progress, moral progress, is to be found in the performance of nonviolence, and not in science and technology or representative self-government. Nonviolence is a fact in history, for Gandhi, perhaps the only fact that can claim to be a truth, both in the experiences of the self but also of the society and the larger world.

Nonviolence was thus Gandhi's alternative world-view that established a different philosophy of history, a history that did not prioritize the laws of science and progress but the 'science of life,' thus highlighting nonviolence as a science that must be investigated if we are to understand life and our sustenance as a community on earth. As he remarked in his journal *Harijan* in his later

years, those who haven't realized this power or not studied this science have 'not investigated' the 'vast possibilities' nonviolence entails. Highlighting this nonviolent world-view, he further writes,

'Modern science is replete with illustrations of the seemingly impossible having become possible within living memory. But victories of physical science would be nothing against the victory of the science of life.'[279]

Nonviolence thus for Gandhi ended up becoming the idea through which in one stroke he was able to counter the many problems he associated with modern civilization. Though he maintained humility in his critique of modernity by confessing that this idea of nonviolence, as a science of life 'cannot be proved' by scientific arguments, he believed the power of nonviolence in bringing about true moral progress 'shall be proved by person living it in their lives.'[280] Nonviolence, he said, must 'grow with age' and the progress of humanity over the years is testimonial to the power and growth of nonviolence. And in this alternative philosophy of history, Gandhi merged the secular and the religious and the scientific modes by positing nonviolence as a science as well as the 'supreme dharma' or a 'spiritual law,' and concluded that 'no discovery of greater import' was available to humanity that the truth of nonviolence. And that this discovery not only pervaded history but all human activities. He wrote,

'I do not believe that spiritual law works on a field of its own. On the contrary...affects the economic, the social and the political fields.'[281]

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[279] Iyer, "The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi," 184.

[280] Gandhi, *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, 280.

[281] Gandhi, 277.

Conclusion

Meditating on the relationship between nonviolence and politics, Gandhi wrote the following,

‘True democracy...can never come through untruthful and violent means, for the simple reason that the natural corollary to their use would be...to remove all opposition through the suppression or extermination of the antagonist. Such a democracy would not be a seat of freedom.’[282]

Gandhi thus equated true democracy to a ‘regime of unadulterated ahimsa,’ as opposed to a political order that was built on the violent foundations of the sovereign, a conceptualization of the political that is inherent to the idea of modern civilization. Progress, in such a true democracy had to be redefined and would not be synonymous with the material and institutional progress that modern civilization was after.

Motilal Nehru, a moderate Indian National Congress leader once quipped that Gandhi’s approach to politics and his stress on nonviolence as an all-encompassing norm that should permeate the political realm was unrealistic. Speaking against Gandhi’s opposition to the INC’s entry into the British led Indian government’s legislative councils, Nehru wrote that, for Gandhi, entering the legislative councils as representatives of the INC is equivalent to a ‘participation in violence.’ In his note, he outlined Gandhi’s position as the following:

‘Councils are established by a government which is based on violence...The very act of living and adopting the most essential means of sustaining life under such a government would be tantamount to participation in violence.’[283]

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[282] Iyer, “The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi,” 181.

[283] Iyer, 183.

While Nehru's statements were rhetorical in nature and were aimed at highlighting Gandhi's approach to representative politics as unrealistic or even ludicrous, his assessment clearly illustrates Gandhi's position in all its simplicity. For Gandhi, any government, even democratic ones, that are working with the assumptions of modern civilization was indeed perpetrating violence, and by cooperating and partaking in such institutions, we are culpable for participating in violence. Where Kant and Mill saw the 'civil society with a just civil constitution' and the establishment of a 'representative government' as instances of moral progress, Gandhi perceived in these institutions the violence entailed in the progress of modern civilization. While Kant and Mill believed man's participation in such politics made him a 'moral agent,' Gandhi argued that all men are moral by nature and did not need such political institutions to provide them with certificates of civility and morality. Rather what made men moral was their performance of duties, as evident since ancient days. Hence, what men need are avenues of engagement and practices that sharpened his moral disposition. And this, Gandhi believed, one could do even without any participation in representative democratic politics. All one needed to do was to fulfil his responsibilities towards the community. And when everyone partakes in their social responsibility, a nonviolent democracy would inevitably emerge. The problem with modern politics was that it gave too much importance and significance to man's rights while ignoring his duties and responsibilities. But what responsibilities did Gandhi have in mind when he spoke of them in the context of modern democracies?

