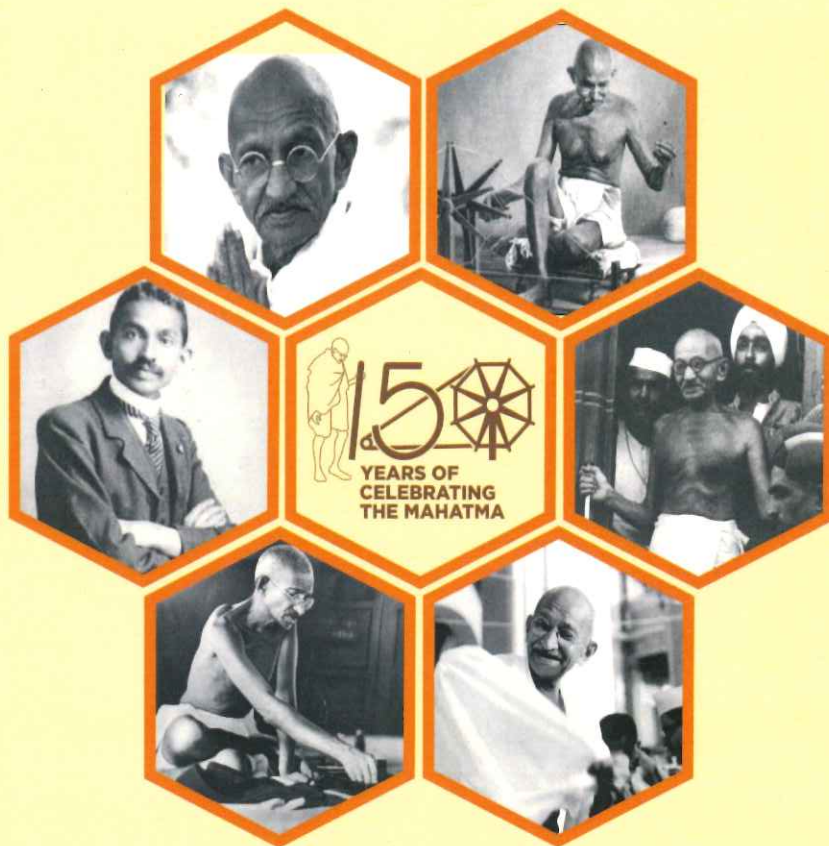


'SUCCESS ATTENDS WHERE TRUTH REIGNS'

# ESSAYS ON GANDHI



**Edited by**  
A. Joseph Dorairaj

**Foreword by**  
S. Natarajan

‘SUCCESS ATTENDS WHERE TRUTH REIGNS’

# ESSAYS ON GANDHI

**Edited by**  
A. Joseph Dorairaj

**Foreword by**  
S. Natarajan



**THE GANDHIGRAM RURAL INSTITUTE (DEEMED TO BE UNIVERSITY)**  
காந்திவிழாம கிராமிய நிபந்தனைகள் பல்கலைக்கழகம் | गांधीग्राम ग्रामीण संस्थान (मानित विश्वविद्यालय)

கிராமம் உயர் நடை உயரம்  
Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India.  
Accredited by NAAC with 'A' Grade (3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle)

Copyright@ Registrar, Gandhigram Rural Institute-Deemed to be University, Gandhigram

First published 2019

ISBN: 9788194079705

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior written permission of the publisher and copyright holder.

Printed by Arvind Associates Chennai

## Foreword

Mahatma Gandhi is fondly known as the 'Father of the Nation' because of his relentless efforts that brought down the unjust British Rule through his innovative, nonviolent fighting technique, Satyagraha. October 2 is not only celebrated as Gandhi Jayanthi but also 'International Day of Nonviolence' as declared by the United Nations.

As we know, the 20th century witnessed unimaginable development in science and technology which resulted in a considerable amount of growth and development and at the same time resulted in destruction of humanity through inventions of advanced weapons like nuclear arsenals. It also turned out to be the most violent period in human history. Also as a positive sign, with the growth of violence began the search for nonviolent capabilities by motivated souls in different parts of the globe. A conscious search for nonviolent alternatives began in 20th century with Mahatma Gandhi who inspired men and women in different degrees in different parts of the globe.

Mahatma Gandhi is the only leader who did not assume any official position after the country's independence. Rather he wanted everyone of his trained followers to take up a life work by involving in any one or a few of the 18 Constructive Programme at remote, non-descript villages of India. Thus, The Gandhigram Rural Institute was founded by two of his close followers, Desikottama Dr.G.Ramachandran and Dr.T.S.Soundaram in the year 1946. Upon hearing the inauguration of the Institution Gandhiji blessed the Institute by saying, "Success Attends Where Truth Reigns".

The Gandhigram Rural Institute is the pioneering and only existing Rural Institutes which involves in propagating the vision and mission of Mahatma Gandhi. It is our bounden duty to celebrate the Sesquicentennial Birth Anniversary of the Mahatma. Various programmes to remember the Father of the Mahatma are being arranged by the Gandhigram Rural Institute during this period.

As an Academic Institution of higher education it was planned to bring out a Commemorative Volume on Gandhiji. The idea behind publishing this volume is to shed more light on the life, work and philosophy of the Mahatma. A committee was formed and Gandhian academicians, scholars, writers, Gandhian institutional heads and activists around the country and abroad were contacted.

I am happy to state that many articles were received from India and abroad. After a careful scrutiny 16 articles were shortlisted and carefully edited by Prof.A.Joseph Dorairaj, Dean, School of English and Foreign Languages and Dr.M.Tamizchelvan, Deputy Librarian, The Gandhigram Rural Institute. The articles of the former Chancellor and three former Vice-Chancellors added new colours to this volume.

The first article entitled 'My First Meeting with Gandhiji' narrates his days with C.F.Andrews at Shanti Niketan and his first meeting and association with Gandhiji as a witness of Gandhiji's 21 Day fast for Hindu-Muslim Unity in Delhi by assisting C.F.Andrews. This also explains our first Vice-Chancellor's commitment to Communal Harmony derived from none other than Gandhiji.

The second article entitled, 'Nai Talim and a Humane and Natural Economy' written by Smt. Renana Jhabvala, former Chancellor, Gandhigram Rural Institute and a national Coordinator of Self Employed Women's Association talks about the abundant potential of Nai Talim, Gandhian Economy, need for Swaraj in the present day context of Education, Economy and the Rural and Informal Sector. She also talks about redefining the present day model of unsustainable growth on Gandhian lines.

"Gandhi's Constructive Programme – The Other Side of Civil Resistance" written by Emeritus Professor of Peace Studies, Coventry University and former Professor of Peace Studies, Bradford University, U.K. brilliantly explains the Gandhian genius of Constructive Programmes and how it paves the base for plunging into Satyagraha/Civil Resistance whenever and wherever necessary.

Two articles entitled "Gandhism in India after Gandhi" and 'Relevance of Mahatma Gandhi's Value Education' by Dr.N.Markandan and Dr.G.Pankajam, former Vice-Chancellors of the Gandhigram Rural Institute reviews the state of Gandhism in India and the relevance of Gandhiji's Value Education in the present day context.

Every article is unique in depicting a different dimension of Gandhiji. Dr.Y.P.Anand's "Gandhian Perspectives and Sustainable Globalization"; Prof. Manohar Lal Sharma's article, "Gandhi and the Environment and Sustainable Development"; Figlio Di Terra's "As If Gandhi had Foreseen Today's Global Health Crisis" and Mr.K.Shivakumar's 'Relevance of Mahatma Gandhi in Today's Economic Scenario' are brilliant interpretation of the socio-economic and health perspectives and action programmes of Mahatma Gandhi. I also thank the other contributors, Dr.M.P.Gurusamy, Dr.Sadan Jha, Dr.A.S.Sasikala, Dr.Ram Ponnu, Prof.S.Ramasamy and Prof.S.Gurusamy for their valuable contribution.

I congratulate the Convener of the Commemorative Volume Committee Dr.M.Tamizhchelvan, Editor of the Volume Prof.A.Joseph Dorairaj and other members of the committee for their hard and commendable work without their help this volume would not have been published.

**Prof S. Natarajan**  
*Vice Chancellor*  
*Gandhigram Rural Institute*

# Commemorative Committee

- 1. Dr.A. Joseph Dorairaj,** **Chairperson**  
Professor and Dean,  
School of English and Foreign Languages
- 2. Dr.T. Ravichandran,** **Member**  
Assistant Professor,  
Department of Gandhian Studies and Sociology
- 3. Dr. R. Mani,** **Member**  
Professor,  
Department of Gandhian Studies and Sociology
- 4. Dr.L. Raja,** **Member**  
Professor,  
Centre for Lifelong Learning
- 5. Dr.S.Andiappan (Retd.),** **Member**  
Professor & Head,  
Department of Gandhian Studies.  
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai.
- 6. Dr.V.Alagirisamy,** **Member**  
Professor and Head,  
Chairperson,  
Department of Gandhian Studies and Ramalinga philosophy,  
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai.
- 7. Dr. M.Tamizhchelvan** **Convener**  
Deputy Librarian & Librarian Incharge.

# Editorial

As India and the world celebrate the sesquicentenary of Mahatma Gandhi's birth, it is only fitting that Gandhigram Rural Institute, an institution that is named after the Father of the Nation, pays tributes to him by bringing out a volume highlighting all that he embodied. This volume is a collection of fifteen essays that deal with a variety of themes related to Gandhi—his rural mindedness, his iconic attire, his environmentalism, his revolutionary educational system (*Nai Talim*) and the *charka* and *khadi* as polyvalent symbols. These essays have been written by people who have been and are associated with Gandhi and Gandhian thought either directly or indirectly.

I thank Dr. S. Natarajan, Vice-Chancellor, Gandhigram Rural Institute for initiating and inspiring us to bring out this volume. I also thank Dr. M. Tamizchelvan, Deputy Librarian and Convener of the Publication Committee, Dr. G. Baskaran, Professor of English and OSD, Publications, S. Loganathan, Publication Assistant who designed the wrapper, and Neville Thomas, Research Scholar, School of English and Foreign Languages, for their help in bringing out this volume.

I thank in a special way the fifteen authors who contributed to this volume. Among them are three former Vice-Chancellors of Gandhigram Rural Institute, including the Founder Vice-Chancellor and a former Chancellor who is currently the Chairperson of SEWA. The rest are Gandhian scholars and individuals who have been deeply inspired by Gandhian philosophy.

The greatest tribute we can pay the Father of the Nation is to put into practice his precepts. I am sure readers will be inspired by at least a couple of Gandhian insights which, when translated into action, will make the world a better place.

# CONTENTS

1. <b>My First Meeting with Gandhiji</b> G. Ramachandran	1
2. <b>Nai Talim and a Humane and Nurturing Economy</b> Renana Jhabvala	5
3. <b>Mahatma's Iconic Attire</b> Ram Ponnuru	13
4. <b>Gandhian Environmentalism: A Theoretical Perspective</b> Sasikala, A.S.	27
5. <b>Gandhi's Constructive Programme - The Other Side of Civil Resistance</b> Andrew Rigby	37
6. <b>A Comparative Analysis of Gandhi and Basaveswara: A Study in Praxis</b> S. V. Shettar	47
7. <b>Gandhian Perspectives and Sustainable Globalization</b> Y.P. Anand	53
8. <b>Gandhi and the Environment and Sustainable Development</b> Manohar Lal Sharma	67
9. <b>Gandhism in India after Gandhi</b> N. Markandan	73
10. <b>As if Gandhi had Foreseen Today's Global Health Crisis . . .</b> Figlio Di Terra	77
11. <b>Relevance of Mahatma Gandhi's Value Education</b> G. Pankajam	85
12. <b>Gandhian Paradigm of Sustainable Rural Development</b> K. Shivakumar	89

13. Relevance of Mahatma Gandhi in Today's Economic Scenario M.P. Gurusamy	99
14. Spinning Wheel as a 'Dear Forgotten Friend of Widows' Sadan Jha	103
15. Gandhi and Untouchability S. Gurusamy	119
 <i>Contributors</i>	 123

## CHAPTER

# 1

## MY FIRST MEETING WITH GANDHIJI

*G. Ramachandran*

The year was 1924 and I was then a student at Visva-Bharati in Santiniketan. The late C.F. Andrews was my favourite professor and I lived very close to him, both in mind and in spirit. I could not have been more than 20 years of age. Something happened in my life suddenly, which gave it a turn and from which I never could come away in all the rest of my life.

In those days at Visva-Bharati, I set myself up as an intellectual and loved nothing better than to challenge every kind of ideology and concept. I found endless delight in posing as an agnostic and held that the very idea of God was anti-reason. God was not needed at all to make men and women good. In fact, God had never succeeded in doing that yet! Moral and spiritual life was largely an artistic life of poise, dignified behaviour and intellectual clarity. I was always debating and arguing with vehemence. It was into this life of mine that something came like a flash of lightning illuminating my inner world and changing it forever.

One day C.F. Andrews received a hundred-worded telegram from Maulana Mohammed Ali, who was then the President of the Indian National Congress. The telegram conveyed the news that Mahatma Gandhi had gone on a fast of 21 days in Delhi to bring about unity between the Hindus and the Muslims and that a great conference of the leaders of all the communities was being summoned in the same city. Maulana Mohammed Ali asked C.F. Andrews to come to Delhi immediately and take care of Gandhiji during the fiery ordeal.

The whole of Santiniketan was plunged into gloom. Never before had Gandhiji undertaken such a long fast. He was also reported to be in indifferent health. Could he survive such a long fast? Even if the mind was strong, would the frail body stand the test? There was a crowded meeting of students and teachers in the library hall in Santiniketan at which Andrews spoke with deep feeling. He caught the night train and left for Delhi. I lost my sleep. I was thrilled and shattered at the same

time. Two days later, Andrews summoned me to Delhi to help him. There was an excited meeting of the students who gave me a touching send-off. Within the next 48 hours I reached Delhi. The Delhi Railway Station was full of khadi-clad and white-capped Congress volunteers. From every part of India Congress leaders and workers were pouring into Delhi. The mighty pull of the moral conscience associated with the Gandhian fast was stirring in the souls of a vast number of men and women in India. Within a few days, Delhi had become the centre of many cross-currents of pilgrimage from every part of India. One of the Congress volunteers identified me, drew me out of the station, put me into a tonga and we went straight to Dil-kush, a beautiful, quiet house on the edge of the city in which Gandhiji lay fasting. As our tonga neared Dil-kush, we passed through growing crowds of men and women and as we turned in at the gate, I saw some five to six thousand people sitting solemnly by the road sides and on the lawns and in the shade of the trees. A deep anxiety hung in the air like some heavy rain-cloud of July.

Many wonderful things happened during the next few days. Andrews occupied a small room on the ground floor opposite the staircase which led to the first floor and it was in a room on the first floor that Gandhiji lay fasting. I was kept busy day and night helping Andrews wash his clothes, bring his food, sweep and tidy his room and last, but not least, deal with his correspondence and the unending stream of visitors who filled the small room all the time. So far as Gandhiji was concerned, Dr. Ansari had strictly forbidden all visitors except a few of his closest co-workers. It was in that small room of Andrews that I saw for the first time the Roman figure of Motilal Nehru, prince-like Jawaharlal, sharp and ascetic Rajaji, dynamic Chittaranjan Das, the immense Ali brothers, tall and valiant Swami Shraddhanandha and a host of others. For more than a week, I did not get even a glimpse of Gandhiji. I was a prisoner in that room on the ground floor. And then, one evening, Andrews asked me to accompany him to attend Gandhiji's evening prayers and I felt the thrill of the thought that at last and for the first time I was going to see Gandhiji at close quarters.

The sun had just set as I climbed the stairs behind my venerable professor. By the time we reached Gandhiji's room, it was full of silent figures sitting on the carpet on the floor. The electric lights had been switched off. In the dim light of evening I could see only a thin and indistinct figure on the cot wrapped in folds of snow-white khadi. I knew

that was Gandhiji. He looked a frail figure etched in delicate, peaceful lines against the indistinct evening light which came in through the open window. I could also distinguish the faces of the leaders of the Muslim, Christian, Sikh and Hindu communities sitting around the cot with bowed heads. Then someone suddenly struck up the cadences of the prayer, the pattern of which became classical in later years in the history of India. Again and again the voices of prayer rose and fell inside that room. There was complete silence after the prayers; no one spoke a word.

I watched the scene and heard the prayers with a critical and intellectual attitude. I said to myself that I must not be swept away. I tried to keep a hold on myself. But even as the prayers were going on, something began to pound inside me. It was not a physical experience, but a mental one absolutely. I saw the frail figure on the bed and looked at the many mighty men of India's destiny sitting with heads bowed in reverence around the central figure on the cot. The question came to me: How did this little man succeed in becoming the unquestioned leader of a political revolution and how on earth did he perform the magic of linking that revolution with non-violence? How could a man of prayer become the leader of a revolution? All distinctions of caste, religion and creed melted in the power of devotion to the unseen God. My mind caught fire. The truth came to me in a flash that God existed and ruled the conscience of humanity. The intellect might not touch God and reason might also fail to reveal God. But God did exist. No myth could hold and rule the hearts of men and women. God was truth and love in one and he who lay on the bed fasting so that Hindus and Muslims might come together in good will and in understanding was the symbol of that truth and love. The spirit of God appeared to hover over that room. A man had brought God into the room. I felt it unmistakably with the touch of my mind. I said to myself, I may never see God nor know God fully, but this human symbol proved the truth of Godhood. I would follow the man who had brought God into that room. I took a silent vow.

This was thirty and more years ago. I have tried to keep the pledge I gave myself inside that room in *Dil-kush*. I know I have often slipped and failed and even fallen. But I have never once stopped trying to hold on to that pledge with all the strength in me. I met Gandhiji again and again after the above-mentioned event. I lived close to him and worked under him for nearly a quarter of a century. More than once during these last many years I have sometimes shocked or amused my

friends by telling them that if I had not known Gandhiji, I would have been a life-long atheist and that perhaps the only party of which I could have become a member was the Communist Party! But the moment I understood that a man of God could at the same time become the unhesitant and valiant leader of a great political and social revolution, I ceased to be an atheist and had no more need for the membership of the Communist Party. I have met innumerable other men and women who have said the same thing to me in different words. The world will realize in the coming years that Mahatma Gandhi has furnished the only alternative to the challenges of Communism in the modern world. The world must ultimately go the way of Lenin or Gandhi. All other ways will only be modifications and amendments of these two paths.

## CHAPTER

## ②

## NAI TALIM AND A HUMANE AND NURTURING ECONOMY

*Renana Jhabvala*

### A Personal Note

I feel honoured to have been part of Gandhigram Rural Institute (GRI) and its proud tradition. This University was started as part of the great movement led by Gandhi which gave independence to our country. It was started by two learned people, Dr. Soundram and Dr. Ramachandran, who were committed to the Gandhian values and whose lives were imbued with these values. Within GRI, these values have been passed down from generation to generation, which is indeed a unique achievement. My own organization—Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA)—too comes from the same tradition and values. SEWA was founded by Elaben Bhatt, who continued in the tradition laid down by Anasuyaben Sarabhai, a close co-worker of Gandhi during his long stay in Ahmedabad and during the founding of Sabarmati Ashram. I am indeed privileged to be, in whatever small way, the link between these two great organizations and the Gandhian legacy.

### Rural Mindedness

Gandhi understood India through her villages and believed that India would be transformed only when she developed her villages. He outlined his programme for non-violent mass action in which he declared that the improvement of the standard of the rural population constituted the key aspect of the non-violent mass action. Let me recall an insightful article written by him titled “Wanted Rural Mindedness,” which put the village and its needs at the centre of growth, linked people’s needs with the preservation of the environment and promoted swadeshi, that is, local production for local consumption. This rural mindedness is required in the twenty-first century marked by accelerated urbanization and unlimited growth which put a severe pressure on the environment and our natural resources.



Our country has changed considerably in the last half a century and the countryside looks very different now. The needs of the rural people have changed as have their lifestyles, means of production and livelihoods, and most of all their aspirations. The technology which was innovative in 1956 is obsolete today; the social structures which served the rural population then are unrecognizable today. And this is as it should be, for change is a law of life. Though external forms change, the principles and values which govern institutions must remain intact. This is the challenge today—how to adapt to today's world, to be relevant and effective and at the same time maintain the basic values and principles advocated by the founders.

### **Nai Talim**

One of these principles is *Nai Talim*. We would like to examine whether *Nai Talim*, a concept evolved almost a century ago, is relevant in today's world. Further, we should examine if it can be applied to higher education today. When Gandhi introduced the concept of *Nai Talim* it was as "Basic education for all". But today, primary education is practically universal and in some states, including Tamil Nadu, secondary education too will soon become universal.

Does that mean that *Nai Talim* is no longer relevant? Not at all. Let us go back to its definition as Gandhi meant it. It is knowledge which is relevant to work and the economic system. It brings the economy and education together. In other words, it includes both abstract knowledge and skills relevant to the economy. It means an understanding of the world of work around us and acquiring knowledge and skills to contribute to this society by improving its productivity and leading the country to economic growth at the grassroots and at the local level.

### **Education, Economy and the Rural and Informal Sector**

Today, society is divided along class lines into those who do manual work and have lower levels of education and those who are white-collar workers and do not soil their hands. Young people enter the educational system hoping to get away from manual work, the work that their parents are doing, and as they get educated, look for work in the formal sector.

However, there are not enough jobs for all of them, for the formal economy absorbs less than 15% of the workforce and the rest are in the informal economy. Most educated people are unemployed or go back to manual work or sectors like telemarketing which are low paid and where career options are limited. Meanwhile, our productive sectors and informal economy—agriculture, small production, small construction—where the majority of people work is deprived of knowledge, technology and skills. Education takes you away from the majority society and your roots and does not give you the skills that would enhance economic growth.

The high levels of inequalities and disparities begin at the school level. Since there is no vocational component to education, only book and digital knowledge are given to children. This is very different from many other countries such as Australia or South Korea where nearly 40% of children opt for vocational education. In India, children who have highly educated and well-earning parents go to schools which have better resources. Those who top competitive exams, go to better colleges and bag the highest paid jobs.

Educational disparities are further aggravated by huge disparities in technology. Those with access to higher levels of skills and technical knowledge also have access to the newest, most labour-saving and most productive technologies. But those with lesser educational levels or with degrees from less-known universities have to make do with technologies that greatly reduce their productivity as well as income.

These disparities are reflected in both economic and social terms. Certain skills are seen as high value and are paid accordingly, while others earn an average income. They have to supplement their incomes with wages and salaries from other jobs. The social status too attached to these skills varies. The workers at the lower rungs of the skills ladder are usually left at dead ends with very little opportunities for advancement, whereas those in the upper rungs have many exciting opportunities, not only for further specialization in their own field but also in many other fields.

Professionals and business persons can become crorepatris through their work, but farmers, weavers and tailors who work just as hard earn a pittance. Too many very rich people flaunt their wealth by building huge houses and spending money on luxurious cars, clothes and perfumes,

not realizing that in nearby regions a poor widow struggles to feed her children. In short, for rural people and the informal sector, education is irrelevant to the economy they come from, whereas for the upper middle class and rich the education they get leads to exciting opportunities.

## A Humane Economy

GRI, at its founding, aimed to create young citizens who will bring the knowledge of the world to impoverished rural areas and through community service change villages into economically self-sufficient and vibrant communities. The founders of the Gandhigram community believed that they could engineer a quiet revolution in the impoverished Dindigul area through an integrated approach. They believed that the University would light up the minds of the youth and mould their hearts while the Gandhigram Trust and the Gandhigram Institute of Rural health and Family Welfare would generate employment, improve the health of the villagers and create awareness on development. The Gandhigram ideal was to set an example to the nation by directly tackling the twin issues of poverty and inequality through a constructive programme.

This was the essence of *Nai Talim* in a university setting. It is an integral part of a larger vision of society and economy, which includes *swaraj* and *khadi* focusing on human values and keeping human needs at the centre. *Nai Talim*, *swaraj* and *khadi* are closely linked concepts. *Swaraj* is a concept deeper than getting rid of the foreign rule. It refers to self-reliance and self-rule, not only at the country level but more importantly at the village level and for the community. *Swaraj* is both a political and an economic concept and village self-reliance needs to be both political and economic.

Self-reliance, or *swaraj*, in a village, means that all the basic needs of everyone in the village are met. It means that everyone has enough nutritious food, clean drinking water, a toilet in every home, a house of her own and adequate clothing. It means that everyone, regardless of caste or class, has equal access to good health care and educational opportunities. It means adequate common resources in terms of land, water, energy and cleanliness. It means a voice in decision-making for all communities and individuals.

All this is possible only if the people in the village have enough resources of their own and their work as labourers or producers helps them to earn enough or to produce enough to meet the basic needs. Of course, the Government at the State and Central levels would transfer resources and funds, but basically there has to be enough work and productivity and earnings in a village to sustain its self-reliance. In today's world, a village is not an island. It is intimately linked to the larger economy and polity. It is linked to large markets and often these large markets destroy the local production. Mill cloth destroys local weavers and readymade garments destroy the work of local tailors. There are many more examples. Of course, none of these products are harmful in themselves. They are harmful only because they impoverish those local producers.

This is where *khadi* comes in. *Khadi* has to be seen in a broader context. *Khadi* and Village Industries more broadly represent all those products that are locally grown and locally produced, which put earnings and resources into the hands of the villagers, especially the poorest villagers. This can be hand-woven cloth produced by weavers or hand embroidery or locally produced food medicine. It can be services such as masonry and plumbing or even the services of local mid-wives and *Ashas*.

*Khadi* has a deeper meaning. Gandhi insisted that we should wear *khadi*, locally spun by village women and woven by local weavers. An economy requires both producers and consumers to be linked through a market, but if consumers are totally indifferent to the producers and the conditions of production, it can lead to exploitation and even devastation of local communities. Being "rural minded" is caring for local production and producers and supporting them in your life.

Elaben Bhatt, founder of SEWA, pleads for 'an economy of nurturance'. She declares, "Nurturance comes naturally to human beings. None of us would be here if we were not nurtured in our infancy and childhood." Yet today the world encourages us to be exploitative rather than be nurturing. This leads to a threefold crisis—rising poverty despite abundance; rise of intolerance, hatred and violence; and environmental catastrophe—the very scenario that Gandhi had predicted.

This has to be corrected not by our leaders but by us, the common people, as a local-global movement. We need to build a new, social

economy of nurturance and reject the current anti-social economy of exploitation and destruction. For this, we have to use all the resources we have in abundance, our human and social capital, and reclaim our access to natural and physical capital. Finance is the instrument of growth but today it has become an independent structure which often exists for its own sake and has become detached from the real and material world. Money is a tool for making more money. But we must be aware of the danger of this tool being used for destructive growth. Tools must serve us, not the other way. We need to ask how finance can promote nurturing growth.

### *Nai Talim* and A Growing Economy

Today rural development is as important as it was half a century ago, but the meaning has changed considerably. Growth drives the economic agenda today and this includes growth in educational opportunities, incomes, opportunities and productivity. Competition, individualism and exploitation underpin the economy today. The challenge is to bring about growth within an economy which is humane and nurturing.

*Nai Talim*, interpreted in today's context, can have a major role to play to redefine growth. Traditionally, the majority of people in rural India have a wide range of skills. Many of these skills are part of their everyday lives; many have been handed down to generations; some are newly learnt; and some are self-learnt. We could say that every man or woman has a whole range of skills using which he/she runs his/her economic and social life and hands it down to the succeeding generations.

New technologies and fast-changing markets tend to make existing skills obsolete and demand upgradation; they require new skills and multi-skilling as well. On the other hand, there are many new markets today which workers can reach out to by adapting existing or traditional skills. In SEWA we have seen that women in Gujarat, Bihar, Kerala, Kashmir and Delhi, who are good at embroidery or weaving or basket making and many other traditional artisanal skills, have lost their markets because they are unable to reach out to modern customers nationally or internationally. However, if they get designs from someone who is in touch with the market and can collectivize into a co-operative or company, they

can be part of national growth and derive better conditions for their own communities.

SEWA Bank, a local women's bank, provides finance combined with financial literacy and skills of entrepreneurship to rural and urban informal women. This has resulted in many women starting their own businesses. This has also enhanced local employment and has helped in expanding local markets and creating a cycle of local development.

Perhaps the major rural challenge today is to ensure productivity growth and better incomes in agriculture and allied activities like livestock and food processing. This requires knowledge, skills and technology for the farmers. However, research from the lab is rarely transmitted to the farmer and the farmers' real, everyday experiences are rarely researched in labs. Generally, there is a gap between universities and the farmer in her field, a new kind of caste system, where the scientist with knowledge is superior, better paid and respected than the farmer. Gandhi's lament that "Divorce between intelligence and labour has resulted in criminal negligence of the villages" is very true of agriculture today.

*Nai Talim* would require the scientist to undertake direct labour on the field and the farmer to understand the workings in the lab. As Gandhi famously stated that while a great science was required to build a bridge over Ganga, a greater science would be required to build implements for village people! Such a lab-to-land and land-to-lab system is present in other countries. In Israel, for example, scientists live on the farm and the research lab is within the farm premises.

*Nai Talim* is the way in which the latest knowledge, research and technology is brought to the majority of people. It is through incorporating skills into our educational system that we can reconnect with the larger world of work. Skills and knowledge are the driving force of economic growth and social development, and many countries which have grown fast and attained prosperity have recognized this. In South Korea, for example, 96% of young people in the age group 19-24 have a vocational skill as part of their education as compared to only 5% in India.

## Redefining Growth

The present model of growth is, in the long run, unsustainable, leading to the destruction of the environment and growing inequality. In India today, literacy and educational levels are growing and students coming out of the present-day schools and colleges expect that they will have jobs different from the earlier generations. They are looking for work in offices and in domains such as IT, finance and marketing. They no longer wish to work in the fields or farms or with livestock or any type of artisanal production. The formal sector of the economy in which these 'desirable' jobs exist can absorb barely 10% of the workforce. The competition for these 10% of jobs is fierce and they generally go to the better-off, better-educated section of the population. For the rest, it means intense competition and stress where parents who can barely afford it pay high prices and yet suitable jobs remain elusive leading to social unrest and movements.

This trend will be reversed only if the majority of the workforce can get work which satisfies their aspirations. The rural and the informal economy, which is the real economy in India, has to become the focus of employment creation. It needs to lead the economy rather than be a drag on the country. It needs to go from an unproductive, low-income sector to a higher productivity sector which provides satisfying work and decent incomes.

Gandhi's teachings can be understood in this modern context. Rural mindedness refers to focusing on where the majority of the population abides; *Swaraj* refers to local production which is sustainable and productive; *Khadi* refers to building on local skills and reaching enlightened consumers who are aware of the products they use; and *Nai Talim* refers to a system where education is closely linked to the needs of the economy. This combination of Gandhian ideas is certainly viable in today's world and adopting these strategies would lead to a more humane and nurturing economy.

## CHAPTER

# 3

## MAHATMA'S ICONIC ATTIRE

*Ram Ponnuru*

"All the alterations I have made in my course of life have been effected by momentous occasions; and they have been made after such a deep deliberation that I have hardly had to regret them" - Mahatma

Unlike other leaders of the Indian national movement, Mahatma Gandhi did not stand apart from the common folk, but empathised and even identified with them. His appearance and the clothes he wore were in harmony with the modesty of his life. In the last 27 years of life, he wore only a loincloth of coarse hand-woven material, which covered his lean brown body from his waist to the knees. In 1921, the historic change undertaken in his attire during his second visit to Madurai was the culmination of a series of events related to swadeshi and khadi. He gave up his traditional Indian clothes for a loincloth which depicted a drastic change in his image. The loincloth-clad figure has been since accepted as the "Father of the Nation" by a nation exporting nuclear know-how.

Gandhi was born and brought up in Porbandar, a place where the effects of the British rule were not felt deeply. In his youth, he wore a shirt and dhoti much like other urban youth and often wore an overcoat. When he went to England to study law, he dressed like an English man and did not hesitate to remove the outer symbols that showed him as an Indian. His desire to conform to English sartorial standards can be seen in his remarks on the attire of Narayan Hemchandra, a Gujarati who visited England. He had remarked, "His dress was queer, a clumsy pair of trousers, a wrinkled, dirty, brown coat after the Parsi fashion, no necktie or collar, and a tasselled woollen cap. He grew a long beard . . . Such a queer-looking and queerly dressed person was bound to be singled out in a fashionable society."<sup>1</sup>

The three years in London (1888-1891) changed his attitude towards English customs and manners. In England, he took care of his clothing and wore suits made by West End tailors. His punctiliousness in dress persisted for years.<sup>2</sup> When he returned to his hometown in 1891 as a Barrister, the outward remnants of Western civilization were overwhelming. He had embraced Europeanization and forced his family as well into a European style of dressing.<sup>3</sup> However, he had the habit of wearing an Indian turban with his European dress like the other Western-educated Indians.

When Gandhi went to South Africa at the invitation of Abdullah Sheth, his dress marked him off from other Indians. He had a frock-coat and a turban, an imitation of the Bengal pugree.<sup>4</sup> At the Durban Court, the Magistrate asked him to take off his turban but he refused and left the court. Taking off his turban would be an insult. So, he bid good-bye to the Indian turban and began wearing an English hat which would save him from insults and unpleasant controversies.<sup>5</sup> But, on the advice of Sheth, he wrote to the press about the incident and defended the wearing of a turban in the court. The issue was discussed in the newspapers which described him as an 'unwelcome visitor'. However, his turban stayed with him practically till the end of his stay in South Africa.

Later, when he was sworn into the Supreme Court of Natal, the Chief Justice said to him: "You must now take off your turban, Mr. Gandhi. You must submit to the rules of the court with regard to the dress to be worn by practising Barristers." He realized his limitations and complying with the order of the Supreme Court, removed the turban that he had insisted on wearing in the District Magistrate's Court. Not that he could not have resisted the court directive but he wanted to conserve his strength for fighting bigger battles. Sheth Abdulla and other friends did not like his meek submission but he tried to press home the truth of the maxim 'When at Rome do as the Romans do.' During his stay in South Africa (1893-1914), he wore fashionably-tailored three-piece suits with striped tie and starched white collar appropriate to an Anglicized £5,000-a-year barrister.<sup>7</sup> John Ruskin's *Unto this Last* inspired him to adopt a simple life in South Africa but he never gave up his European clothes.<sup>8</sup>

When Balasundaram, an indentured Tamil labourer in tattered clothes, headgear in hand, two front teeth broken and his mouth bleeding, stood before Gandhi trembling and weeping, he remarked:

A practice had been forced upon every indentured labourer and every Indian stranger to take off his head-gear, when visiting a European, whether the head-gear were a cap, turban or a scarf wrapped round the head. A salute even with both hands was not sufficient. Balasundaram thought that he should follow the practice even with me. This was the first case in my experience. I felt humiliated, and asked him to tie up his scarf. He did so, not without a certain hesitation, but I could perceive the pleasure on his face. It has always been a mystery to me how men can feel themselves honoured by the humiliation of their fellow beings.<sup>9</sup>

In *Hind Swaraj*, a book illustrating his policies, he insisted on the boycott of all mechanized goods. He considered machinery, the key symbol of modern civilization, something sinful and tried to restore the dignity of manual labour.<sup>10</sup> He firmly believed that weaving or spinning a charka could tackle the growing famine in India. In his 1911 letter to Narandas, he wrote, "What is required for the present is that every intelligent person should learn the art of weaving".<sup>11</sup>

When he returned to India in 1915, after 21 years of his South African 'Experiments with Truth,' he was ready to provoke the Anglicized reception committee in Bombay. He changed his mode of dress from an impeccable Western outfit to native garments, which included a dhoti, a long coat, a stole and a white turban as headgear. He also clothed his entire family in Kathiawar with the same costume and spoke in Gujarati rather than English. His Indian peasant dress was very simple and unique. But leaders like Kripalani and Gaganvikari Mehta criticized his dress.

Gandhi mentions how the Viceroy's durbars in India humiliated the local kings by compelling them to wear inappropriate clothes. During his stay with Gokhale in Calcutta, Lord Curzon held his durbar. Gandhi wrote: "Native kings who had been invited to the durbar were members of the club. In the club, I always found them wearing fine Bengali dhotis, shirts and scarves. But, on the durbar day they put on trousers befitting khansamas (cooks/butlers) and shining boots." He was pained and asked one of them the reason for the change and he replied, "We alone know our unfortunate condition. We alone know the insults we have to put up with in order to keep in possession our wealth and titles".

On 4th February 1916 Lord Hardinge, the then Viceroy of India, laid the foundation stone of the Banaras Hindu University and there was a durbar. On that occasion, Gandhi was clad in a short, coarse dhoti, Kathiawadi cloak and turban, and was distressed to see the Maharajas dressed like women in silk pyjamas and achkans, pearl necklaces, bracelets, pearl and diamond tassels on their turbans and swords with golden hilts hanging from their waist-bands. He was told that it was obligatory for these Rajas to wear their jewellery on such occasions. He also came to know that some of them disliked wearing these jewels and never wore them except on occasions like the durbar. He remarked, "How heavy is the toll of sins and wrongs that wealth, power and prestige can extract from man!"<sup>12</sup>

In due course of time, his experiments in dress centred round manual spinning and weaving. With the establishment of Sabarmati Ashram in 1915, he concentrated on spinning, weaving and the production of khadi. He was attached to this form of swadeshi, because this could provide work to the semi-starved, semi-employed women of India. One of the mandates of the ashram was that they had to weave the clothes they wore.

In 1916, Gandhi participated in the Lucknow session of Congress where two grandly dressed landlords mistook him for a stray village peasant.<sup>13</sup> On 30 June 1917, he wrote, "Having taken the vow of swadeshi, my clothing is now entirely hand-woven and hand-sewn and made by me or my fellow-workers." He took every opportunity to put his precepts into practice. During the Champaran movement, he wrote, "The fact is that I wear the national dress because it is the most natural and the most becoming for an Indian. I believe that our copying of the European dress is a sign of our degradation, humiliation and weakness; and that we are committing a national sin in discarding a dress which is best suited to the Indian climate and which, for its simplicity, art and cheapness, is not to be beaten on the face of the earth and which answers hygienic requirements. Had it not been for a false pride and equally false notions of prestige, Englishmen here would long ago have adopted the Indian costume".<sup>14</sup>

During the early period of the Congress, Indian nationalism was an elite phenomenon. The Congress was represented by microscopic landlords, advocates, doctors and other high class people and did not include the Indian people as a whole. In their appearance, attire and thinking, the leaders isolated themselves from the common people. Gandhi

was aware of the fact that the participation of the poor was necessary for the success of the movement. He wanted to convey a message not only to the Congress but to the entire country through the change in his attire. He successfully plugged the leader-volunteer gap through his appearance, speech and action. With the emergence of Gandhi, the Congress was no longer a body of professionals and intellectuals. Peasants, workers and artisans came to follow their Mahatma who dressed and lived like them and spoke their language.