During the early days of his political work in India, Gandhi was invited in 1916 to the Muir College Economic Society in Allahabad where he delivered a lecture titled was 'Does economic progress clash with moral progress?' Speaking to a group of well-learned economists, he

confessed humbly that he hadn't read the economic works of 'Mill, Marshall and Smith' but it was clear to him that the civilisation and politics they advocated, the one India was currently on the path to 'under the British aegis' had little to teach men about morality and only could induce people to the 'vices' rooted in a 'disease of materialism.' He then went onto put forward an alternative idea of order and progress, in contrast to these European political economists and defined progress not as the establishment of institutions that curtailed the state of nature but he put forward that progress happens within a community when there is an 'absence of starvation' among its population. And the role of the government, if there had to be one, was to ensure the weak and the powerless were well looked after.

Over the next few years, Gandhi appears to have been seriously pondering over the idea of a political order that was primarily focused on the protecting the interests of the vulnerable. Such an order, he considered as 'true democracy.' And the first serious articulation of this true democracy emerges in 1920 and he called it Ramrajya,

> 'If the king is mindful of the difficulties of the weakest section of his subjects, his rule would be Ramrajya; it would be people's rule…But we cannot expect this of any government in modern times.'

Since then, Gandhi often referred to Ramrajya when he spoke about 'true democracy' or an 'ideal political order.' But he expanded his ideal of Ramrajya to not merely reflect the needs of the starved but also the needs to the minorities who were vulnerable to the violence of the majority.[284]

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[284] Articulating his idea of Ramrajya, Gandhi wrote:
'It is only a government that fully protects the weakest among its subjects, and safeguard all his rights, which may be described as perfectly democratic...Such a government does not mean the rule of the majority but the protection of the interests of the smallest [minority]…In ordinary matters, the principle of majority rule is, by and large, justice as the world understands justice, but the purest justice can consist only in the welfare of all.'

Gandhi's venture into politics can thus be summed up as his long-lasting effort to set up such a democracy, his Ramrajya, where the minority's interests were not trampled upon by the majority, where the vulnerable other is not exploited by the self. And it is exactly such a condition that modern democracies, in Gandhi's view could not offer. And given that, and the possible failure of these modern governments to protect the weak, the onus then rests on the self to work towards the protection of the wellbeing of the vulnerable. In modern democracy, it is only such a socially responsible self that can ensure the 'purest justice.'

We began this chapter with the argument that to understand nonviolence merely as a moral or political category masks the larger ideological significance of the idea in Gandhi's political thought. Over the course of our discussion, the chapter has attempted to showcase how nonviolence must be seen as Gandhi's formulation of a positive-ideology, a world-view that prioritizes the concerns of the weak or the powerless. Gandhi's idea of Ramrajya epitomizes the political culmination of such an outlook and the ideal Gandhian self that inhabits such a political order is the 'responsible self.' Yet, one can never move towards such a self or a political community as long as one is blind to the real history of nonviolence and instead falls for the promise of progress and democracy that the 'masters of modern civilization' offer. It requires an attitude of anti-historicism and a strong belief that nonviolence is the science of life and the spiritual law that must pervade all spheres of life, including the political. And only when we can appreciate this can we convince ourselves to move away from an idea of politics that will inevitably perpetuate violence towards the vulnerable other, which for Gandhi, is built into the workings of modern civilization and its institutions.