When the swadeshi movement flourished and people boycotted foreign clothes in favour of khadi, Gandhi started wearing a cloak.<sup>15</sup> He discovered that the heart of swadeshi lay in khadi.<sup>16</sup> The khadi movement was then called Swadeshi Movement.<sup>17</sup> While he went ahead with khadi, there was a debate whether the public should opt for expensive khadi. On 8 April 1919 when he pronounced the swadeshi vow, he spoke of the loincloth for the first time. When men say, "We shall confine ourselves to pure swadeshi cloth, even though we may have to remain satisfied with a mere loincloth"<sup>18</sup> and when women resolutely say, "We shall observe pure swadeshi even though we may have to restrict ourselves to a clothing to satisfy the sense of modesty," then shall we be successful in the observance of the great swadeshi vow.<sup>19</sup> Thus by 1919, Gandhi welcomed the idea of wearing a loincloth. But he continued to wear khadi.

In Barisal, he saw that the people of Khulna were naked and were dying of hunger. He realized that he should content himself with a mere loincloth and send his shirt and dhoti to Dr. Roy for the people of Khulna. But he restrained his emotion, for it was tinged with egotism. Later when his friend Maulana Mahomed Ali was arrested in his presence, he addressed a meeting soon after his arrest. He thought of dispensing with his cap and shirt that very moment, but restrained himself fearing that he might create a terrible scene.

The third occasion was during his trip to Chennai. People began to tell him that they did not have enough khadi to start with and added that even if khadi were available, they had no money. "If the labourers burn their foreign clothing where are they to get khadi from?" He realized that there was truth in the argument. He shared his grief with Maulana Azad Sobhani, Rajagopalachari, Dr. T.S.S. Rajan and others, and proposed that

he should henceforth go about with a loincloth. Sobhani understood his grief and accepted his idea but the other co-workers felt uneasy. They felt that such a radical change might make people uneasy and they would find it difficult, if not impossible, to copy his example. For the next four days, he filled his head with these thoughts and began telling people in his speeches: "If you don't get khadi, you can do with mere loincloth but discard foreign clothing." But he was hesitant while he uttered these words, for he had his dhoti and his shirt on.

The dearth of *swadeshi* goods in Madras continued to make him uneasy. The Maulana had as much alteration in his dress as the Shariat permitted. Instead of the trousers, he wore a lungi and a shirt of which the sleeves did not reach beyond the elbow. Only at the time of prayer, he wore a cap, as it was essential. The other co-workers were all silently watching. The masses in Madras watched Gandhi in bewilderment. He observed:

But if India calls me a lunatic, what then? If the co-workers do not copy my example, what then? Of course this is not meant to be copied by co-workers. It is meant simply to hearten the people, and to make my way clear. Unless I went about with a loincloth, how can I advise others to do likewise? What should I do where millions have to go naked? At any rate, why not try the experiment for a month and a quarter? Why not satisfy myself that I left not a stone unturned?

It is after all these thinking that I took this step. I feel so very uneasy. For eight months in the year, you do not need a shirt here. And so far as Madras is concerned, it may be said that there is no cold season at all, and even the respectable class in Madras wears hardly anything more than a dhoti.

The dress of the millions of agriculturists in India is really the loincloth, and nothing more. I have seen it with my own eyes wherever I visited.

I want the reader to measure from this the agony of my soul. I do not want either my co-workers or readers to adopt the loincloth. But I do wish that they should thoroughly realize the meaning of the boycott of foreign cloth and put forth their best effort to get

it boycotted, and to get khadi manufactured. I do wish that they may understand that *swadeshi* means everything.<sup>20</sup>

Gandhi was waiting for the most appropriate time to change his clothes. He noticed that the common people, especially in South India, wore minimal clothes as a way of dealing with poverty and extreme climate. Moved by their 'hunger and nakedness,' he realized that to lead the masses, he had to share their suffering and become one with them. It was to prove the axle around which his entire political life and leadership would evolve. Typically, he never undertook a major change without a period of experimentation and soul-searching. He stated, "All the alterations I have made in my course of life have been effected by momentous occasions; and they have been made after such a deep deliberation that I have hardly had to regret them. And I did them, as I could not help doing them. Such a radical alteration—in my dress—I effected in Madurai."<sup>21</sup>

During the non-cooperation movement, he undertook extensive travels throughout India to spread the message of *swadeshi* and *khadi* with a call to boycott foreign clothes. Because of the repressive policy of the government, he tried to step up his campaign. He had fixed 30<sup>th</sup> October for the complete boycott of foreign cloth. He intensified the campaign by his decision to switch to a loincloth:

I know that many will find it difficult to replace their foreign cloth all at once. Millions are too poor to buy enough khadi to replace their discarded cloth. Let them be satisfied with a mere loincloth. In our climate, we hardly need to protect our bodies during the warm months of the year. Let there be no prudery about dress. India has never insisted on covering of the whole body especially in the case of males as a test of culture. In order to set the example, I propose to discard, at least, up to the 31<sup>st</sup> of October, my topi (cap) and vest and to content myself with only a loincloth and a chaddar, whenever found necessary for the protection of the body. I adopt the change because I always hesitated to advise anything I may not myself be prepared to follow, also because I am anxious by leading the way to make it easy for those who cannot afford a change on discarding their foreign garments. I consider the renunciation to be also necessary for me as a sign of mourning and a bare head and bare body is

such a sign in my part of the country. That we are in mourning more and more, and yet as the end of the year is approaching, we are still without swaraj. I wish to state clearly that I do not expect co-workers to renounce the use of vest and topi, unless they find it necessary to do so for their own work.

I am positive that every province and every district can, if there are enough workers, manufacture sufficient for its needs in one month. I advise complete suspension of every activity but *swadeshi*. I would even withdraw pickets from liquor shops, trusting the drinker to recognize the new spirit of purification. I would advise every non-cooperator to treat imprisonment as his ordinary lot in life and not think anything about it. If only we can go through the course of organizing manufacture and collecting foreign cloth during the month of October, abstaining from meetings and excitements, we shall produce an atmosphere calm and peaceful enough to embark upon civil disobedience if it is then found necessary. But I have a settled conviction that if we exhibit the strength of character, the faculty for organizing and the power of exemplary self-control, all of which are necessary for full *swadeshi*, we shall attain Swaraj without more.<sup>22</sup>

Krishnadas, an inmate of Sabharmati Ashram and Gandhi's assistant, wrote: "It was in the train at Dindugul, Gandhi prepared a report, and told me to take copies and arrange to distribute to various places as a policy note to public. In which as the mark of identity of grief for one month he wanted to give up his shirt and hat, and only to wear lower garment. He announced that when necessary he would use the upper garments."<sup>23</sup> The historic moment of "change of attire" took place on the morning of 22 September 1921.

He discarded the cap and the vest and wore a piece of a cubit width around his loins. Ultimately, he made a significant change in his dress and Madurai had an opportunity to write a unique chapter in the history of Gandhi. With the loincloth on, he effectively identified himself with the Indian peasants. Friends tried to dissuade him from taking to such a dress. He assured them that it was no part of his intention to become a *sanyasi*. He resolutely took to loincloth. Great events seemed imminent.<sup>24</sup>

Gandhi emphasized his devotion to home-spun cotton and to simplicity by discarding, for all time, his cap, sleeveless jacket/waistcoat, and the flowing dhoti or loose trousers, and adopted the loincloth as his sole garment. In addition, he carried a homespun bag for his writing equipment, the rosary and a few necessities. This was his 'mendicant's garb'.<sup>25</sup> This uneventful, but momentous renunciation identified him with the common man. On that day he was to travel by car to Karaikudi, a distance of sixty miles from Madurai. On the way he accepted the welcome accorded by weavers on Kamarajar Salai. It was here that he made his first public appearance in a loincloth and this site is called 'Gandhi Pottal' now. It was at this site that the entire nation saw Gandhi in a new attire, a new *avatar*. It was in Madurai that he experienced spiritual enlightenment. He wrote:

On the way (from Madras to Madurai by train) I saw in our compartment crowds that were wholly unconcerned with what had happened. Almost without exception, they were bedecked in foreign fineries. I entered into conversation with some of them and pleaded for Khadi. They shook their heads as they said, 'We are too poor to buy Khadi and it is so dear.' I realised the substratum of truth behind the remark. I had my vest, cap and full dhoti on. When these uttered only partial truth, the millions of compulsorily naked men, save for their langoti four inches wide and nearly as many feet long, gave through their limbs, the naked truth. What effective answer could I give them, if it was not to divest myself of every inch of clothing I decently could and thus to a still greater extent bring myself in line with ill-clad masses? And this I did the very next morning after the Madura meeting.<sup>26</sup>

On 22nd September 1921, Gandhi, in his public speech at Tiruppathur, said that in India twenty-two crores of people had no work for six months in a year and that if every house had a spinning-wheel which could be used for a few hours during leisure time by every member of the family, surely, then they would be able to supply the whole of India with enough *swadeshi* clothes. Till all Indians were able to get adequate supply of hand-woven and hand-spun clothes, they should be ready even to wear a langoti and go out. They should take pride in wearing hand-made clothes however coarse they might be. He then explained why he had changed his



dress and said that he would wear only a little piece of cloth until that time when Indians rich and poor alike would be able to get adequate supply of clothes.<sup>27</sup>

His dramatic change of attire and appearance shocked many of his friends and followers. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, a prominent leader of the Congress Party, got so emotional at the sight of Gandhi wearing a loincloth that he declared, "Why brother should you thus dress yourself? Is it right?" C Rajagopalachari, another Congress leader and close friend, voiced strong objection to his ascetic look and tried to dissuade him but the Mahatma, as he was being increasingly referred to, had clearly made up his mind. He issued a public statement that was sent out to the national media and to the Associated Press which would relay the news to a global audience. His "nakedness had become a badge of honour," wrote his biographer Robert Payne.

He once said he had no right to wear anything more than the barest minimum when millions of his countrymen were deprived by their British rulers of the ability to buy enough clothing "even to hide their shame." On 12 October 1921 in his speech on swadeshi in Surat, he explained why he took to the loincloth. He wanted to set an example because many of his own countrymen and women were semi-naked. Hand-spun and hand-woven khadar was the need of the hour, and if Surat alone did this no civil disobedience will have to be resorted to.<sup>28</sup> He spoke and wrote about his dress because he wanted people to understand it.

On 22 October 1921, Jawaharlal Nehru saw Gandhi for the first time wearing his loin-cloth. Gandhi looked like an ascetic and Nehru was visibly moved. Advancing towards him and warmly grasping his hand, he asked, "Why, brother, should you thus dress yourself? Is it right?"<sup>29</sup>

In 1930, the year of Gandhi's Civil Disobedience campaign that almost toppled the British Empire in India, Winston Churchill, the empire's great exponent, coined the epithet 'the half-naked fakir,' a phrase that spoke for the Americans and Britons who identified Gandhi with what they believed was India's self-inflicted poverty and its fraudulent spirituality. It was while addressing the Council of the West Essex Unionists on February 23, 1931, that Churchill, the arch-imperialist, remarked, "It is alarming and also nauseating to see Mr. Gandhi, a seditious Middle Temple lawyer of

the type well-known in the East, now posing as a fakir, striding half naked up the steps of the Vice-Regal palace to parley on equal terms with the representative of the King-Emperor." Speaking at the Constitutional Club on March 26, 1931, he observed that "Gandhi, with deep knowledge of the Indian peoples, by the dress he wore – or did not wear . . . deliberately insulted, in a manner which he knew everyone in India would appreciate, the majesty of the King's representative . . ." Churchill contemptuously dismissed him as the 'half-naked fakir' but Gandhi regarded the expression as 'a compliment'.

Gandhi explained to the journalists from News Chronicle: In India several millions wear only a loincloth. That is why I wear a loincloth myself. They call me half-naked. I do it deliberately in order to identify myself with the poorest of the poor in India. The simplest of clothing expressed a denial of 'material comforts,' a shunning of luxury and 'high-living'. It might even be regarded as a mark of the way that England had stripped the once prosperous Indian land. Hand-woven cloth further denoted the vibrancy of ancient traditions and the rejection of modern industry. Over time, it became a uniform of revolt.<sup>30</sup>

In 1931 he visited England to attend the Second Round Table Conference on behalf of the Indian National Congress and had minimum clothes and only slippers notwithstanding the changes in the autumnal climate and the onset of winter. He had already visited that place four times but dressed in a western attire. But this time he wore the dress of the poor Indian to reveal India's poverty and starvation. The press focussed on his new attire and he said:

As to the dress I have had many advisers. But here too my position is simple. If I go to England I shall go as a representative and nothing more, nothing less. I must, therefore, appear not as the English would have me but as my representative character demands. I represent the Congress because and in so far as it represents Daridra-narayana, the semi-starved almost naked villager. And if I represent the landed or moneyed or educated Indians, I do so to the extent that they identify themselves with Daridra-narayana and desire to promote his interest. I can therefore appear neither in English costume nor in that of the

polished Nehrus. In spite of the closest bond between us it would have been just as ludicrous for me to dress as Pandit Motilal did as it would have been for him to appear in loincloth. My loincloth is an organic evolution in my life. It came naturally, without effort, without premeditation. My duty, as I conceive it, will then be, if I succeed in reaching London, to add nothing more to the loincloth than the climate peremptorily demands.”<sup>31</sup>

His reception at the Buckingham Palace was a very formal affair that required a formal garb—black coat, striped trousers, black shoes, white shirt, collar and tie. But even after prolonged discussions, he refused to wear such clothing even to meet the king.<sup>32</sup> On his return from a visit to the Buckingham Palace, a correspondent asked how he, so scantily dressed, felt in the presence of the monarch (During his stay in England, he added only a shawl to protect himself from the cold), he replied: “There was no problem . . . His Majesty more than made up for both of us.”<sup>33</sup>

The iconic image of Gandhi shows him bare-chested, clad in a loincloth, and reading a newspaper while seated next to a spinning wheel or *charkha*. That picture, taken by the legendary American photographer Margaret Bourke-White, was shot for the now defunct *Life*. It was taken in 1946 when Bourke-White arrived in Poona (now Pune), where Gandhi had been imprisoned by the British.

Gandhi’s change of attire not only highlighted and strengthened the fight to boycott British goods but also created an everlasting symbol reaching out to his fellow Indians. As Bean points out, “All the Indians were able to understand the most sensitive message that could be easily understood by his stardom. Gandhi’s important and powerful message through the new attire is the dignity of poverty, the rise of labour, the equality of all Indians, the greatness of Indian civilization, and above all his sainthood. He could indulge with the poor illiterate people who spoke many languages because his attire had resemblances with theirs. His clothing was transmitted to people by crossing cultural boundaries. His simplicity in dress influenced the western people who considered the attire of Gandhi more similar to that of Jesus on the cross.” The loincloth had the paradoxical effect of elevating him to a saint, a holy man, a Mahatma.

## End Notes

1. M.K. Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Mahadev Desai (trans.), Navajivan, Ahmadabad, 1940, p. 97.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
4. *Ibid.*, p.134.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 137.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
7. Louis Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, New York: Harper, 1950. p. 74.
8. B.R. Nanda, *Mahatma Gandhi: A Biography*, Oxford, 2002, pp.74-75
9. M.K.Gandhi, *op.cit.*, p. 192.
10. M.K.Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Navajivan, Ahmadabad, 2006, p. 107.
11. Letter to Narandas Gandhi, January 10, 1911, CWMG, 10: 398-99.
12. M.K. Gandhi, *op.cit.*, pp. 277-78.
13. *The Swadeshi Vow-II*, April 8, 1919, CWMG, 15: 199.
14. CWMG,13: 450.
15. Ronald Cohn, *Mahatma Gandhi*, 1989, p. 343.
16. M.K. Gandhi, *Gospel of Swadeshi*, p.128.
17. M.K. Gandhi, *op.cit.*, p. 592.
18. CWMG, 15:199.
19. *The Swadeshi Vow-II*, April 8, 1919, CWMG, 15: 199.
20. *My Loincloth*, October 2, 1921, CWMG, 21:225-27.
21. *Ibid.*, 328.
22. D.G. Tendulkar, 2: 82.
23. Krishnadas, *Seven Months with Mahatmaji*, Sabarmati Ashram, 1926, p. 202.
24. *My Loincloth*, October 2, 1921, CWMG, 21: 225.
25. *Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 215.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Speech at Thiruppathur, September 22, 1921 CWMG.

28. CWMG, 21: 280.
29. Krishnadas, *Seven Months with Mahatma Gandhi*, Sabarmati Ashram, 1926, p.114.
30. Robert Bernays, Gandhi watches London, *News Chronicle*, 19 September 1931.
31. CWMG,47:119-20.
32. Jagdish Chandra Jain, *Gandhi, the Forgotten Mahatma*, Mittal Publications, 1987, p. 19.
33. Anne M. Todd, *Mohandas Gandhi*, Infobase Publishing, New York, 2009, p.69.

## CHAPTER


**GANDHIAN ENVIRONMENTALISM:  
A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**
*Sasikala, A.S.*
**Preface**

The world acknowledges Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the Indian Nation, for his contributions to world peace, application of non-violence to resist injustice, educational philosophy and the conflict resolution strategies proposed by him. Since Gandhian principles have impacted environmental movements across the globe, it is pertinent to understand the conception of nature/environmental philosophy embedded in his writings and assess its applicability to the present context. The first thing we need to remember is that major environmental issues like global warming and climatic changes, nuclear proliferation, urbanization and population explosion, and loss of biodiversity were not topics for discussion during Gandhi's time. But as a colonial subject, he was much concerned about the Western Civilization and its ill effects on society and the environment. Perhaps his critique of modern civilization is the reason for considering him an early environmentalist.

***Theoretical Background of Gandhian Environmentalism***

Gandhi was not an environmentalist in the strict sense of the term, but his life is an example of how to live in tune with nature. He developed his ideas on nature conservation from his understanding of religious traditions and also from Western influences. Though he rejected the supremacy of the Vedas, he considered himself a *Sanatani* Hindu (one who practised religious rituals) to whom *moksha* (liberation) was the highest end of life, and he believed that the perfect way to achieve *moksha* was "to do pure and good deeds; to have compassion to all living beings and to live in truth" (CWMG, Vol: 4, 246). He showed concern for the non-human world: "All living creatures are our brothers

and sisters. Hence our *rishis* and *munis* taught us that we should regard the cow as our mother and should develop friendly relations towards all living beings including non-human creatures" (CWMG, Vol: 95, 228). He was also influenced by the Buddhist philosophy and teaching and greatly admired the love and compassion that Buddha had towards all living beings. He pointed out that "Buddha's teaching essentially was not merely Brotherhood of Man but the Brotherhood of all Life" (CWMG, Vol: 61, 453). Non-violence towards the non-human world practised by Jainism also had a striking impact on Gandhi's thoughts. Like Mahavira, he also believed that "the world is sanctified by one out of whose heart love flows constantly like a stream" towards all living beings (CWMG, Vol:41, 143).

Gandhi was greatly influenced by the ideologies of H.D. Thoreau, an American author and philosopher, considered by many the Spiritual Father of Modern Environmentalism. Through his classic, *Walden*, he set the stage for modern environmental thoughts. In a letter to Henry S. Salt (the author of *A Plea for Vegetarianism*), Gandhi wrote:

My first introduction to Thoreau's writings was, I think in 1907 or later when I was in the thick of passive resistance struggle. A friend sent me Thoreau's essay on civil disobedience. It left a deep impression upon me. I translated a portion of that essay for the readers of *Indian Opinion* in South Africa which I was then editing and I made copious extracts from that essay for that paper. That essay seemed to be so convincing and truthful that I felt the need of knowing more of Thoreau and I came across your life of him, his 'Walden' and other short essays all of which I read with great pleasure and equal profit. (CWMG, Vol:47, 243)

Like Thoreau, Gandhi criticized the West for its development paradigms based on industrialization and exploitation of natural resources. He cautioned his fellow countrymen and women about the huge impact of imperialism and capitalism on humankind as well as on the earth by stating that "the economic imperialism of a single tiny island kingdom is today keeping the world in chains. If an entire nation of 300 million took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like

locusts" (CWMG, Vol: 43, 413). The first two ashrams which Gandhi established in South Africa (Phoenix Settlement and Tolstoy Farm) were community living experiments that reflected his desire to live in simplicity and in tune with nature.