Conclusion: Towards a Gandhian Paradigm

The preceding chapters of this Thesis focused on a contextual reading of Gandhi's early writings and conducted a genealogy of three concepts that are considered central to Gandhi's political thinking – swaraj, satya and ahimsa. The main argument of this study is that Gandhi, unlike most of the other modern political thinkers like Thomas Hobbes, Immanuel Kant, Max Weber, etc., disagreed with the proposition that violence or coercion is a necessary and constitutive feature of the political. And his political project must be understood as a unique effort in political philosophy to contemplate and explore the possibility of a nonviolent political that rids itself off the sovereign which, for Gandhi, represented the seat of violence in conventional conceptions of the political. Instead of the sovereign, we found over the course of the course of the first two chapters, Gandhi posited an idea of a 'socially responsible self' at the centre of his nonviolent political and worked towards conceptualizing a range of ethical dispositions and socio-political practices that are primarily concerned with the conduct of this self within the community it is part of. Yet, this vision of a socially responsible self is not merely an idea of the self for Gandhi but is ultimately intertwined with his idea of the political because the nonviolent political becomes a possibility and can only coexist with such a responsible self who is sensitive and attends to the wellbeing of the other. Politics, in this Gandhian world-view, is not concerned with questions of governance or order as Gandhi himself found the idea of government dispensable to his political project. Instead, what is indispensable is the performance of the self's responsibilities to the other.

The study then undertook an analysis of the idea of swaraj, alongside other ideas like satyagraha and swadeshi, and showed that in the Gandhian paradigm swaraj must be seen as an expression of social responsibility as opposed to a conventional understanding of the term as an instance of liberty or freedom. And what is central to the notion of Gandhian swaraj is the performance of duties or specific ethical directives – ideologiekritik and the prioritization of means over ends. We further conducted a textual analysis of Gandhi's articulation of truth in his writings and recognized that the contradictory dimensions entailed in Gandhian truth, as either being a moral-existential category that is attainable or a fragmented epistemic category that is elusive and unattainable, can be resolved if see Gandhi's truth not as one thing or the other but as an idea that evolves over a period of time. In this historically sensitive reading of Gandhian truth, we saw that truth, for Gandhi, at the early phase of his life was dominated by his idea of the inner voice and at later stage, and especially in 1920s when he assumed leadership of the Indian national movement, is taken over by his conceptualization of the idea of relative truth. But what underscored both these attitudes to truth was his persistent search to understand the place of individual morality when it comes to political action, and to what extend the self and its morality must permeate the political. Such a truth ultimately, for Gandhi, is to be arrived at through an act of reflective judgment. Following this, the thesis suggested a reassessment of ahimsa not as a moral or political idea but as a philosophy of history that underpinned Gandhi's outlook to politics and progress. And through this reassessment of nonviolence, we were able to see clearly a deep-seated anti-historicism in Gandhi's thought that informed his world-view.

In his writings, Bhikhu Parekh has highlighted how Gandhi often considered himself to be a 'yugapurush', which resembled the figure of a 'moral legislator' or 'law giver' for a 'yuga' i.e. an epoch.[285] Such a characterisation of Gandhi's role in history, and that too by himself, can be seen as a view of life that attributes paramount self-importance and may come across as being irreconcilable with Gandhi's own philosophy of humility or an idea of the humble self that we often associate with him. As a result, and assuming humility to be a fundamental value in Gandhi's philosophical discourse and not merely exhibiting a polemical or strategic significance, we can conclude that Gandhi's use of the term 'yugapurush' to refer to himself needs to be understood from an alternative vantage point. In contrast to Parekh's reading of the term yugapurush in Gandhi's discourse as that of a leader or law-giver who must lead his people 'away from the yuga of darkness' and is required to establish a new yugadharma or a set of moral legislations for his time and age, perhaps we can redefine the term by ridding it of its grandeur and self-importance of a moral legislator and see the term as Gandhi's way of pointing out to us our situatedness in a specific historical epoch. And the term Gandhi often employed to refer to this epoch in his writings was 'modern civilization.'

Gandhi's use of the term yugapurush thus points us towards his attempt to tell us how our ethics and politics cannot be *a priori* to the questions and concerns that we face during our time. Instead, they must be directly related to the problems and troubles the time or epoch we inhabit throws at us.[286] A practice of politics or a system of ethics that does not take into the account the

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[285] Bhikhu C Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition, and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhi's Political Discourse* (Sage, 1999).