Some of the principal causes for environmental devastation which Gandhi dealt with directly or indirectly during his period are discussed below.

### *Human greed rather than need*

Gandhi is a synonym for simplicity. He was attracted by the simplicity of various personalities like Tolstoy, Ruskin, Thoreau, and Gokhale. He also adopted a simple lifestyle based on minimum consumption and use of natural resources. As we are aware, most environmental problems start with either overexploitation of natural resources or over-consumption of resources by a minority. Gandhi believed that taking more from nature than required was a theft. Similarly, he considered it shameful to live in luxury. He often wondered how people could live with their amassed wealth amidst the poverty and starvation of millions. He suggested "bread labour" (one of the Ashram vows of Gandhi which states that everybody needs to do certain physical labour to get their bread) to underline the message of the dignity of labour and the real value of food.

Gandhi associated modern civilization with indefinite multiplication of wants, whereas ancient civilizations were marked by a strict regulation of these wants. He observed: "The nature has implanted in its creation the instinct for food and it also produces enough food to satisfy that instinct from day to day. But it does not produce a jot more. That is Nature's way. But man, blinded by his selfish greed, grabs and consumes more than his requirements in defiance of Nature's principle, in defiance of the elementary and immutable moralities of non-stealing and non-possession of other's property, and thus brings down no end of misery upon himself and his fellow-creatures" (CWMG, Vol:38, 458). This conception of Gandhi that "nature has enough to satisfy everybody's needs, but not to satisfy anybody's greed" has become a norm for environmental movements across the globe.

Reduction in wants can be considered an important aspect in Gandhian environmental philosophy. He urged us to minimize our wants so as to minimize consumption and thus reduce the burden on the environment by avoiding wastes. He believed that our civilization, culture and swaraj advocate the restriction and regulation of wants. But modern civilization and market economies multiply the wants of common people. E.F. Schumacher (1973) pointed out that modern economy is propelled by a frenzy of greed which leads to unbridled envy. He observed that as physical resources are limited everywhere, people satisfying their needs by means of a modest use of resources are obviously less likely to be at each other's throats than people depending upon a high rate of use. Equally, people who live in highly self-sufficient local communities are less likely to get involved in large-scale violence than those whose existence depends on world-wide systems of trade. The desire to amass wealth creates a social order in which inequality, oppression, and deprivation prevail with disastrous implications for human dignity and ecological stability.

In his article "Mahatma Gandhi and the Environmental Movement," Ramachandra Guha highlights Gandhi's insistence on the minimum use of resources. Once Gandhi was staying with Nehru in the latter's family house at Allahabad and asked for a bucket of water for his ablutions. Nehru sent two buckets, whereupon Gandhi sent one back. Nehru protested saying, "This is the city where the Ganga and Yamuna meet; there can be no shortage of water here". But Gandhi did not find any reason to overuse the available resource.

### *Violence against animals*

Man considers himself superior to all non-human worlds. Naturally it leads him to believe that he has the right to use the lower animals. That's why we have been, for centuries, exploiting the lower animals and various species of plants in the name of scientific experiments and economic development. Gandhi raised his voice against the merciless use of animals for scientific experiments by stating that "In the West, they experiment on living beings so that the human body may be preserved. In order to extract all that they can from the cow they slaughter her as well as the bull and feed on their flesh. What can

we learn from them?" (CWMG, Vol: 95, 370). Gandhian notion of non-violence was based on all-embracing love, without discriminating between the higher-lower stratum of life. He observed: "Our love consists in our getting off the necks of our dumb fellow-creatures. The more helpless the lower life, the greater should be our pity" (CWMG, Vol: 20, 347). He was fascinated by the life of Buddha, the embodiment of *ahimsa*, and believed that while carrying the lamb on his back and chastising the Brahmins against animal sacrifice, Buddha showed the highest measure of love. Gandhi wrote, "Prince Gautama Buddha, having learnt the spiritual worth of things during a prolonged period of contemplation, commenced to teach that animal sacrifices were de-spiritualizing, and that the highest form of love was expressed by extending that toleration, which was already a tenet of their faith, in the direction of refraining from killing or otherwise destroying living things" (CWMG, Vol: 4, 201).

There was a strict observance of Non-violence/Ahimsa in Gandhi's ashrams. As most of the ashrams were located in rural waste lands, they were not free from intruding snakes and insects. But none of these snakes or insects were killed by the ashramites. When he talked about this to his Western friends, they were shocked. Gandhi wrote about such an instance: "Mr. Kallenbach and I had frequent talks on religion, which usually centered on fundamentals like non-violence or love, truth and the like. When I said that it was a sin to kill snakes and such other animals, Mr. Kallenbach was shocked to hear it as my numerous other European friends had been. But in the end he admitted the truth of that principle in the abstract" (CWMG, Vol: 34, 206).

Another such incident is described in *Bahuroopi Gandhi* by Anu Bandopadhyaya: One cold evening Gandhi, with a wrap round his body, was conversing with a friend. Suddenly a snake appeared on the edge of the wrap and wriggled its hood. Gandhi's friend asked him to keep calm. But he showed no sign of agitation and advised his friend not to panic. The friend caught hold of the wrap and threw it away with a jerk.

### *Scientism/Technologism without Humanism/Naturism*

According to Gandhi, there are various sins which make societal progress impossible. He identified Seven Social Sins: Politics without Principles, Wealth without Work, Pleasure without Conscience, Knowledge without Character, Commerce without Morality, Science without Humanity, and Worship without Sacrifice.

In his pioneering work *Hind Swaraj*, he criticized the Western civilization which depended fully on machines. According to him, in a country like India, where millions of people are jobless and are reeling under poverty, there is no need to depend heavily on machines. Instead, what we need in such situations is the proper use of manpower to strengthen the nation's economy and people's welfare. He remarked that "there is no reason why our country should remain poor when it has so much natural beauty, good climate, a variety of plant life and an inexhaustible store of other resources" (CWMG, Vol.41, 143).

Gandhi's opposition to machinery and industrialization did not imply that he was anti-development or utopian. What disturbed him was the pathetic condition of the mill workers or the people who were working in industries under heartless capitalists. He clearly stated that "rather than destroy big and small industries we must establish a balance between them and give first place to village industries" (CWMG, Vol: 15, 79). He emphasised that village industries should use natural resources judiciously and provide the maximum employment to the villagers.

During his short stay in London to participate in the Second Round Table Conference, Gandhi met Charlie Chaplin, the famous London-born actor and director. Chaplin shared the memory of his first meeting with Gandhi in his autobiography. He described how nervous he was at that time and how confused he was regarding what to talk with Gandhi. The first thing that came to his mind was Gandhi's opposition towards machinery. He started the conversation by saying, "Naturally I am in sympathy with India's aspirations and struggle for freedom. Nonetheless, I am somewhat confused by your abhorrence of machinery". Gandhi smiled and replied calmly that the first objective for India was to get freedom from the British bondage. "Machinery

in the past has made us dependent on England, and the only way we can rid ourselves of that dependence is to boycott all goods made by machinery. That is why we have made it the patriotic duty of every Indian to spin his own cotton and weave his own cloth. This is the form of attacking a very powerful nation like England." Through his explanations he convinced Chaplin that his opposition to machinery was not based on a mere hatred of machines, but based on the specific need of India of that time. Chaplin wrote about it: "I got a lucid object lesson in tactical maneuvering in India's fight for freedom, inspired paradoxically, by a realistic, virile minded visionary with a will of iron to carry it out" (Weber, *Gandhi at First Sight*, 143-147).

### *Wrong economic/development policies*

As we are aware, the root causes of most environmental issues are wrong economic or development policies. Gandhi believed that "true economics is the economics of justice which stands for social justice; it promotes the good of all equally, including the weakest, and is indispensable for decent life". He believed that "an economics that inculcates mammon worship and enables the strong to amass wealth at the expense of the weak is a false and dismal science" (CWMG, Vol: 72, 258). To him, the basic foundation of economics should be truth and non-violence followed by self-sufficiency.

The economic concepts put forward by Gandhi were analysed by J.C. Kumarappa, a well-known Gandhian disciple and economist. Gandhian economics can be used as a synonym for ecological economics. Kumarappa equated Gandhian economics with "Mother's economy" to highlight its caring and inclusive nature. Simplicity (use minimum resources), Bread labour (physical labour to earn one's own food), Trusteeship (sharing one's wealth and resources for the upliftment of all), *Swadeshi* (using one's neighbour's products to ensure the economic independence of the county), *Sarvodaya* (ensuring the welfare of all the people in the society), village industries (for rural development and women's participation in economic activities), and production by the masses instead of mass production (to ensure employment for all) were Gandhi's major economic concepts. He believed that the base for all these concepts should be truth and non-violence.

The development of a nation or society is often based on the economic prosperity of its people. To pursue the goal of economic prosperity for the majority, we violate the laws of nature and impose sufferings on the minority. The result is drastic ecological changes and environmental destruction. For Gandhi, true development is the welfare of all. It is based on moral principles and economic equality. He realized that "a non-violent system of government is clearly an impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists".

### *Centralized decision-making*

Gandhi had a firm belief that India has the right to decide her destiny. In his controversial work *Hind Swaraj* or *Indian Home Rule*, he stated that *Swaraj* (self-rule) is possible only when an individual is able to govern him/herself. A village committee, consisting of the representatives selected by the villagers, can decide on the developmental projects required for the upliftment of that particular village. This kind of decentralized decision-making will meaningfully address environmental issues, overexploitation of village resources by a minority, etc. If we analyse the developmental projects of several countries and the exploitation of natural resources by multinational companies, we realize how these projects go against the wishes of the local population as well as against environmental sustainability.

In 2003, the Government of Odisha signed an agreement with Vedanta Aluminium Limited (VAL) for the extraction of three million tonnes of Bauxite every year. Niyamgiri, a series of four hills in Odisha housing a dense forest, was widely exploited by the company for mineral extraction. The area was inhabited mainly by the indigenous tribal population. When the issue came under the consideration of the Supreme Court of India, the court ordered the Government to get the opinion of the *Gram Sabha* on the subject. It unanimously said 'no' to mining in their soil to protect the rights of the tribals, to reduce ecological disturbances and safeguard their cultural identity. The incident is cited by several scholars as the victory of the Gandhian concept of *Gram Swaraj*. It has to be noted that various environmental

movements have been inspired by Gandhi. Movements like Chipko and Narmada Bachao Andolan have been directly influenced by him and have adopted the Gandhian method of non-violent active resistance to deal with environmental injustice.

### **Concluding Remarks**

More than seventy years after his death, Gandhi continues to remain the spiritual, ideational and methodological source of many environmental movements and his legacy continues to offer hope to alternative approaches to economy and society. Gandhian environmentalism begins with his idea of truth and non-violence and is infused with concepts like self-reliance, village *swaraj*, *swadeshi*, economic decentralization, and *Satyagraha*. It continues to criticize industrial civilization and Western capitalism. It comes as no surprise that Gandhian non-violence has been accepted by environmental movements as their primary strategy all over the world.

Green movements in India and outside have claimed a spiritual affinity with Gandhi and his vision of a sustainable world. Arne Naess, considered to be the father of deep ecology, acknowledges that his philosophy of ecology or ecosophy developed out of his work on Spinoza and Gandhi. He explains that Gandhi threw light on the relation between self-realization, non-violence and bio-spherical egalitarianism, and points out that he was greatly influenced by the Mahatma's metaphysics. It was Gandhi's critique of the Western and modern civilization based on machinery and his alternative vision of a sustainable society, as advocated in *Hind Swaraj*, which established him as a champion of environmentalism.

### **References**


Gandhi, M.K, 1965. Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG), Vols. 4, 15, 20, 34, 38, 41, 43, 47, 61, 72 & 95. New Delhi: The Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, and Ahmadabad: The Navajivan Trust.

Guha, Ramachandra, 2006. "Mahatma Gandhi and the Environmental Movement". In *Debating Gandhi: A Reader, (Third Impression)*, edited by A Raghuramaraju, 223-236. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Schumacher, E.F, 2011. *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered*. London: Vintage Books. (Originally published in 1973)

Weber, Thomas, 2004. *Gandhi as Disciple and Mentor*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

--- 2015. *Gandhi at First Sight*. New Delhi: Roli Books.

CHAPTER  

**GANDHI'S CONSTRUCTIVE  
 PROGRAMME – THE OTHER SIDE  
 OF CIVIL RESISTANCE**

*Andrew Rigby*

### Introduction

Gandhi was a special figure in the history of movements for social transformation, and as such has been the subject of countless studies – most recently by activist-scholars and students of civil resistance seeking to identify the key lessons that can be applied to more contemporary non-violent movements for peace and justice. As such they have tended to focus on the large-scale *satyagraha* campaigns initiated by him in the Indian freedom struggle, such as the Salt March of 1930 that inaugurated a mass civil disobedience campaign and the 1942 'Quit India' campaign. Less attention has been paid to exploring the significance and contemporary relevance of the other major dimension of his approach to transformation – constructive action to lay the foundations of new ways of living (what has been called by more recent generations of activists as pre-figurative politics).

Gandhi believed that there should be two integral dimensions of any campaign to transform systems of oppression and injustice. There was the front-stage *satyagraha* of active non-violent resistance, but there was also the constructive work to create alternatives to the systems and practices that were in need of change. Indeed, for Gandhi the constructive work was far more important than the active 'political *satyagraha*' in the struggle for emancipation and independence (*Swaraj*). As he advised his co-workers in 1944, through the constructive programme "you can make the villages feel self-reliant, self-sufficient and free so that they can stand up for their own rights. If you make a real success of the constructive programme, you will win *Swaraj* for India without civil disobedience."<sup>1</sup>



## Constructive Action as Foundation of the New Society

Gandhi's understanding of *Swaraj* was far deeper and broader than political independence from Britain. Self-rule, for Gandhi, was premised on a fundamental moral-psychological transformation that each person had to experience for themselves – it could not be granted by some external agency. As he wrote in *Hind Swaraj*, "It is *Swaraj* when we learn to rule ourselves . . . But such *Swaraj* has to be experienced by each one himself." From his perspective, to the extent that people individually and collectively practised self-rule and self-reliance, then they would make British rule irrelevant. As such, there was no distinction between means and ends insofar as he contended that "the attempt to win *swaraj* was *swaraj* itself."

In this we can see how Gandhi in effect held his fellow-citizens responsible for their own subjugation. The way to achieve the necessary individual and collective transformation that would make *Swaraj* a reality was for people to transcend the practices that prevented them from achieving their potential as free human beings. And it was in his constructive programme that he began to explore the types of changes necessary.

His vision of the constructive programme embraced many overlapping dimensions. They included the development of village-based industries as one of the foundations for economic self-reliance, the use of local resources and the spinning of locally grown cotton for the production of hand-woven cloth (*khadi*), the promotion of community cohesion through the eradication of untouchability and the promotion of economic equality, the improvement in the status of women and the pursuit of communal unity between Hindus and Muslims.<sup>2</sup>

At its heart, the constructive programme functioned as a series of experiments in self-rule, and as such constituted the necessary preparation for *swaraj*/independence. As with so many other aspects of his life, Gandhi was continually experimenting and developing his ideas on the changes necessary to throw off the hegemonic domination of the British Raj, and it was in his ashrams that they were most fully put into practice. As Judith Brown has noted, the ashrams or intentional communities which housed his most devoted co-workers "were places akin to laboratories where

he could attempt to solve in microcosm problems that affected India on a much larger scale."<sup>3</sup> The ashrams also provided a training ground from which cadres of workers went out to develop a wider network of constructive initiatives, acting in the capacity of community development workers and amateurs throughout the countryside. As Krishnalal Shridharani, who participated in the Salt March, observed, the ashram graduates became "the nuclei of the economic and spiritual regeneration of India's countryside."<sup>4</sup>

## Relationship between *Satyagraha* and Constructive Action

It should be clear from the above that a central theme of Gandhi's approach to social transformation was a kind of life-style politics – the creation of spaces within which individuals and communities might attempt to bring about the changes necessary for them to 'live the future now'. However, Gandhi was aware that there were inevitable institutionalised 'blockages' that would be encountered in the struggle for change. In such circumstances it was necessary to consider political action to try to overcome the barriers. He urged people to use all the constitutional space available in the pursuit of the necessary changes, but once these had been exhausted then it became necessary to consider other forms of pressure, including civil disobedience and forms of nonviolent resistance/confrontation (*satyagraha*).

For Gandhi, civil resistance was a non-violent alternative to armed struggle, and just as engagement in armed revolt required training, so it was with civil resistance. And the training ground for developing the discipline and commitment necessary for sustained civil resistance was the sphere of constructive work. Indeed, he was convinced that any attempt to launch a large-scale civil disobedience campaign would be likely to deteriorate into violent confrontations once people's passions were aroused, unless the bulk of the participants had been trained and disciplined for non-violent resistance and he believed that the key medium for this training was involvement in different forms of constructive action. As he wrote in Constructive Programme, "Training for military revolt means learning the use of arms ending perhaps in the atomic bomb. For civil disobedience it means the constructive programme."<sup>5</sup>

He did not believe that small-scale local level satyagraha required trained participants, so long as there was a cadre of disciplined activists to lead and coordinate the action. But, as he wrote in 1941, "... when Civil Disobedience is itself devised for the attainment of Independence, previous preparation is necessary, and it has to be backed by the visible and conscious effort of those who are engaged in the battle . . . Civil Disobedience in terms of Independence without the cooperation of the millions by way of constructive effort is mere bravado and worse than useless."<sup>6</sup>

So how was involvement in the constructive programme necessary for a sustained and large-scale civil resistance movement?