[286] It is important to note here that such an approach to ethics and politics that is sensitive to the needs of our time is distinct from the historicism that Gandhi found problematic. Instead, this Gandhian approach only stresses on our

so-called ‘evils’ of our time cannot for Gandhi be called ‘civilization’, for ‘true civilization’ points us towards the ‘path of duty’, he wrote early on in *Hind Swaraj*.[287] And to understand what our duty is requires us to be sensitive to questions of power, injustice and violence that plague our own life and times.[288] It requires us to be aware of not just the needs of the self but also the wellbeing of the other. And his main problem with modern civilization was that it not only made such an awareness unnecessary but it also incentivized a way of life that rewarded an outlook that veered us away from the path of duties and responsibilities to this other.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, an interpretation of Gandhi’s philosophy that is sensitive to his intellectual context, as well as his interlocutors, can help us uncover specific ethical dispositions in his thought that he devised as a means to counter this flight from our duties and responsibilities. Seen from this vantage point, at the heart of Gandhi’s ideological project lies an attempt to develop a way of life that is centred on cultivating a socially responsible self. His ultimate ideological manoeuvre thus appears to be the construction of a responsibility-centred ethical project in the face of a dominant way of life advocated by modern civilization. And perhaps nowhere is this ethical outlook as clearly as articulated in his pursuit of nonviolence, not as a principle or a political norm but as a comprehensive ideology that counters a worldview that came with the Enlightenment period – a self-centred outlook to life that permitted and valorised the security and wellbeing of the self at the cost of the other, a view of

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situatedness within a socio-historical context and, unlike historicism, does not advocate a progressive view of history.

[287] Mahatma Gandhi, *Gandhi:’Hind Swaraj’and Other Writings*, ed. Anthony J Parel (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 67.

[288] It is important to clarify here that this tendency is different from Historicism

life that legitimized violence as a necessary element of the political as a means to control this other.

The relationship between the self and the other is of significant importance for making sense of the political. As we have already seen in the initial chapters of this study, Gandhi considered 'utility' to be at the heart of the modern political project and he believed that the dependence on the sovereign, the seat of brute force, as the ultimate arbiter of the relationship between the self and the other, as well as the self and the community to which it belonged to, appeared to him a way of abdicating the responsibilities the self was endowed with by virtue of being part of a society. Instead of supporting and inculcating a way of life that aided the self's ability to meet its social responsibilities, whether it be through a performance of satyagraha or an embrace of a swadeshi sentiment or though the cultivation of a larger public discourse that prioritized diversity over uniformity and subjectivity as seen in his articulation of truth in the later years, Gandhi realized early on that the aspirational political community and national identity his compatriots were after relied on ideas like nationhood, citizenship etc. that were prone to exclusivist definitions. What made these ideas possible, in Gandhi's view, was their ability to distinguish themselves from those who did not belong to the nation or those who were alien i.e. the other. This meant Gandhi's political project was obsessively occupied with finding a place for the other in a community, while at the same time finding a way for the self to draw its worth from sources that did not necessitate a degrading or an antagonizing of this other. And as we primarily focused on a contextual reading of Gandhi's texts and ideas to make sense of his political philosophy, this particular problem i.e. the place of the other in his philosophy, has only been peripherally touched upon in our discussions in the preceding five chapters. Yet, this is a central concern in

Gandhi's philosophy and this conclusion hopes to meditate further on the nature of this Gandhian view of the self and the other and, in the process, intends to bring together the totality of his political philosophy.

As we have already mentioned at the beginning of this study, a cursory reading of Gandhi's writings can easily help us acknowledge the difference in his outlook to politics in comparison to some of the other thinkers of the political like Hobbes, Kant, Weber and Schmitt.[289] Yet, where do we place him when it comes to his conceptualization of the political? What lenses and ideas in the history of political thought can help us best understand this Gandhian project? Does his philosophy of politics share affinities and intersections with the philosophies of other political thinkers? While a comprehensive answer to these questions require a much deeper engagement, a brief answer can be found in the interesting overlaps one finds between Gandhi's philosophy and those of Emmanuel Levinas and Hannah Arendt. For all three of these thinkers are concerned with the making of a politics that accommodates the other.