*i) A popular movement requires the participation of the people*

In a recent study of the popular unarmed Palestinian resistance to occupation, carried out by Marwan Darweish and I, one of the activists we interviewed in 2015 observed that what the Palestinians called 'popular resistance' was no longer popular, insofar as the local people were no longer prepared to participate. Why should they risk injury, imprisonment or a large fine by participating in protest actions that no longer seemed effective in terms of achieving tangible results?<sup>7</sup>

A key feature of the constructive programme was that it created the opportunity for everyday people, particularly the peasantry, to play an active and significant role in the liberation movement. Gandhi noted in a letter to Nehru following the Civil Disobedience movement of 1934-5:

With civil resistance as the background we cannot possibly do without the constructive activities such as communal unity, removal of untouchability and universalization of the spinning-wheel and khaddar. I am as strong as ever about these. We must recognize that whilst the Congressmen can be counted by hundreds of thousands, civil resisters imprisoned have never amounted to more than one lakh (100,000) at the outside. I feel that there is something radically wrong if paralysis has overtaken the remaining lakhs. There is nothing to be ashamed of in an open confession by those who for any reason whatsoever are unable to join the civil resisters' ranks. *They are also serving the*

*cause of the country and bringing it nearer to the goal who are engaged in any of the constructive activities I have named and several other kindred activities I can add to the list.<sup>8</sup>*

*ii) Maintaining involvement during 'passive' phases of movement*

In his analysis of the Indian liberation movement, Bhipan Chandra, using Gramsci's terminology, likened it to a protracted war of position, a struggle to undermine the hegemonic influence of the Raj in all walks of life.<sup>9</sup> This was the battle of ideas, the sustained struggle to get increasing numbers of people aware of the ways their acquiescence sustained British rule, and hence the extent of their power to challenge and undermine the colonial power by thinking and acting differently. According to Chandra, "... it was the law-breaking mass movements of the post-1918 period which basically performed the task among the mass of the Indian people. The basic objective of these movements was to destroy the notion that British rule could not be challenged, to create among the people fearlessness and courage and the capacity to fight and make sacrifices, and to inculcate the notion that no people could be ruled without their consent."<sup>10</sup>

But no movement can sustain extended periods of mass mobilisation without exhausting its followers and 'burning out' its cadres. So, given the prolonged nature of the struggle periods of intense mobilisation and contestation were interspersed with longer 'passive' periods when ideological work was carried out. A key medium for this was the constructive programme, which helped fill the political space left vacant by the withdrawal from civil disobedience, thereby enabling people to sustain a sense of activism and provide a medium for continued involvement in the movement during the relatively quiet phases, whilst at the same time providing something of a 'safe haven' for the cadres where they could withdraw from the front-line struggle in order to recuperate and recharge their batteries.<sup>11</sup>

*iii) Developing the self-discipline of satyagrahis*

As noted above, one of Gandhi's ongoing concerns was the propensity to violence of those engaged in confrontational struggle that was intended to be non-violent.<sup>12</sup> To maintain the commitment to nonviolence in the face of an opponent prepared to use violence,

required a significant degree of self-discipline on the part of the *satyagrahis*. Gandhi believed that the experience of working in the constructive programme enabled participants to take on as their own the world-view and values on which it was based, particularly the importance of self-reliance. This, he felt, was a necessary preparation whereby people could develop the self-discipline and emotional control necessary for them to engage in nonviolent confrontational resistance without resorting to violence.<sup>13</sup>

*iv) Graduates of the constructive programme as the steel-frame of the movement.*

Given Gandhi's preoccupation with maintaining a nonviolent discipline during civil disobedience and other forms of confrontational resistance, he placed considerable emphasis not only on the self-discipline of the activists, but also the importance of trained cadres with the capacity to direct and control the rank-and-file activists during their contentious encounters with opponents. Once again, the bulk of his lieutenants were graduates of many years of community organising as part of the constructive programme. As Bipan Chandra noted:

As a whole, constructive work was a major channel for the recruitment of the soldiers of freedom and their political training - as also the choosing and testing of their 'officers' and leaders. Constructive workers were to act as the steel frame of the nationalist movement in its active satyagraha phase. It was therefore not accidental that khadi bhandar workers, students, teachers of national schools and colleges, and Gandhian ashrams' inmates served as the backbone of the civil disobedience movements both as organizers and as active Satyagrahis.<sup>14</sup>

## Resistance and Reconstruction

As noted above, in his *Satyagraha* campaigns Gandhi focused on attempts to remove obstacles that were blocking the progress of constructive work. As such, he concentrated on issues that were of immediate relevance to the concerns of the Indian masses which were also deeply symbolic of the injustices of the British colonial rule. In targeting a particular abuse,

however, he also sought to incorporate into the struggle a constructive dimension – the creation of an alternative. The clearest examples of this can be found in the India-wide civil disobedience campaign launched in 1930. A key element of that campaign was the refusal to pay the Salt Tax imposed by the British, but alongside this activists were also urged to make their own salt. In a similar vein, during this phase of the movement, the boycotting of foreign cloth was prioritised. But as part of this campaign, alongside the symbolic bonfires of imported fabrics, there was also the encouragement of people to spin their own cotton and weave their own cloth. What is evident here is a strong pre-figurative dimension to the struggle, with the incorporation into the protest actions of attempts to construct the types of relationships sought for in the future society – highlighting once again the centrality of the means-end continuum within the Gandhian praxis of nonviolent transformation

### Conclusion: Lessons for Contemporary Non-violent Activists

Any resistance movement occurs within its own particular context, and few would claim that the Indian freedom struggle presented a template that should be mirrored by contemporary movements for justice and emancipation. But I would like to conclude this review of Gandhi's approach to constructive action with a few reflections regarding what I consider to be aspects of his legacy that continue to have relevance for today.

*i) The importance of incorporating everyday acts of resistance and solidarity into the struggle.*

The majority of members of any protest movement would appear to be unwilling to risk imprisonment or physical injury for the sake of the cause. The cost is too high for many. Hence the importance of finding ways of resistance that can be incorporated into our everyday lives and which do not carry any great cost for movement followers and solidarity activists, but which can have a significant cumulative impact on the opponent. Simple activities like consumer boycotts fall within that category of action that is open to anyone wanting to express their solidarity with a particular cause, thereby strengthening a movement and broadening its participatory base. This is one of the key lessons to take from Gandhi's constructive

programme and the way in which it created space for different kinds of participation within the overall liberation struggle.

*ii) The importance of local action in creating a culture of creative resistance*

As noted earlier, Gandhi sought a fundamental transformation of Indian society, based on a profound change in the culture of individuals and their communities. His constructive programme was an attempt to experiment with different ways of everyday living that would embody his core values of nonviolence whilst addressing the key challenges facing Indian society. His focus was on bringing about changes in the living conditions (and world-view) of people in the communities they lived rather than organising to take over state power.

This remains an important lesson. As David Hardiman has pointed out, much of the more recent writings on civil resistance have had a 'statist' orientation, and their focus has been on the ways and means nonviolent movements might erode the pillars of state power in order that a new regime might take control and use state power to transform the society. As Hardiman has pointed out:

Capturing state power and transforming a society through the work of a constitutional government that is responsible to an electorate is regarded as the panacea. It celebrates a form of popular coup-d'état while downplaying the fact that all too often the interest-groups that gain office by such means start to misappropriate resources for themselves and govern in corrupt and repressive ways. Without ongoing resistance that builds new institutions from below, there is no genuine democracy – at least not in the sense that radical critics of constitutional democracy (such as Gandhi) have understood it.

From this perspective, what matters most is the ongoing process of nonviolent struggle, rather than any superficial 'victory'. In this, creating a fair and egalitarian society can never be brought about by capturing only the higher echelons of power; it is rather something that has to be continually recreated through people

addressing the various problems that confront them in assertive ways, which may include protest.<sup>15</sup>

## End Notes

1. Quoted in G. Ostergaard, 'The Gentle Anarchists: A Study of the Leaders of the Sarvodaya Movement for Non-violent Revolution in India. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971, p. 3.
2. Khadi was a central element in Gandhian economics. Not only did it provide employment and meet a basic need for clothing, it also symbolised i) the values of economic freedom and equality, ii) the swadeshi mentality of self-reliance, iii) the weakening of the city's traditional exploitation of the countryside, iv) the transcendence of the traditional division between mental and manual labour, and v) the decentralisation of production and distribution.
3. Judith Brown, in J. Brown & A. Parel, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 55.
4. K. Shridharanai, *War Without Violence: A Study of Gandhi's Method and its Accomplishments*, London: Victor Gollanz, 1939. P. 150. Accessible at <http://tinyurl.com/kgwrxm> (21.04.2017)
5. M. Gandhi, *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing, 1941, p. 4.
6. David Hardiman has pointed out that the discipline required for large-scale nonviolent resistance could be acquired without involvement in the constructive programme: 'For example the Sikh Akalis in the early 1920s demonstrated extraordinary levels of nonviolence made possible through religious faith and a military style discipline . . . There were no significant Gandhian-style constructive activities in their villages at this time. The nationalist movement led by Gandhi demanded nonviolence at that time, but this could be taken up and expressed in different ways by different groups without formal Gandhian training.' (Personal communication, 11.05.2017)
7. *Constructive programme* (1941), p. 35.
8. See M. Darweish & A. Rigby, *Popular protest in Palestine: The uncertain future of unarmed resistance*, London: Pluto Press, 2015, pp. 97-99.
9. *Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi*, v. 55, p. 429. (Emphasis added) Accessible at <http://tinyurl.com/kj5fqxa> (07.05.2017)

10. The Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, used the terms 'War of Position' and 'War of Manoeuvre' to indicate two different phases in the class struggle. The war of manoeuvre referred to the phase of open conflict between classes, where the outcome is decided by direct clashes between revolutionaries and the State. War of position, on the other hand, referred to the slow, hidden cultural struggle to gain influence and power through swaying people's hearts and minds. See D. Egan, 'Rethinking war of manoeuvre/ war of position: Gramsci and the military metaphor', *Critical Sociology*, v. 40, n. 4, 2014, pp. 521 – 538.
11. Chandra, p. 508.
12. Chandra, p. 510.
13. See K. Mantena, 'Another realism: The politics of Gandhian nonviolence', *American Political Science Review*, v. 106, n. 2, May 2012, pp. 455- 470, p. 458.
14. This analysis owes much to Bob Overy whose doctoral study of Gandhi as a political organiser is an invaluable source of insight. See B. Overy, *Gandhi as a political organiser: An analysis of local and national campaigns in India, 1915 – 1922*, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Bradford, UK, 1982, p. 110. Accessible at <http://tinyurl.com/kf7bc4q> (08.05.2017).
15. B. Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence*, New Delhi: Penguin, 1989, p. 246. Another related function of the constructive programme was that it made the urban-based and upper caste cadres familiar with the conditions of the villages and went some way towards bridging the gulf between the leadership and the peasantry.
16. D. Hardiman, *Non-violent Resistance in India 1916 – 1947*, New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, Occasional paper 61 (new series), 2014, p. 40. Accessible at <http://tinyurl.com/lgq7oyx> (08.05.2017)

## CHAPTER 6 A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GANDHI AND BASAVESWARA: A STUDY IN PRAXIS

S.V. Shettar

### Introduction

Only at long intervals there appear in the world rare and great souls like Gandhi and Basava who, with the example of their lives and teachings, guide the erring humanity to noble paths. Basava or Basavanna or Basaveshwara as he is affectionately called belonged to the 12<sup>th</sup> century Karnataka and Gandhi to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and they are two among half a dozen epoch-making personalities. Their message of supreme wisdom and universal love is for the whole humanity and not for any particular country or community.

In comparing these two rare spirits and trying to understand the values they represented, we will have to take note of the different ages, geographical space and the surroundings in which they lived and worked. Many points of similarity can be shown between the teachings of Basava and Gandhi. Both represented in full measure the highest and the best in Indian culture and tradition. They could, therefore, make a stirring appeal to the masses and command the following of the multitudes. Both stressed basic human values rooted in our culture. For instance, values like truth, non-violence, compassion for all living creatures, and tolerance are timeless. Both worked for the realization of these values in a spirit of dedication regardless of the results. They were men of infinite courage and were ready to sacrifice everything to pursue their goals.

### Mass Leadership

There is a striking similarity between these two personalities in so far as their capacity to attract a huge mass following and evoke supreme loyalty from them is concerned. The impact of the life and work of

Basava is felt mostly in and around Karnataka from where he operated in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and it is needless to say that this age lacked transport and communication facilities. The Virasaiva or the Lingayat movement (These two terms were used interchangeably earlier but now a band of Basava followers seriously object to the use of the word 'Virasaiva' as a synonym for Lingayat) led by Basava was essentially a mass movement. Other saints and philosophical systems focused on the upper classes and castes. The masses were least influenced by their teachings as the scriptures were written in Sanskrit or high-flown Kannada which was inaccessible to women and sudras. Since these were the main concern of Basava, he sought to evolve and popularize a new literary form known as *Vachanas*. These *Vachanas*, written in simple and homely Kannada, were at once expressive and poetic. This was a revolutionary change in so far as the medium of expression of profound thoughts in Kannada was concerned.

Basava, a Brahmin by birth, had mastery over Sanskrit but chose to preach in Kannada, the language of the common people, just as Buddha preached in Pali. When *Devavani* (i.e. Sanskrit) could not be *Janavani* (i.e. Kannada), Basava and his team of Saranas raised this *Janavani* to the status of *Devavani*. Since language is the means of communication, preaching in a language unknown to the common man is not laudable.

Gandhi's eleven Ashram Vows or observances are the result of the impact of several philosophies and religious traditions. The Vows are: Truth, Non-violence, Non-stealing, Celibacy, Non-possession, Physical or Bread labour (an idea borrowed from Tolstoy), Control of the palate, Fearlessness, Equality of religions, *Swadeshi*, and Removal of untouchability. Despite claiming to be a *Sanatani* Hindu, Gandhi called his religion an ethical religion. For him, religion and morality were interchangeable terms. Basava too stressed the moral aspect of religion which, according to him, was a code of conduct. Hence for both Gandhi and Basava, religion with its moral aspect was a code of conduct for all the members of the society. Basava explained his seven-fold ethical code as follows:

Thou shall not steal nor kill,  
Nor speak a lie,

Be angry with none,  
Nor scorn another man  
Nor glory in thyself,  
Nor others hold to blame,  
This is your inward and outward purity.  
This is the way to win our Lord Kudal Sangama.<sup>1</sup>

With the example of cocks and crows in his *Vachanas*, Basava reveals the secret of Sarvodaya, which requires the broad-mindedness of individuals. Gandhi too developed his philosophy of Sarvodaya almost on the same lines and was inspired by John Ruskin's *Unto the Last* which he rendered into Gujarati under the title *Sarvodaya*. Drawn by the fame of Basava, men and women of various castes and classes from different parts of the country flocked to Kalyana where Bhakti Bhandari, the keeper of the treasury of devotion, was discharging his duties as a minister to King Bijjala.<sup>2</sup> Basava demonstrated his commitment to equality by setting up a unique institution known as Anubhava Mantapa which was a spiritual academy where everyone, irrespective of caste, creed, race, gender or status, was welcome to participate in the discourses.

Gandhi's ashrams included people of various castes, classes, races, religions and nationalities and they participated in the experiments of community living. The Gandhian ashrams, which were considered training grounds for Satyagrahis, buzzed with constructive activities. Like Basava, Gandhi also wrote and spoke for the masses and his experiments were directed mainly towards them. His writings are extremely simple and lucid. In Gujarati, his mother tongue, he is regarded as the founder of a new literary movement and his writings in English have been prescribed in many universities as samples of simple and good prose. Gandhi once said, "I want art and literature that can speak to the millions."<sup>3</sup>

Both Basava and Gandhi were men of God; their ultimate aim was to establish the kingdom of heaven on earth. Their objective was the moral and spiritual regeneration of each individual. Basava is regarded as divine incarnation by millions of his followers. He is worshipped as a deity and his name 'Basava' is regarded as a potent mystic mantra and many miracles are attributed to him.

There were efforts during Gandhi's lifetime to deify him. At times he described himself as an instrument of God. "I never act, I only react according to the guidelines given to me by God" was his favourite statement. His repeated references to his 'inner voice' underline his spiritual character. Some admirers claimed that he had worked miracles. But Gandhi denied any such claims and warned his followers against following him blindly. He declared that it was a blasphemy to attribute divinity to him. Both these men remained completely unaffected by the adulation of the masses and were humble and simple. Basava expressed his reaction in a *Vachana*: "My own people praise and praise me and thus impale me on a golden stake. Such adulation pierces me like a dagger. If you are my well-wisher put a stop to this senseless praise—O Kudala Sangama Deva."<sup>4</sup> Gandhi, almost in a similar vein, said: "Truth to me is infinitely dearer than the Mahatmaship which is purely a burden . . . Often the title has deeply pained me; and there is not a moment I can recall when it may be said to have tickled me . . . I have become literally sick of the adoration of the unthinking multitude."<sup>5</sup>

Unlike other saints, Basava and Gandhi lived in a society and discharged the duties of a householder. They did not consider a life of total withdrawal from the world and its activities as necessary for attaining their spiritual goals. They were married men with children but led a life of intense activity. One can hardly see mystics and saints in action. But it is remarkable that both Basava and Gandhi were recognized as men of God in action. The revolutionary work rendered by these two personalities has left a permanent mark in the annals of the country.

Basava achieved a large measure of success in bringing into existence a well-knit community which would bridge the distinction between different castes, classes and genders. He undertook the task of attacking the citadel of orthodoxy with its established social order of the stratification of castes, with its traditionally powerful priesthood enjoying royal support. The curse of untouchability had of course no place in his scheme of thought and action. It was a revolutionary idea those days and continues to be so even now.

There is a striking similarity in the social reforms advocated by Basava and Gandhi. Gandhi came out with a constructive programme which attempted to remove the blot of untouchability on the Hindu community.

Unlike Basava who had firm views on *Varna* and caste system, Gandhi's ideas underwent some changes in course of time. He appeared to be an apologist of caste in the earlier phase, but ultimately became an ardent believer in the total abolition of caste distinctions among the Hindus.<sup>6</sup> In his appeal to caste Hindus, he declared, "Caste has nothing to do with religion. It is a custom whose origin I do not know . . . But I do know that it is harmful both to spiritual and national growth."<sup>7</sup> The precepts and practice of both these epoch-makers have a great significance and relevance for the modern times.

The removal of untouchability, equal status for women, equal respect for all professions, dignity of labour, and the upliftment of the masses were brilliantly envisaged by Basava eight centuries ago. Gandhi of our own times effectively preached and practised these very principles which appear modern in construction. Louis Renon, a French scholar, has noticed a close affinity between Basava and Gandhi. He points out, "On the whole we must look for Gandhi forerunners in the leaders of sects, the men who 'cleared paths' and opened up ways. In the middle ages and up to the present there are examples of such men coming from all social and spiritual strata, gathering communities about them, adopting new gospels, sometimes trying to make their way in the social and political field by means which they invariably claimed to derive from the gospels. Such are Basava in the 12<sup>th</sup> century with the Lingayats, Ramananda and Kabir in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and Nanak in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries."<sup>8</sup>

Basava was a realist of his times. In his *Vachanas* we can discern the different stages of the mystic's progress towards the ultimate goal of union with the Lord. Gandhi revolted against the political and social order of his times and brought about vast changes in the life of the nation, using an altogether new technique of Satyagraha which is unique in the history of the world. He claimed to be a practical idealist. He demonstrated through experiments that the principles he advocated—whether they are truth or non-violence or the Ashram vows—could be practised.

Gandhi admitted way back in 1924 that Basava was successful in achieving many of his goals. The participants in the Belgaum Congress (which was the only session presided over by Gandhi) have written about it. Gandhi admitted that he would not be able to achieve all the goals set by Basaveshwara but would be happy if he could bring into practice a

couple of them during his lifetime, especially *Dasoha* or Trusteeship and *Kayaka* or physical or Bread labour or the removal of untouchability.

The ideals that Gandhi and Basava stood for are time-tested and universal. An ideal ceases to be an ideal the moment it is reached or realised. One can recall a statement by Nehru in so far as the realization of ideals are concerned: "The amazing thing about Gandhi was that he adhered in all its fullness, to his ideals, his conception of truth and yet he did succeed in moulding and moving enormous mass of human beings."<sup>9</sup> These two great men who appeared at long intervals never wholly succeeded in reforming humanity but their life and teachings have touched millions of men and women in a positive manner and will continue to do so for generations to come.

### Notes and References

1. Peace March, Vol 1, No 10, Oct 1998, Rajashekharayya A.M, p. 18.
2. Ibid, Kulkarni V.G. p. 281.
3. Harijan, 14-11-1936
4. Basavannavara Vachanagalu, Ed. S.S.Basavanal, V, 1962, p. 386.
5. Young India, 02-03-1922, and 01-11-1928.
6. Peace March, Vol 1, No 12, April 1999, p-283.
7. Harijan, 18-07-1936.
8. Vishwa Bharati Gandhi Memorial Peace Number, pp. 232-233.
9. Tendulkar D. G, Mahatma, Vol. I. Foreword by Jawaharlal Nehru, 1960, p. xi.

## CHAPTER



## GANDHIAN PERSPECTIVES AND SUSTAINABLE GLOBALIZATION

*Y.P. Anand*

### Preamble

Globalization may be defined as the process of interaction and integration across communities and nations through cross-country flows covering economic, social, cultural and political aspects. It has been an ongoing process from the beginning of human civilization. Its progress coincides with the progress in human capabilities and advances in communication and technology and mobility, with a corresponding progress in travel, trade, social structures and politico-economic processes, structures and controls. Imperialism, colonialism, successive industrial and technological revolutions and the growing preparations for wars were among the manifestations of globalization during the last four centuries. These trends are continuing in the twenty-first century leading to the depletion of earth's scarce resources and have adverse effects on climate change.

Globalization is not a value-neutral phenomenon. The post-World War II era of globalization which has tended to reduce the earth to a global village has its relative gainers as well as losers, its own peculiar characteristics of inequitable progress and exploitation, and rising social and ecological implications and costs. As a reaction to the adverse impact of globalization, a counter-trend is developing for protection and localization in diverse forms, particularly in underdeveloped and developing parts of the world. Such counter-trends essentially advocate an economy of neighbourhood and self-reliance, particularly with regard to basic needs, as a means to ensure freedom and protect the rights and interests of local and weaker sections and communities against exploitation engendered by globalizing forces, particularly under the free market economic order. In the Indian context, the idea of necessary localization has already been embodied in the comprehensive and well-known Gandhian concept of



*swadeshi*, which had evolved as a reaction to global exploitation under colonial rule and as an essential driver during the movement led by Mahatma Gandhi for India's freedom. It is an ideological thesis whereby the process of globalization would simultaneously ensure observance of necessary local concerns such as decentralization of economic controls and decisions, appropriate levels of self-reliance, concern for fulfilling basic needs of all, and protection of natural resources.

The Gandhian concept of *swadeshi* is not only an agenda for cooperation, sharing and mutual concern within each community but also a programme of development that grows outwards into a system of widening concentric circles, each circle giving strength to its inner circles and growing in harmony with its outer ones. Hence, the right course of globalization can only proceed on the foundation of the Gandhian concept of *swadeshi* and its associated perspectives and components such as *swaraj* (home-rule) and *sarvodaya* (welfare of all).

### Globalization: Context and Approach

Globalization, like technology, can function in varied forms, which may serve, ignore or even harm the interests of different constituents of the social order. Its negative aspects usually result from letting market forces ignore the good of humanity and the earth. It is essential that its negative aspects must be challenged with a constructive and inclusive vision of globalization.

The first phase of globalization came up as industrial revolution and took the form of colonization. These are not value-neutral terms. After World War II came the Bretton Woods organizations, viz. IBRD (World Bank) and IMF, followed by the birth of GATT in 1947. Then followed rounds of Multilevel Trade Negotiations leading to the Dunkel Treaty (1993) requiring reduction of tariffs, physical trade controls and domestic and export subsidies, market access to foreign agriculture products, TRIPS, and the free movement of capital and of services across national borders, eventually leading to the setting up of the World Trade Organization (1995). It was in this context that the present phase of globalization may be said to have been initiated in 1980s, spurred by the end of Cold War, fall of the Berlin Wall, and the Washington Consensus' of Bretton

Woods institutions affirming the primacy of the market in 1990s. The earlier forms, driven by forces of greed and racism, had led to slavery, oppression, and imperialism. The present wave of globalization is driven primarily by an increase in international trade in goods and services and global investments by transnational companies (TNCs), and explosion in financial and exchange transactions, all these leading to global markets for booming profits and consumerism, and establishing controls as driven by international political economy and political power structures.

The world gradually has got divided into underdeveloped, developing, and developed countries, and into corresponding sections or class structures within a country. Capital, goods, information, culture, and pollution increasingly flow across national boundaries without developing countries like India being able to bring their national authority, judgments and values to bear on the market forces. While energy, food and water security are becoming basic needs, national governments have been losing effective control over global economic processes in such matters. Greed, consumerism, and self-aggrandizement have taken control of the national economy. The existing international institutions are not competent to manage an integrated global economy, much less safeguard the interests of the poor and the weak. Countries like India are caught in a dialectic of supra- and sub- nationalism, that of the WTO Vs. 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments of the Indian Constitution.

Threats and risks such as terrorism, drug-trafficking, illegal wealth, black money, and organized crime, including human trafficking, have grown alongside widening disparities, financial-economic crises and ecological disturbances. A well-governed state must have both peace and prosperity. Sustainable prosperity means inter- and intra-generational equity and justice. A more inclusive approach is required whereby technological development, economic growth, and national and global governance ensure an equitable distribution of natural resources, wealth and other benefits.

Modern economics treats a human being primarily as 'economic man' / *homo economicus* and not as *homo ethicus*. The struggle for survival gets converted into a race among selfish beings driven by greed/profit in the neoliberal capitalist market economy. It leads to the exploitation of both man and nature and triggers violence. Efficiency and productivity

are not pursued along with equity. Structural violence and exploitation are growing in depth and extent. Today, market hegemonies, replacing the earlier imperialistic exploitation, tend to control globalization.

The conventional economic theory of international trade is based on comparative advantage in political-economic power attained through acquisition of international resources, advanced technologies, and armed strengths. It is preoccupied with profit maximization rather than fulfilling mutual needs, cooperation, employment and equitable distribution of gains. It means free trade among unequals and in the interest of those having the purchasing power for unending wants and luxuries. Such international 'free trade' would mean exploitation of weaker economies by the stronger and of the rural poor by the urban elite.

Some of its immediate adverse consequences are: local/weaker societies are losing control over production and resources and TNCs achieve competitiveness by lowering wages, with reduced job security. Developed countries accommodate 30% of the world population but enjoyed 66% of its income in 1945 and by 1992 constituted 15% of population but had access to 79% of income. In 2007-08 came the anti-climax, the great recession. It was fed by sub-prime lending, bank failures, credit collapse, market uncertainties, and stock market crash.

An underlying pattern of violence against individuals, communities, nations and nature is inherent in the present phase of globalization. Economic institutions deliver economic and political power to the ruling elite, dividing the society into haves and have-nots, engendering a variety of conflicts that keep nearly everyone insecure and unsatisfied.

Power and resources are not being shared equitably and the growth in GDP does not ensure parallel social growth in human development and environmental quality. It bestows plenty of benefits on the rich and powerful, such as those with access to education, health, and opportunities. GDP indicators are best served when individual greed is pursued in the market largely unfettered by governmental regulations. Hence, poverty, social conflict, oppression, slums, and exploitation co-exist with prosperity. In 1994, top five MNCs had a total corporate sale of \$871.4 billion while South Asia, with a quarter of the world's population, had a GDP of only \$451.3 billion. The situation has moved further inexorably in the same direction since then.

Globalization also ignores the concerns of the marginalized. In India, most of the tribal areas still have 'unregistered' common rights over water, forest, and land resources. Millions of people living in forests and rural areas of India have been uprooted and made homeless or thrown into city slums or other marginalized neighbourhoods because the State is functioning more as an agent of globalizing interests. About 93% of the workforce is in the unorganized sector with very little provision for security of jobs and decent work conditions and wages. Thousands of farmers commit suicides every year as they are unable to 'perform' in the prevalent market system.

### SWADESHI: Its Relevance

The idea of *swadeshi* entered the Indian freedom struggle well before Gandhi appeared on its scene, in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century itself, as a reaction to the ruination of the artisan-based Indian industry and local economy (largely rural), and the resultant widespread poverty and famine under the colonial rule. *Swadeshi* as a mass movement emerged first during protests against the Bengal Partition (1905-11). Its scope included, apart from its political agenda, setting up of cottage/rural industries and revival of national education, arts, science and literature and social reforms. Sister Nivedita's message "Believe in your organic relatedness. Imagine a life in which all have common interests, common needs and mutual and complimentary duties" sums it up.

After 1915, under Gandhi the concept of *swadeshi* acquired newer, wider, and deeper dimensions. He defined *swadeshi* in broad terms as an ideology in 1916: "Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote. Thus, as for religion . . . I must restrict myself to my ancestral religion. That is the use of my immediate religious surroundings. If I find it defective, I should serve it by purging it of its defects. In the domain of politics, I should make use of the indigenous institutions and serve them by curing them of their proved defects. In that of economics, I should use only things that are produced by my immediate neighbours and serve those industries by making them efficient and complete where they might be found wanting."<sup>1</sup>

Under Gandhi, *swadeshi* promoted brotherhood and co-operation. It means the economics of neighbourhood, self-reliance, and mass employment. It is a gospel of decentralized economy and of economic revival of villages and communities. As he said, *swadeshi* is “the only doctrine consistent with the law of humility and love. It is arrogance to think of launching out to serve the whole of India when I am hardly able to serve even my own family.”<sup>2</sup> He went further: “If you love your neighbour as thyself, he will do likewise with you.”<sup>3</sup> His concept of *swadeshi* is based on a holistic view of human society and is integral to his philosophy of *swaraj* and *sarvodaya*.

Gandhi lived his life with the *Gita* as his universal guide. The *Gita* says [III: 35], “One’s own dharma though imperfect is better than the dharma of another well-performed.” He takes it as a message for *swadeshi*: “Interpreted in terms of one’s physical environment this gives us the law of *swadeshi*. What the *Gita* says with regard to *swadharma* equally applies to *swadeshi* also, for *swadeshi* is *swadharma* applied to one’s immediate environment.”<sup>4</sup>

*Swadeshi* helps in improving the range and quality of local production and in reducing costs due to the use of indigenous skills, resources, manpower and appropriate technology, and the correspondingly lesser need for transportation, packaging, storage and marketing. Thus, he selected *khadi* on sound economic considerations as no other alternative could have provided productive work to the idle masses driven to economic marginalization under foreign rule. It particularly empowered women, mostly rural and illiterate.

Gandhian *swadeshi* was not anti-globalization but a socially sustainable approach for globalization. His thinking about how *swadeshi* becomes the basis of a global co-operative social order is expressed thus: “Our first duty is that we should not be a burden on society, i.e., we should be self-sufficient. That means self-sufficiency by itself is a kind of service. After becoming self-sufficient we shall use our spare time for the service of others . . . Even if we succeed in realizing complete self-sufficiency, man being a social animal we shall have to accept service in some form or other. That is, man is as much dependent on others as he is dependent on himself. When dependence becomes necessary in order to keep society in good order it is no longer dependence but becomes co-operation.”<sup>5</sup>

His concept of *swadeshi* is based on a holistic view of human society. It is an integral component of his comprehensive philosophy of *swaraj* and *sarvodaya*. The Gandhian approach to technology is also relevant. He supported machinery when it saved “time and labour not for a fraction of mankind but for all” as he wanted “the concentration of wealth not in the hands of a few, but in the hands of all.”<sup>6</sup> Machinery became “an evil when there are more hands than required for the machine,”<sup>7</sup> or when people tend to lose “one’s individuality and become a mere cog in the machine,”<sup>8</sup> as these are attributes of an exploitative order. He accepted the use of heavy machinery for works of public utility or works that cannot be done by human labour, but rejected “all destructive machinery”<sup>9</sup>. Similarly, he opposed industrialism that led to exploitation of ‘colonies’ for raw materials and as markets and rejected it because it led to unemployment and even wars (such as the present wars for control over oil and gas resources). Overall, he declared, “An industry to be Indian must be demonstrably in the interest of the masses.”<sup>10</sup>

He advocated the use of local produce, skills and resources to the extent possible in specific social contexts and concerns. He said: “I have never considered the exclusion of everything foreign under every conceivable circumstance as part of *swadeshi*. The broad definition of *swadeshi* is the use of all home-made things to the exclusion of foreign things in so far as such use is necessary for the protection of home-industry more especially those industries without which India will become pauperized.”<sup>11</sup> He added: “To reject foreign manufactures merely because they are foreign and to go on wasting notional time and money to promote manufactures in one’s country for which it is not suited would be criminal folly and a negation of the *swadeshi* spirit. A true votary of *swadeshi* . . . will not be moved by antagonism towards anybody on earth. *Swadeshism* is not a cult of hatred. It is a doctrine of selfless service that has its roots in the purest *ahimsa*, i.e., love.”<sup>12</sup>

Thus, *swadeshi* is not a chauvinistic or exclusive concept of self-centred economics but one of evolving, decentralized, employment-oriented, need-based and socially enriching economics. Gandhi asserted: “An individual’s service to his country and humanity consisted in serving his neighbours . . . He could not starve his neighbour and claim to serve his distant cousin in the North Pole. That was the basic principle of all

religions and . . . of true and humane economics.”<sup>13</sup> His patriotism too was not exclusive but worked for the optimum good of the whole humanity. He said: “My patriotism is not an exclusive thing. It is all-embracing and I should reject that patriotism which sought to mount upon the distress or the exploitation of other nationalities. The conception of my patriotism is nothing if it is not always in every case, without exception, be consistent with the broadest good of humanity at large.”<sup>14</sup>

He clarified: “I would not like India to live a life of complete isolation whereby she would live in water-tight compartments and allow nobody to enter her borders or to trade within her borders.”<sup>15</sup> His concept of *swadeshi* evolves into a concept of positive inter-dependence and universalism. It harmonizes local and global concerns as long as it does not mean an external control over a society’s judgments and decisions. While defining *swadeshi*, he remarked: “Any article is *swadeshi* if it subserves the interest of the millions, even though the capital and talent are foreign but under effective Indian control.”<sup>16</sup>

Tagore had expressed serious reservations when Gandhi started his movement for *khadi* as the core of his *swadeshi* programme. In response, what Gandhi wrote in 1921 remains valid even today as a manifesto for the right kind of globalization: “Economics that hurt the moral well-being of an individual or a nation are immoral and therefore sinful. Thus the economics that permit one country to prey upon another are immoral. It is sinful to buy and use articles made by sweated labour. It is sinful to eat American wheat and let my neighbour the grain-dealer starve for want of customers. Similarly it is sinful for me to wear the latest finery of Regent Street, when I know that if I had but worn the things woven by the neighbouring spinners and weavers, that would have clothed me, and fed and clothed them . . . Nor is the scheme of non-co-operation or *swadeshi* an exclusive doctrine . . . Our nationalism is not exclusive, nor aggressive, nor destructive . . . India must learn to live before she can aspire to die for humanity.”<sup>17</sup>

Eventually, Tagore was also inspired by the Gandhian vision of *swadeshi*, and had written: “We have for over a century been dragged by the prosperous West behind its chariot, choked by dust, deafened by the noise, humbled by our own helplessness and overwhelmed by the speed. We agreed to acknowledge that this . . . was progress and progress was

civilization . . . Of late, a voice [Gandhiji’s] has come to us to take count not only of the scientific perfection of the chariot but of the depth of the ditches lying in its path.”<sup>18</sup>

## Globalization and Swadeshi for a Sustainable World

With growing globalization whereby economic controls become ever more remote and less accountable and profit/greed seeks to colonize the whole earth, the Gandhian concept of *swadeshi* and its wide-ranging perspectives become even more relevant. International trade and capital investment in non-basic sectors of economy and in stock exchanges have very little concern for poverty elimination, social justice, and conservation of resources which are scarce. Ethical behaviour, *sarvodaya* (welfare of all), non-violence and peace, prosperity, ecological concerns, co-operation and brotherhood cannot be globalized without *swadeshi*.

It was highlighted in the *Human Development Report* (1997) that globalization is “proceeding largely for the benefit of the dynamic and powerful countries.” It also advised countries like India to manage trade and capital flows more carefully, invest in poor people, foster small enterprises, manage new technology and provide safety nets. All these steps mean standing up firmly to the socially adverse aspects of globalization through the concept of *swadeshi*.

Gandhian concepts of *swadeshi* and *swaraj* are not a case of shrinking into some form of negative localism, but these naturally grow and merge into positive interdependence, universalism and globalism. Gandhi opposed centralized forms of production-cum-distribution as centralisms in production and power reinforce each other. He said: “Centralization as a system is inconsistent with the non-violent structure of society.”<sup>19</sup> He saw “no incompatibility in the idea of decentralizing to the greatest extent possible all industries and crafts, economically profitable to the villages of India and centralization or nationalizing the key and vital industries required for India as a whole.”<sup>20</sup> The *swadeshi* approach can lead to a necessarily decentralized and equitable economic order in the fast globalizing world.

The present form of globalization follows the thesis of Benthamite utilitarianism, which, according to Gandhi, means “in its nakedness that

in order to achieve the supposed good of 51 per cent the interest of 49 per cent may be, or rather, should be sacrificed. It is a heartless doctrine and has done harm to humanity. The only real, dignified, human doctrine is the greatest good of all, and this can only be achieved by uttermost self-sacrifice."<sup>21</sup>

It is relevant to quote the views of two other well-known scholars (J.C. Kumarappa and Ambedkar), who were Gandhi's contemporaries. The Gandhian ethical outlook is apparent in Kumarappa's inaugural address (July 1930) at an exhibition of Indian products: "Trade should result in gains to both the parties . . . Any set of transactions which are not to such mutual advantage is not trade . . ."<sup>22</sup>

Just before his martyrdom, Gandhi had warned: "The Congress has won political freedom but it has yet to win economic freedom, social freedom and moral freedom. These freedoms are harder."<sup>23</sup> Ambedkar too cautioned on 25.11.1949 in the Constituent Assembly while moving the resolution for the adoption of the Draft Constitution: "On 26<sup>th</sup> January 1950 we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality . . . How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life?"<sup>24</sup> The present form of globalization has further widened the disparities and taken us away from social, economic and moral freedom/equality.

The Gandhian approach would be that of *Sarvodaya*, the good of all, through the good of the 'last' person (*Unto This Last*). This is best expressed in Gandhi's *Talisman*: "Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and yourself melting away."<sup>25</sup>

He distinguished between good and bad economics. He wrote: "True economics never militates against the highest ethical standard just as all true ethics to be worth its name must at the same time be also good economics. An economics that inculcates mammon worship and enables

the strong to amass wealth at the expense of the weak, is a false and dismal science. It spells death. True economics, on the other hand, stands for social justice, it promotes the good of all equally, including the weakest, and is indispensable for decent life."<sup>26</sup>

Globalization-with-*swadeshi* leads to co-operation and not dependency. As Gandhi said: "There is a feeling of helplessness in dependency. Members of a family are as much self-dependent as inter-dependent, but there is no feeling of mine or thine. That is why they are called co-operators. Similarly when we take a society, a nation or the entire mankind as a family all men become co-operators."<sup>27</sup>

Growing domination by elitist markets or foreign cultures over indigenous or local cultures is an issue of concern. Here again, the Gandhian perspective would be the right guide: "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. I refuse to live in other people's houses as an interloper, a beggar or a slave."<sup>28</sup>

Globalization must not proceed on the foundations of greed and exploitation. That would only lead to further conflicts and a violent social order. Gandhi's dictum that "nature has enough to satisfy everybody's needs, but not to satisfy anybody's greed"<sup>29</sup> and "excessive greed for anything is the root of all evil"<sup>30</sup> provides the key to sustainable growth and development.

Under the prevalent globalization process, power, wealth, and amenities tend to concentrate in metropolitan societies and areas in a pyramidal form. This may be seen clearly in the Indian context where rural and tribal areas function practically as colonies for the benefit of urban development. Rural industrialization and development need a *swadeshi* approach to globalization, a bottom-up instead of a trickle-down approach. We need to convert the prevalent rural-urban divide into a rural-urban continuum as the basis for globalization in India.

In globalization, the production of non-basic goods tends to rise faster as their income elasticity of demand is higher than that of basic goods, and it is subsidized indirectly through infrastructure, tax shelters and other fiscal measures. But "Under the Gandhian economic order, the character

of production will be determined by social necessity and not by personal whim or greed."<sup>31</sup> Marketed exchange value covers not only the needs but also superfluities, harmful goods and services, and hazardous production. Under *swadeshi*, exchange value and use value would tend to converge, as the aim then would be to prioritize supply of socially determined basic goods and services in preference to meeting the insatiable wants of an acquisitive consumerist society.