Though Gandhi, Levinas and Arendt are contemporaries, none of them seem to have engaged with each other's ideas substantively. Yet it is not as if they were entirely ignorant of each other's philosophical positions. For example, in one of her essays in 1970 for The New Yorker, Arendt analysed the idea of civil disobedience. While her primary focus of this essay is the philosophy of disobedience as espoused by American thinker Henry David Thoreau, her argument was that the claim that Thoreau inspired the practice of civil disobedience popularized by Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. needs reconsideration. This is because, in Arendt's

[289] For details, see Chapter 1 and 2 of this study.

analysis, Thoreau's 'whole moral philosophy was anathema to the collective spirit that ought to guide acts of public refusal' as in the case of Gandhi and King.[290] Arendt locates 'conscience' at the heart of Thoreau's approach to civil disobedience whereas the nonviolent Indian struggle for independence led by Gandhi and the Civil Rights Movement led by King were not grounded in 'individual conscience.' Thoreau, for Arendt, represented a practice of dissent that was primarily 'unpolitical' as a conscience driven action can only aim at 'moral purity' and does not have any 'political' character. Conscience, in Arendt's analysis, does 'not say what to do; they say what not to do' and by nature do not require us to act politically to bring about change or justice. Rather, it can only prevent us from not participating in evil and is dominated by concerns of moral purity. Conscience, seen from this perspective, is only remotely interested in the wellbeing of the collective and is primarily rooted in the self's need for maintaining her moral purity. True politics of civil disobedience, in contrast to conscience driven acts, is fundamentally concerned with questions of redressing collective injustice and cannot ignore the community and the place of the other. And Arendt situates both Gandhi and King within this tradition of thinkers whose nonviolent practices were more concerned with the 'political' rather than the 'moral' and the 'personal.'

In contrast to her engagement with Gandhi, Arendt did not directly engage with Levinas' political philosophy though the two met once in 1970 in Chicago.[291] The meeting, on stage, was an occasion hosted by a Jesuit institute in Chicago to celebrate the two philosophers for their

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[290] Hannah Arendt, "Reflections: Civil Disobedience," *The New Yorker* 12 (1970): 70–105.

[291] Anya Topolski, *Arendt, Levinas and a Politics of Relationality* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 10.

contribution to Jewish thought but accounts suggest that their meeting left them both quite unimpressed of each other. But despite this anecdotal hurdle, the overlapping nature of their approach to the political is uncanny. And this may be attributed to the similar life experiences they were forced to encounter as Jews fleeing the Nazi regime in Europe. Born in central Europe, both these thinkers spent a period of time studying in Germany with Heidegger. Following the growing anti-Semitism in the region, both moved to Paris in the 1930s seeking refuge and, following the war, both were held captive – Levinas in the Prisoner of War camp and Arendt at one of the many internment camps. Yet, both Arendt and Levinas survived the ordeal and over the course of their lives went onto become established thinkers in the field of political theory and ethics respectively, as per their own admissions. It seems both were particular in pointing out that their concerns and interventions belonged to specific domains – ethics, in the case of Levinas, and politics, in Arendt's case. And both their visions were deeply influenced and informed by the their analysis of violence they had witnessed and experienced during the war.

In Arendt's understanding of human life, she identified four distinct, yet intertwined domains - legal, political, ethical and personal – as part of her analysis of totalitarianism. And as we have already seen, she placed conscience driven action under the ethical-personal realm.[292] Arendt was adamant that no amount of ethical-personal actions can help counter totalitarian tendencies and believed that only 'political' action can help us recover our humanity during such difficult times. This is because only political action can generate freedom and power, and this happens when people act in concert.

[292] Topolski, for more on this see Chapters 3 and 4 of this book.