## Conclusion

Gandhi and other advocates of *swadeshi/localization* reject the basis of globalization, i.e. the concept of the *economic man*, as it separates economics from ethics or social good. The Gandhian *swadeshi* approach would provide an ethical direction to the economic and other activities under globalization, as it makes conservation, sharing, and self-provisioning the basis of a sustainable and humane social order. The Gandhian dictum that "The good of the individual is contained in the good of all"<sup>32</sup> must underlie the process of progressive globalization. The concept of *globalization-with-swadeshi* is best expressed in Gandhi's description of what constitutes independence. He declared: "In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever-widening, never-ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages; till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units. Therefore the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it."<sup>33</sup>

## References

- Sp. on Swadeshi at Missionary Conference, Madras, 14.2.1916, CWMG 13: 219. [*Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Volume 1 to 100, New Delhi: Publications Division, Govt. of India, 1954-1994; quotes from these volumes are referred to as: CWMG vol. no.:page no.(s)]
- Ibid*, CWMG 13: 224.

- Speech at Meeting of Vill. Workers, Nagpur, 23.2.1935, CWMG 60: 254.
- The Law of Swadeshi, *Young India* (18.6.1931), CWMG 46: 256-57.
- Answers to Questions, 29.11.1945, CWMG 82: 133.
- Discussion with G. Ramachandran, 21/22.10.1924, *Young India* (13/20.11.1924), CWMG 25: 251.
- Village Industries, *Harijan* (16.11.1934), CWMG 59: 356.
- Discussion with Maurice Frydman, on or before 01.01.1939, CWMG 68: 266.
- Some Knotty Points, *Young India* (17.6.1926), CWMG 31: 12-13.
- Indian Industry, *Young India* (23.10.1937), CWMG 46: 270.
- Young India* (17.02.1926), p. 218.
- The Law of Swadeshi, *Young India* (18.6.1931), CWMG 46: 256-57.
- Speech at Public Meeting, Godhra, 14.8.1919, CWMG 16: 29-31.
- Speech at Public Meeting, Rangoon, 9.3.1929, *Young India* (04.04.1929), CWMG 40: 109.
- Extract from Procs. of Federal Structural Committee, 19.11.1931, CWMG 48: 316.
- NOTES, 20.2.1939, 20.2.1939, *Harijan* (25.2.1939), CWMG 68: 431.
- The Great Sentinel, *Young India* (13.10.1921), CWMG 21: 290-91.
- Rabindranath Tagore, Crisis of Civilization, *Collected Works* (1961), Vol.18, Shantiniketan.
- Hand-spun as a Measure of Value, 13.01.1942, CWMG 75: 215-16.
- Interview to P. Ramachandra Rao, before 19.06.1945, CWMG 80: 352.
- Letter to Jal A.D. Naoroji, 04.06.1932, CWMG 50: 14.
- Quoted in 'J.C. Kumarappa: Mahatma Gandhi's Economist', by Mark Lindley (Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, 2007), p. 26.
- Congress Position, 27.1.1948, CWMG 90: 497.
- Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 13, pp.1206-1218 [Draft Constitution], Govt. of Maharashtra. Mumbai, 1994.

A NOTE, August 1947, CWMG 89: 125.

Primary Education in Bombay, *Harijan* (09.10.1937), CWMG 66: 168.

Answers to Questions, 29.11.1945, CWMG 82: 133.

NOTES: English Learning, *Young India* (01.06.1921), CWMG 20: 159.

'Mahatma Gandhi', vol. X: The Last Phase-Pt. II:p.552, by Pyarelal, Navajivan, 1958/1997.

Letter to Valji G. Desai, 19.10.1932, CWMG 51: 260.

'A simple practical trusteeship formula', *Harijan* (25.02.1952).

*An Autobiography*, Part IV, Ch. XVIII, CWMG 39: 239.

Independence, 21.7.1946, *Harijan* (28.07.1946), CWMG 85: 32-33.

## CHAPTER



## GANDHI AND THE ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

*Manohar Lal Sharma*

These days the term 'environment' has become a catchword and we are in the midst of a great debate over the issue of how to protect the environment which is being increasingly threatened by growing pollution and exhaustion of non-renewable resources. Our obsession with a materialistic concept of growth and technological advancement has given rise to serious ecological concerns. Now people are highly concerned about the Greenhouse effect, depletion of the Ozone layer, deforestation, water, air and land pollution, and traffic congestion. These are causing both physical and mental health hazards in all parts of the world. With increasing attention to these environmental and ecological problems, a new -ism is spreading across the world. The UN Conference on Environment in 1972, the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the Global Forum in 1992, the International Forum and the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 clearly show that environment is on the agenda of the international community. People in different parts of the world are trying to be more eco-friendly to save the earth.

In fact, the environment constitutes our existence. Etymologically, the term 'environment' means surroundings. The surroundings may be natural or man-made, and may be physical, chemical or biotic. The environment, thus, is a complex of many things encompassing an organism that interacts not only with other organisms but also among themselves. As a result, it is difficult to isolate or alter any one of them without affecting the other components. The growth behaviour and life of an organism are, therefore, influenced by the environment in which they live.

In a broad sense, the environment constitutes the various physical, mental, social, spiritual, educational, economic, and intellectual aspects of humanity. Air, water and land are, therefore, the basic components

of the environment. But their indiscriminate use poses a serious danger to environmental stability. The necessity to protect and improve environmental stability has recently been recognized by all developed and developing nations.

The natural resources of the earth including air, water, land, and flora and fauna are representative samples of the natural eco-system and must be safeguarded for the benefit of the present and future generations through careful planning and management. The state should take all possible steps to prevent pollution of seas by substances that are liable to create hazards to human health and harm living resources and marine life. Man and his environment must be spared by nuclear weapons and other means of mass destruction.

Gandhi could foresee these issues at the beginning of the twentieth century. He observed: "It is not possible to conceive Gods inhabiting a land which is made hideous by the smoke and the din of mill chimneys and factories and whose roadways are traversed by rushing engines dragging numerous cars crowded with men who know not for the most what they are after . . ." He had unmistakably foreseen this predicament as early as 1909 in his *Hind Swaraj*. Throughout his life he continued to show us the way to avert and steer clear of it through his ideas and experiments based on truth and non-violence. In *Hind Swaraj*, he had characterized modern civilization as a disease and as a nine days' wonder. In 1927, he had predicted that for the civilized West "a time is coming when those, who are in the mad rush today of multiplying their wants . . . will retrace their step and say 'What have we done?'" Barely two weeks before his death in January 1948, he made the prophetic statement: "This modern civilization is such that one has only to be patient, and it will be self-destroyed."

Another serious thinker and writer, Alvin Toffler, in his best-seller *Future Shock* has described the inexorable price we are paying for the degradation of the environment and the mindless application of high technology. He writes:

Our technological powers increase but the side effects and potential hazards also escalate. We risk thermo-pollution of the ocean themselves, overheating them, destroying immeasurable quantities of marine life, perhaps even melting the polar ice

caps. On land we concentrate such large masses of population in such small urban technological islands that we threaten to use up the air's oxygen faster than it can be replaced, conjuring up the possibilities of new Saharas where the cities are now. Through such destruction of natural ecology, we may literally in the words of biologist Barry Commoner be destroying this planet as a suitable place for human habitation.

The major findings of the Global 2000 Report to the President of the United States of America are: "If the present trend continues, the world in 2000 will be more crowded, more polluted, less stable ecologically and more vulnerable to disruption than the world we live in now. Serious stress involving population, resources and environment are clearly visible ahead." The negative growth syndrome has led to rising disillusionment, thickening frustration and mounting fear. It would, therefore, be useful to examine critically global concerns, chiefly pollution and environmental degradation, and see whether and to what extent Gandhi offers an alternative for a peaceful world order.

### People and Their Concern for Environment

Man and environment have always been in interaction. From the ancient Indian scriptures, we get a myriad of examples which show that people used to live in harmony with nature. *Vanaprastha*, the last phase of life in Indian culture, is a change from materialistic to a non-materialistic life and an attempt to adjust to the natural environment.

With increasing attention to environmental and ecological degradation, efforts are being taken to diagnose the causes and find suitable remedies. Several arguments are being advanced especially for developing countries. The major factors are: (i) The population explosion has resulted in the exploitation of resources in an unsustainable manner; (ii) General indifference of the industrial sector on aspects of environmental safety and protection has led to air, water and soil pollution; and (iii) There is low level of environmental literacy.

What is required now is a radical change in our thinking. Any real concern for the environment must bring in profound changes in the role



of human beings to save the eco-system. It requires a philosophical and religious awareness of the oneness of all life and the inter-dependence of multiple manifestations of nature. The philosophy of the survival of the fittest based on competition, struggle, destruction and exploitation of man and nature needs to be replaced by integrative and cooperative principles which should be the essential aspects to organize living systems at all levels. These should be rooted in deep moral and spiritual values.

The solution ultimately lies in what Gandhi had suggested: change in life-styles, reversal in our sense of values which discourages conspicuous and wasteful expenditure, small-scale industries, and a technology that assists and helps the individual and not overpowers him, and that teaches us to live in harmony with nature.

When an interviewer pointed out that the material resources of the west have advanced out of proportion in contrast to its moral resources, Gandhi replied: "That is precisely what the Charkha is intended to do." On another occasion he observed: "I can not only imagine but am working for a civilization in which possession of a car will be considered no merit and railways will find no place. It would not be for me an unhappy event if the world once more became as large as it used to be at one time . . . it is not an attempt to go to the so-called ignorant, dark ages. But it is an attempt to see beauty in voluntary simplicity, poverty and slowness . . . the modern rage for variety, for flying through the air, for multiplicity of wants, etc. has no fascination for me. They deaden the inner being in us."

Gandhi knew the fact that the development of the world was not in the right direction. Therefore, in one of his letters to Nehru, he expressed his fear and suspicion about the future. He said: "I must not fear if the world today is going the wrong way. It may be that India too will go that way and like the proverbial moth burn itself eventually in the flame around which it dances more and more fiercely." Technological society has committed the blunder of plundering the world's resources. It supplies cheap materials for constructing the new industrial society, but has left a huge debt—destroyed and depleted resources to be paid back by later generations.

A new conservationist movement is needed to preserve life itself. In fact, excessive technological growth has created an environment in which life has become physically and mentally unhealthy. Air and noise pollution,

traffic congestion, chemical contamination, radiation hazards and many other sources of physical and psychological stress have become part of everyday life. Human technology is severely damaging and disrupting the ecological process that sustains our natural environment and the very basis of our existence.

Without a holistic approach to development and environment, we have no hope of success or even survival. In this respect, Gandhi pointed out that "the rules of survival are as immutable as the laws of physics. There will be no pardons for us if we fail to obey and respond to the iron imperatives we now recognize and understand; there may not even be anyone to write our obituary." Sustainable development is not a fixed state of harmony, but rather a process of change in which the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional changes are made consistent with future as well as present needs.

### Gandhi's Approach to Human Survival

The findings of Schumacher and a host of other technologists and ecologists have reinforced the basic validity of Gandhi's approach. The problem is within man, not outside him, and so is any solution. And this is precisely what Gandhi emphasized. Human beings will have to realize that a way of life that rapidly depletes the power of earth can only be violent. Man's urgent task is to follow a non-violent way of life. It is a concept that needs to be widened to combat man's dealings with nature.

The development strategies in the majority of the Third World countries are borrowed from the affluent countries, which are based on high technology and capital-intensive industries that lead to resource depletion and lack of social justice. There is, therefore, an urgent need for an alternative model of development, conservation, production, and distribution.

### Conclusion

Today, sustainable development is the need of humanity and it requires taking from nature only as much as it can replenish. It requires voluntary reduction of wants, and decentralization of political and economic power.

It enjoins on man to learn to live in harmony with nature, instead of trying to conquer or dominate it.

The influence of Gandhi on history is without a parallel. His love for humanity and non-violence, his philosophy of Satyagraha, his concept of limiting wants and sustaining nature and natural resources, his plea for decentralization of economic and political power, his concept of self-rule, his emphasis on science and technology with a human face and his belief in the moral evolution of man have continued to influence the thinking and actions of men and women all over the world.

Gandhi advocated a moral society which alone can survive and succeed in the long run. His ideas on environment can assist us in our search for a more livable earth. The Gandhian principle of non-possession asks man to learn to live in harmony with nature and his fellow-beings and even with animals. Gandhi had warned man to stop the thoughtless exploitation of natural resources in the pursuit of his endless quest for greed and material comforts. He did not approve of the Western concept of accumulation of unnecessary material based on mass production leading to a culture of consumption and consumerism which accelerated the process of depletion of natural resources. In fact, containment of wants is relevant and directly connected to natural resources and bio-diversity and the eco-system. He argued that happiness does not depend on riches and worldly comforts but on man's internal satisfaction. He argued: "Nature has enough to satisfy everybody's needs, but not to satisfy anybody's greed." He had already warned us against the craze for machinocracy and blind industrialization where man becomes a cog in the wheel. His approach to appropriate technology with a human face is quite relevant today. To him, science and spirituality must go hand in hand. Science without spirituality would result in disaster and would pose a threat to the world. His message of simple living and high thinking should be followed to protect the environment.

## CHAPTER

# 9

## GANDHISM IN INDIA AFTER GANDHI

*N. Markandan*

### Preamble

We are celebrating 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation. Let us think for a while to what extent we have been following the message of Mahatma Gandhi in our private and public lives. Gandhian institutions like Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, Gandhigram Trust in Dindigul district, Gandhigram Rural Institute-Deemed to be University and Gujarat Vidyapith and Gandhi museums and ashrams are engaged in the promotion of Gandhian philosophy and education, Khadi and Village industries, organic farming and other constructive programmes in rural and urban areas. They are also engaged in conducting seminars and camps for spreading the message of Mahatma Gandhi, building leadership at all levels and publishing Gandhian literature. Of course, these institutions are few in number and have not attracted the attention of the present generation in India to a great extent.

### After Gandhi's Martyrdom

During the freedom struggle, Pandit Nehru enjoyed the wholehearted support of the masses and also a large number of educated people and intellectuals of the Indian society. He also enjoyed the support of the people belonging to all religions and regions of the nation. So, Gandhi declared that Nehru was his political heir. According to Gandhi's wish, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel served as the Deputy Prime Minister. Patel, with his intelligent strategy and firm action, brought the Indian princely states into the fold of the democratic political structure of the nation. Acharya Vinoba Bhave, the spiritual heir of Gandhi, and J.C. Kumarappa, the Gandhian economist, guided the constructive workers who were working

in different parts of the country. Vinoba Bhave, along with Gandhian constructive workers and his Paunar ashramites, travelled all over the country on foot and made an appeal to the landlords and large-scale land owners and collected around fifty lakh acres of land through his Land Gift Movement (Bhoodhaan Movement) and distributed them to the landless poor. Jayaprakash Narayan, a close associate of Nehru during the freedom struggle and later leader of the socialist party, joined the Bhoodhaan movement and played a major role in guiding the workers of the movement.

### **Nehru's Realization**

In the beginning, Nehru followed the Russian model of planning on the basis of the advice given by experts. Establishment of iron and steel industries, construction of huge dams for power generation and development of agriculture were quite essential to build a modern India. But in a huge country like India, centralized planning system did not generate enough employment opportunities and failed to improve the technology of the already existing cottage and village industries. After the first two five-year plans, economic experts like Schumacher suggested that decentralized planning system on the Gandhian line of economic development is ideal for the development of rural and urban areas. Nehru declared in the Parliament: "The benefits of the two five-year plans have not reached the last man. I am looking back at Babu's approach for development."

The functioning of All India Khadi and Village Industries Commission under the chairmanship of the veteran Congress leader and social worker U. N. Dhebarji generated employment opportunities to some extent in rural areas. On the basis of the recommendations given by the committee headed by the then member of the Parliament, Balwanth Rai Mehta, three-tier Panchayat Raj institutions started functioning at village, block and district levels. People's representatives were elected as chairpersons and members of the Gram Panchayats, block and district level Panchayat Samitis. Community development programmes were implemented with the help of people's participation to some extent.

### **After Nehru and Shastri**

After the demise of Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri, after successfully defending the country against Pakistani aggression, tried his best to solve the Kashmir issue through negotiations in a Gandhian way. His sudden death in the middle of his tenure put an end to the active functioning of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission and the Panchayat Raj institutions. In many of the states, elections were not held to the Panchayat Raj institutions. When Rajiv Gandhi was the Prime Minister, he realized the need for strengthening the local self-governments. 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment was brought in by the parliament and grassroots democracies started functioning. There was an effort to put the Gandhian idea of decentralization of political power into practice. But in the long run, grassroots democracies were not allowed to function with reasonable autonomy by the central and state governments.

### **Akhil Bharatiya Sarvodaya Mahasangh**

The Akhil Bharatiya Sarvodaya Mahasangh organised a national workshop on "Poverty Alleviation, Employment Generation and Rural Development" in Bangalore in 2000. After a day-long discussion and deliberations, a standing committee, under the chairmanship of Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, was constituted to prepare the "National Plan of Action". I was one of the members of the standing committee. After receiving our suggestions to solve various problems and issues, S.V. Manjunath arranged for a meeting of the members of the committee. We met twice in Bangalore and prepared the National Plan of Action. On 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2000 the members of the standing committee gathered at Tagore Bhavan at Gandhi Darshan, New Delhi and met A.B. Vajpayee, the then Prime Minister. Our suggestions to protect the forest wealth and promote Khadi and Village industries received his attention.

### **Gandhian Concept of Education**

Gandhi wanted education, particularly at the school level, to be value-based and work-oriented. He wanted the regional languages

to be the medium of instruction and declared that Hindi and English should be taught effectively. He was convinced that learning through the medium of regional languages would help in understanding various subjects and promote original thinking. It would also help students to understand and adopt the good aspects of regional cultures. According to the Gandhian system of education, a student who completes his/her school education must be in a position to become self-employed after a short period of apprenticeship in any one of the trades that he/she wants to engage in. Courses in higher educational institutions must be designed in such a way to help students become self-reliant and attain an all-round development. Gandhi was not in favour of the Government spending large amounts on the functioning of higher educational institutions. He said, "A University will be able to maintain itself through the labour of the students who join it and if it becomes people's institution, the masses also will help on their own accord". The Gandhian model of development is certainly an example to all the nations. His model of education is paradigmatic and will usher in a new society.

## CHAPTER



## AS IF GANDHI HAD FORESEEN TODAY'S GLOBAL HEALTH CRISIS

*Figlio Di Terra*

Albert Einstein, the eminent scientist, had this to say about M.K. Gandhi: "Mahatma Gandhi's life achievement stands unique in political history. He has invented a completely new and human means for the liberation war of an oppressed country . . . The moral influence he had on the consciously thinking human being of the entire civilized world will probably be much more lasting than it seems in our time . . . We may all be happy and grateful that destiny gifted us with such an enlightened contemporary, a role model for the generations to come."

Gandhi continues to stand tall among his contemporaries—a lateral thinker, visionary and foreseer. What solutions would he offer us today, as our world stands at the brink of food and environmental crisis, worsening poverty and deepening nexus between declining human and ecological health? Will he invent a completely novel way of solving the ills of the globe and humanity? Perhaps, he had already foreseen the crisis the world will face in the twenty-first century and had modelled a way of living to address the issues that threaten the very survival of Homo sapiens and the planet earth.

Although the issues of environment were neither in the horizon nor a concern of the public and the governments across the world during his lifetime, he had an uncanny perception of things to come. Ecological crisis, increasing violence, growing poverty and inequality and HIV/AIDS and other chronic diseases are threatening the health of humanity and mother earth.