It is important to note here that for Arendt, it is not necessary that these actors coming together share a similar worldview or a shared vision of society. In fact, Arendt believes that plurality, even those that arise from an agonistic dialogue between people, serve as an avenue of freedom and power. The idea of the political then, in her understanding, is created in this intersubjectivity of distinct people with different perspectives who come together and nurture a shared reality rooted in this plurality. Seen from this perspective, this notion of intersubjectivity and it's centrality in Arendt's thinking about politics offers to us an alternative foundation for thinking about the political. Thus, like Gandhi, Arendt too rejects a utility oriented conceptualization of politics. But where Gandhi dislocates the sovereign and places the self and its social responsibilities at the heart of his political project, Arendt prioritizes human plurality and intersubjectivity. Yet, a closer engagement with Gandhi's ideas, as we have seen over the course of this thesis, very well reveals Gandhi's own stress on the necessity of plurality as a condition of the political, a plurality that is manifested through an intersubjective relationship between the self and the other. And in this sense, one isn't entirely wrong to suggest that perhaps Gandhi and Arendt maintains a shared approach to the political - one that celebrates intersubjectivity as opposed to security. Further, both these thinkers see conflicts and disagreements in society not as something to be reined in or neutralized but as evidence for the 'shared' nature of the world. In this view, dialogue becomes the way forward to negotiate the fruits of this shared social world and participants are, by nature of this shared social, forced to embrace uncertainty and ambiguity due to the lack of clarity on the outcomes their actions can bring about.

Like Arendt, Levinas too is concerned with the problem of intersubjectivity. But where Arendt traces the associated plurality as the necessary condition of the political, Levinas locates in this intersubjectivity an 'alterity' that marks for him the prerequisite for the ethical.[293] To clarify the place of alterity in Levinas' framework, it is important to contrast the place of the other in Arendt and Levinas' thought. As already touched upon, Arendt does not rely explicitly on the categories of the self and the other to make sense of the political. Instead, she generalizes these categories merely as expressions of plurality. In comparison, Levinas' formulation is closer to that of Gandhi in that both of them rely on the categories like the self and the other to make sense of both ethics and politics. Unlike Arendt and like Gandhi, Levinas is much clearer in his articulation of this 'other' and is against conceptualizing the other in general terms, whether it is in terms of reducing the other to the same or in terms of generalizing the other to resemble whatever is different. Thus, pluralism, for Levinas, becomes an instance of 'reduction of particularity in the name of unity.'[294] Instead, Levinas advocates recognizing the other in all its particularity, as a 'face.' When the self is interrupted by this face of the other, we experience alterity. And our encounter with this face generates in us a response. An ethical response, for Levinas, is one that does not reduce this face to a 'form' based one which we can identify the right kind of action. Ethics requires no context and breaks through all morality, which only works through forms and rules. Seen this way, we practice ethics when we appreciate the alterity of the other in our encounter with a face. This is, for Levinas, the first step towards taking

[293] Topolski, 111.

[294] Topolski, 119.

responsibility for the other. Responsibility, thus, is ultimately an ethical act and the responsible self is an ethical, as opposed to, a political being in this framework.

The above brief discussion of Levinas' ideas again echoes aspects of Gandhi's own formulations though Levinas' usage of terms like 'alterity' and 'face' may seem remote to the Gandhian discourse. Yet, if we again remind ourselves of some of the discussions in the preceding chapters, it will become evident that such formulations are not entirely alien to the Gandhian discourse. After all, both Gandhi and Levinas appear to be preoccupied with the relationship between the self and the other. And both claim responsibility as the anchor on which self must make sense of itself and its community.[295] But unlike Levinas, Gandhi is much more convinced of the nature of action that fulfils our responsibilities, while at the same time avoiding the moral pitfalls of universalism that Levinas himself warned his readers. This is because, unlike both Arendt and Levinas, Gandhi was primarily a political actor, as opposed to being a philosopher or writer, and was forced to respond to real life ethical and political situations of his time and not merely meditate on them as a means to further our understanding of the ethical or the political. Instead, he had to develop as well as execute practical and timely action on the ground to counter several issues like colonialism, casteism, communalism etc., aspects of which continue to our day. This makes his position quite unique among these thinkers.

[295] Various references in the preceding chapters are a case in point to underline the centrality of responsibility in Gandhi's philosophy. A detailed discussion on the idea of responsibility of the self to the other is undertaken in Chapter 2 of this Thesis. But a more coherent articulation of the nature of such a responsibility in Gandhi's thought is undertaken in Chapter 3 and the chapter outlines specific ethical dispositions that constitute as our social responsibilities in the Gandhian discourse.

Gandhi did not have the comfort of analytically disentangling the political and ethical dimensions of his philosophy of responsibility as Arendt and Levinas managed. Instead, all he could do was continuously stress, with urgency, the need to respect the other, protect the other, and resist the other if need be, but with love. For Gandhi, irrespective of the face he encountered, he was adamant that his Hindu self must respect the Dalit by casting off the practice of untouchability, accord protection to the Muslim by offering his own self-sacrifice, if need be, and resist British colonialism and its machinery, including its institutions, while at the same time not harbouring any ill-will toward the Englishmen who were part of the imperial order. And these, he took to be he his task i.e. his yugadharma – the ethical responsibilities bestowed on him by virtue of belonging to a particular historical epoch of modernity and as a consequence of his situatedness within a particular social and cultural context in India. The spatial location and the temporal positioning of our lives determined for Gandhi the contours of what constituted the ethical and the political for a particular individual. While we may all maintain shared visions of ethics and politics, what is constitutive of these domains is not that they are shared but that they must reflect our particular subject-position in a society. Ethics and politics, thus, arise out of the intersubjective predicament that emerge between our situated self and its associated other.

Throughout his life, Gandhi strongly resisted attempts by others to typecast him either as a moralist or a politician. Instead, he called himself a ‘practical-idealist’ - the ‘practical’ in the term indicating that his only interest was in uncovering not the form but the content of his action while the ‘idealist’ part points to us his affinity to choose acts that are in the interest and wellbeing not of the self but the other. To entangle oneself in specificities and to be bothered by minute differences over what should be prioritized - our ethical or political duties, public or

private responsibilities etc. - were to engage in concerns that took one away from the 'evils' of our historical epochs that require immediate correction, not via meditation but urgent action. The Gandhian approach to ethics and politics, thus, propels us to reflect on our existing conditions and requires us to develop an awareness and sensitivity to the everyday injustices that surround us. It asks us to recognize the place and situation of the other in our own communities, reminding ourselves that no matter how grand our political projects or how ethical our social visions may appear, they will always remain incomplete as long as we fail to attend to the wellbeing of the other within our communities. It puts the onus on each and every one of us to ponder on our own subject positions and implicate ourselves in our own complicities when it comes to propagating unjust practices. Because, it is only when we are really aware of the responsibilities that arise out of our own situated self that true ethics and politics begin to take shape.

The Gandhian paradigm thus pushes us towards an ethics of a socially responsible self, a version of situated-ethics that cannot be understood as an instance of conventionally established normative ethical paradigms like deontology, consequentialism or virtue ethics. In a similar vein, its politics of nonviolence directs us toward an ideological orientation that is neither liberal nor conservative, neither modern nor post-modern. Gandhi's approach to problems in ethics and politics thus pushes the boundaries of conventional ethics and politics as we understand these terms as separate domains of activities. Gandhi instead problematizes such separations and provides with us with his alternative paradigm that conflates the ethical and the political, the moral and the religious, reducing all of these compartmentalized and competing domains into a simple concern for the 'social' and our performance of social responsibilities- an approach to normative philosophy that, for the lack of better word, seems to be uniquely 'Gandhian.'

Understanding the contours of this Gandhian paradigm is in itself worthy of a serious engagement and requires further discussions. And Gandhi's idea of a nonviolent political and his vision of a socially responsible self, as outlined in this Thesis, serve as important markers that can aid us in our attempts to interrogate the nuances associated with Gandhi's ethics.

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