Does Gandhi have anything to offer at all? Yes and No. No, because he had neither access to computer-simulated programmes to project and predict climate change fifty years ahead, nor would he have imagined that 'war on terror' and 'military campaign' would become common phrases as weather bulletins in print and popular media. But, he must have foreseen things to come, for he lived in harmony with nature, experimented with food and lived life like that of an empirical scientist. He laid bare every

moment of his life for everyone to see, question and understand, and had the humility or audacity to say his “life is his message” with all its shortcomings, achievements and successes. Harmony with oneself and the ecosphere was his *mantra* and he ventured to practise it in his lifetime giving a sense and direction that is relevant even today. The students and Greenpeace activists in Germany were seen carrying placards with Gandhi’s photo and message when they sat on the rail tracks offering non-violent resistance, blocking the train transporting nuclear waste, the act of which speaks for the values Gandhi stood for in the sphere of health and sustainable development.

### Environment and Health Crisis

“Nature has enough to satisfy everybody’s needs, but not to satisfy anybody’s greed.”

Many studies in different parts of the world have shown that tackling environmental issues is very important, as environmental risk factors play a role in more than eighty of the major diseases that afflict the world. Low and middle income countries disproportionately carry the environmental burden of the disease. Drastic climate changes will further increase poverty reduction challenges and the poor and most vulnerable will suffer the most.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that 24% of the global burden of diseases and 23% of all deaths are attributable to environmental factors. Are we at the eleventh hour, incapable of reversing the trend, as the doomsday sayers predict? Is our own ‘carbon-foot’ going to devour humanity and is man the cancer-of-the-earth as castigated by Arnold Toynbee? Global warming, dwindling fresh water source, rising sea level and the recent food crisis are warning bells.

Much before the environment issues were in the forefront, Gandhi modelled a harmonious living, treading the mother earth gently. His ashram was made of recyclable materials and was energy efficient. Vinoba Bhave, his spiritual heir, lived a life of ‘scientific austerity,’ for he calculated the amount of calories he spent on work and consumed only that much of food in a day all through his life. Gandhi’s ashram was self-sufficient, producing most of the things that they consumed, so much so the Gandhian economist, J.C. Kumarappa, coined new terms such as “prosumers” and “mother economy,” when producers themselves became consumers. Kumarappa called the earth-depleting, trade-deficit economies as ‘the monkey economy’ and one wonders

what he will say to the container revolution that forces women and children closeted in sweatshops to produce clothes and shoes for faceless consumers.<sup>2</sup> Clothes, cereals and vegetables are being produced in many of the ashrams established by Gandhi even today. A healthy vegetarian diet, meditation, prayer and ‘bread labour’ are some of the daily activities practised by Gandhi in his times and followed by many even today, consuming less and leading a ‘stress-free earth-sustaining lifestyle’.

Rajendra Pachauri, the UN’s chief climate expert, says that the average meat eater in US produces about 1.5 tons of carbon dioxide more than the vegetarian, corroborated by the *Journal of Physics World*. Pachauri points out that the animals reared for meat emit 21% of all the carbon dioxide that can be attributed to human activities. There is more evidence to come in favor of shunning meat, from the research of geophysicists Gidon Eshel and Pamela Martin from the University of Chicago who had calculated that changing eating habits to become a vegetarian does more to fight global warming than switching from a gas-guzzling SUV to a hybrid-car. “Where did Gandhi get his evidence from when he joined the vegetarian society of London during his student days? Why did he choose to walk or go by train rather than use a car? He was the editor of a journal on vegetarianism while in England and continued to practise, profess and experiment with vegetarian diet using traditional millets all his life. Reverend Keithan, an ardent follower of Gandhi, was convinced that cultivating and consuming rice was overexploitation of mother-earth and, therefore, lived on millet-based diet all his life. Gandhi abhorred violence not only towards fellow human beings but all living beings, including earth.

### Violence—a public health problem

“He was no ordinary leader. There are those who believe he was divinely inspired, and it is difficult not to believe them. He dared to exhort non-violence when the violence of Hiroshima and Nagasaki exploded on us; he exhorted morality when science, technology and capitalist order made it redundant” – Nelson Mandela

Violence is a complex problem rooted in the interaction of many factors—biological, social, cultural, economic and political. An estimated 1.6 million people lost their lives to violence in 2000, of which about half were suicides, one-third homicides and one-fifth were casualties of armed conflict.<sup>3</sup>

The act of 'self-directed violence' is a global public health problem and it is appalling that violence is the leading cause of death among people aged 15-44 years worldwide, accounting for about 14% of the deaths among males and 7% of the deaths among females.<sup>4</sup> There is violence at all levels and it is a threat to human development, health and the very survival of mankind. At the micro-level, child abuse of varying degrees and forms, intimate partner violence and female feticide are causes for concern. Evidence shows that victims of child abuse, domestic and sexual violence have more health problems, significantly higher healthcare costs, and more frequent visits to hospital emergency departments throughout their lives than those without any history of abuse. The growing discontent between the industrial-developers and people displaced of their land and the animosity between different ethnic and religious minorities are disrupting societal harmony and health at the meso-level. Cross-border terrorism and the so called 'war on terrorism' at the macro-level have displaced millions and maimed and killed hundreds of thousands of people. The words of Gandhi "an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind" reflect the stark reality and admonish one and all.

Gandhi's message of non-violence has a global relevance and will continue to do so as long as there is injustice, inequality, violence, greed and hatred in this world. It is for all of us to contemplate whether the 'war on terror' is creating more and more blind people—blind to reason, respect and love of humanity. It is a great tribute that the United Nations has declared 2<sup>nd</sup> October, Gandhi's birthday, as the 'International day of Non-violence'.

"What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans, and the homeless," decries Gandhi, "whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty and democracy?" Having suffered and survived the pangs of destruction and death of many in World War II, did Gandhi foresee the inherently embedded seeds of self-destruction in humanity? Did he sense the fall of one superpower and the rise of the other from the atomic clouds of Hiroshima and Nagasaki? The freedom movement that he spearheaded in India is one of the unique socio-political experiments that extolled the virtues of civil disobedience, and enlightened people's participation and non-violence as a means to end colonialism. He was able to build a healthy relationship and dialogue between the colonized and the oppressor, despite hundreds of years of exploitation, systematic plundering and destruction of culture.

It's no wonder that Gandhi has this to say: "There are many causes that I am prepared to die for but no cause that I am prepared to kill for." If at all

an iota of the strength and conviction of Gandhi on non-violence can impact the current religious and political leaders, so many thousands of people would not have lost their lives and limbs in Iraq, Afghanistan and Kashmir. The three broad categories of violence, namely, self-directed, interpersonal and collective, should be analyzed and understood to establish primary, secondary, tertiary prevention programmes at individual, community and societal levels. Gandhi had deeply reflected on these issues, spoken and written on them extensively and addressed this most crucial, preventable public health problem. He recognized inequity, exploitation, ignorance and marginalization as seeds of violence and affirmed the significance and virtue of non-violence as the instrument of moral power and the means of overcoming and tackling the very roots of violence.

### **Increasing Poverty, Ill-health and Double-burden of Diseases**

"The worst form of violence is poverty, discrimination, and the social exclusion of people."

Poverty and inequality are increasing globally. Despite being the home to the fastest growing economies in the world, the Asia-Pacific region has over 640 million people living in extreme poverty. Out of the 20 countries surveyed, 14 had showed a rise in income inequalities which is the cause of increased morbidity and mortality.<sup>5</sup> In the long run, this would be an impediment for sustainable growth and development of the individual and the society.

Poverty is the number one killer in the world today, outranking smoking as the leading cause of death.<sup>6</sup> Poverty is seen by international developmental agencies as a disease to be eradicated. Gandhi who proposed, advocated and lived all his life in celebration of "voluntary poverty" has a different perspective. The need of the hour is the gradual and consistent reduction in the consumption pattern of G8 countries which are one sixth of the global population but consume nearly 70% of the global energy and bio-reserves. Gandhi, the original thinker he was, focussed on non-income related health and development issues such as women emancipation, education, and better access to health care and placed the agenda of health and development in the forefront of government policy and planning.

The World Development Report by the World Bank defines absolute poverty as a "condition of life so characterized by malnutrition, illiteracy and disease as to be beneath any reasonable definition of human decency".

But when considering health and development, there should be better ways of looking at poverty and ill health, such as access to health services, clean water and sanitation, life expectancy, infant, child and maternal mortality, and literacy levels, as they are inextricably interlinked. Some countries and regions such as China, Sri Lanka (despite the protracted war) and the Indian state of Kerala have achieved levels of life expectancy far above the rich and developing countries, due to high levels of female literacy, fewer income inequalities, government commitment to health education and social security and high levels of public participation in political life.<sup>7</sup>

Unlike Marx, Gandhi was more concerned about reducing rural poverty than industrialization, technology and dialectical materialism. It is increasingly becoming evident that as a result of unplanned, rapid urbanization and lifestyle changes, most of the developing countries are suffering from the 'double-burden of diseases'—the poverty-malnutrition-infection cycle and chronic lifestyle-related disorders such as cancer, cardio-vascular disorders and substance abuse. Environmental and social changes, dietary and lifestyle modification due to industrialization and urbanization are contributing to a significant increase in the incidence of diabetes, hypertension, heart diseases and respiratory illness among both urban and rural poor.<sup>8</sup> Gandhi led many campaigns and movements against tobacco and alcohol consumption, the two major risk factors for mortality and morbidity in developing countries today.

True economics, Gandhi said, stands for social justice as opposed to market-oriented, competition-driven economy. He advocated the welfare of all (*Sarvodaya*), particularly focusing on the most excluded ("Unto this Last") in the community. There is a need to examine in a more holistic way economic and social policies for an inclusive and sustainable development, investing in health and education, strengthening the social safety net and promoting skill development among the disenfranchised. The world, particularly the low income countries, will gain a lot by adopting the Gandhian principles of empowerment and 'production by the masses' rather than setting up special economic zones for 'mass production'. His emphasis on the bottom-up approach and an accountable-governance vis-à-vis the trickle-down approach to economic growth will include the most marginalized in society, preventing discontent and anger among the disadvantaged. The government healthcare system, particularly in low and middle income countries, is skewed towards urban hospitals, (aptly named "disease-palaces" by David Morley, a social pediatrician), disproportionately serving the rich to the neglect of the legitimate health needs of the poor. The most common perception and experience of

the poor people seeking help in government healthcare setting is that the health professionals treat them with disrespect and as passive recipients of substandard treatment.<sup>9</sup> Gandhi fought all his life to stamp out prejudice in the practice of public health and sanitation, particularly caste system that reinforced and chained certain sections of the community to waste collection and disposal of human excreta.

### Social Justice, Sanitation, and Placing Public Health in People's Hands

"I may not be born again, but if it happens I would like to be born in a family of scavengers, so that I may relieve them of the inhuman, unhealthy and hateful practice of carrying night-soil."

What places Gandhi apart from the rest of the world leaders is the emphasis that he placed on inner transformation and means rather than bringing change in the external world sans fundamental change within. He researched different types of toilets and designed them to suit the general public. Much before the research on oral rehydration and infant mortality was out in the realm of public health, he emphasized safe disposal of human waste and public hygiene and practised it in his ashrams. Every year 5.4 billion incidences of diarrhea and 1.6 million deaths among children below five are attributed to contaminated water and poor sanitation. The magnitude of water and sanitation problem is huge, as 1.1 billion people lack access to safe drinking water and 2.6 billion are without adequate sanitation.<sup>10</sup> No one has as passionately advocated the public health practice of "sanitation barrier," as Gandhi.

Gandhi practised what he preached. In Sevagram, the ashram established by him near Nagpur, all the newcomers were first assigned to cleaning the toilets and composting human waste. Only after a few months or even years, will they take up other tasks in the kitchen or the office in the ashram. Both Vinoba Bhave, a Sanskrit scholar and J.C. Kumarappa, an economist trained in the US, were given the task of cleaning up the night soil at the ashram, the true mark and practice of the dignity of labour.

### Holistic Health and Gandhi's Talisman

"I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the

poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to *swaraj* for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and yourself melting away.”

The world has a lot to gain by adopting the Gandhian principles of empowerment and being the agency of the poor and women in public life. His philosophy of “Unto this Last,” the bottom-up and holistic approach to healthcare and accountable governance as opposed to vertical programmes and trickle-down economic policies, was reflected in the ‘Health for All’ movement initiated by WHO in the 70s. Due to lack of political will, time-targetted clear indicators and insufficient fund allocation, the movement failed. Some of the goals of ‘Health for All’ are incorporated in the Millennium Development Goals. It is important to remember Gandhi’s Talisman so that we can achieve health for everyone, including the health of the planet earth.

## References

IPCC 2007

Kumarappa, J.C. Economy of Permanence.

“World Report on Violence and Health,” A Summary Report by WHO, Geneva, 2002

“Injury: A Leading Cause of the Global Burden of Disease.” Geneva, World Health Organization, 1999 (document WHO/HSC/PVI/99.11)

International Day of Non-Violence, 2nd Oct. 2007, statement by UN USG & ESCAP ES

Haines A, Smith R. “Working Together to Reduce Poverty’s Damage.” *BMJ* 1997; 314-529

Sen, A. *Development as Freedom*. Oxford, 1999.

Tanner M, Harpham T. *Urban Health in Developing Countries: Progress and Prospects*

London, 1995.

Narayan D, et al. “Can Anyone Hear Us?” *Voices of the Poor*. Oxford, 2000.

WHO/ UNICEF. 2005.

## CHAPTER

# 11

## RELEVANCE OF MAHATMA GANDHI’S VALUE EDUCATION

G. Pankajam

*“Education means all-round drawing out of the best in child and man—body, mind, and spirit” - Mahatma Gandhi*

Gandhi’s philosophical, religious, economic and social approaches and a number of contemporary Gandhian perspectives on life are relevant to the understanding of human values and social changes. His ideals of truth, non-violence, peace, love, dignity of labour, self-control, and right thinking will motivate people to serve the society. To inculcate this value system, students should be trained to appreciate the doctrines of various religions of the world with a spirit of reverence and tolerance. This cannot happen in the school or college in a specific period of time. Therefore, what is required is lifelong education which helps in bringing out whatever already exists within the individual by the school, family and the community. If education is provided on the basis of values, it will pave the way for the all-round development of the students.

Gandhi’s concept of value education is based on moral and ethical knowledge. Value education is necessary today because the present system of education is lagging behind in contributing to both individual and social development and the welfare of the humanity. Value-oriented education does not mean preaching moral science and precepts and propagating particular religious tenets. It aims at imparting a sound knowledge of values considered essential for the individual as well as the society.



Gandhi realized that education should not only attempt to acquire knowledge but also develop the head, the heart and the hand. He laid emphasis on moral and ethical knowledge, which is helpful for character building and the physical and mental development of students. He firmly believed that without a healthy body the mind could not be developed.

Gandhi believed that it was the duty of teachers to develop sound values and a strong character in their students. According to him, teachers must be able to formulate and follow their own curricula and teaching and learning process. He also believed that education should be locale-specific and life-oriented.

Gandhi underlined craft and vocational education not because of its utility but because of the ideology of dignity of labour that he cherished. He believed that vocational education will promote this ideal among students and enable them to look upon both manual and intellectual work on equal terms throughout life.

Education without character, according to Gandhi, cannot be fruitful. He considered a strong character as the foundation of good citizenship. Therefore, he insisted on character building through value-based education and at the same time called for integrating science and technology into education at all levels, so that an all-round personality could be developed.

Students should prepare themselves for technical knowledge and skill development right from their primary education. People criticized vocational education and argued that this type of education will help only rural people in the promotion of village handicrafts or in the establishment of cottage industries. On the contrary, the ultimate purpose is to make young men and women self-reliant economically so that the problem of unemployment is addressed.

To inculcate values right from childhood, Gandhi introduced farming, spinning and weaving and inter-religious prayers and sanitation from the pre-primary level. *Thakli* (a spinning tool) was

introduced as a play material at the Pre-Basic/Pre-Primary level. It was not only a toy but provided an opportunity for body-mind-hand coordination.

Gandhi's emphasis on craft-centred education has great importance in the Indian scenario. In a populous and poor country like India, craft would make education self-supportive. It would also inculcate a healthy attitude in the students' minds to look upon manual and intellectual work on equal terms. This will usher in a revolutionary change in our work-culture. This mode of education will also establish a close relationship between the teacher and his/her students. In this process, the teacher inculcates the art of living in his/her students.

The irony in the Indian educational system is that it clings to the western model—its centralized, textbook-oriented and employment-driven curriculum. But many Western as well as Eastern communities have adopted many of Gandhi's principles of education. China, in its rural education and commune system, has incorporated many features of Gandhian education to promote a peaceful co-existence. Bangladesh has hundreds of non-governmental organizations delivering "popular education" developed by Paulo Freire that are similar to the teachings of Gandhi. The involvement of the community in providing education is insisted upon so that education becomes need-based.

In the West, there has been a major shift towards teaching and learning in the vernacular following common curricula. Local authorities, schools, teachers, pupils and parents have a say on what is taught and how it is taught. They are particular that education is not considered simply as a ticket for a career. They believe that life itself is learning and learning is lifelong. Gandhi writes, "Man is neither mere intellect, nor the gross animal body, nor the heart or soul alone. A proper and harmonious combination of all three is required for making the whole man and constitutes the true economics of education."

Gandhi underlined sustainable development, eco-friendly environment and a non-exploitative economic system. He insisted on a humane, just and equitable social order. His system of education has great relevance today.

## CHAPTER

## 12

GANDHIAN PARADIGM OF  
SUSTAINABLE RURAL  
DEVELOPMENT

*K. Shivakumar*

Sustainable development means to fulfil “the present needs without compromising the needs of future generations”. Mahatma Gandhi’s life is the best example of sustainable development for the world. In Gandhi’s words, “Nature has enough to satisfy everybody’s needs, but not to satisfy anybody’s greed”.

The world has changed dramatically since Gandhi died. There have been enormous changes in the political, economic and social sectors. However, the moral issues he raised are still relevant and the questions he posed for social, economic, and political justice still hold good and remain of crucial importance.

The prevalent methods of measuring development in terms of economic progress, GDP, industrialization, consumption of energy and urbanization are inadequate to address the miseries of millions in rural areas. Gandhi was aware of the pitfalls of such a theory which resulted in the unequal distribution of wealth between different classes in a society and between the haves and the have-nots. Today science and technology has taken unprecedented strides and yet millions in rural areas and slums live in abject poverty and basic human rights are denied to them. Powerful nations dominate over the powerless and innocent people have become victims of terrorism. It is in this dismal situation that the Gandhian perspective becomes imperative.

At the turn of the century, the UN and the world countries agreed on a number of global goals to be achieved in the new millennium. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) included reduction of poverty and hunger, universal primary education, gender equality and

empowerment of women, reduction in child mortality and improved maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, ensuring environmental sustainability and developing global partnership. These goals declare that every individual has the right to dignity of freedom, equality, and a basic standard of living that includes freedom from hunger and violence.

### From MDGs to SDGs

By 2012, the countries around the world realized that the achievement of MDGs, though good, was not sufficient. They realized that it was necessary to carry them forward in a more sustainable way and this led to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs are more ambitious than the MDGs, for they cover a broad range of inter-connected issues—from economic growth to social issues to global public goods.

The implementation of SDGs requires every country to judiciously prioritize and adapt the goals and targets in accordance with local challenges and the resources available. The SDGs cover social and economic developmental issues including poverty, hunger, health, education, global-warming, gender equality, water, sanitation, energy, urbanization, environment and social justice.

### Gandhi - A Visionary

Gandhi, being a visionary, had these MDGs and SDGs on his priority list long back which included eradication of poverty through strengthening village economy. He believed that sanitation was a science and his ideas on village sanitation ensured clean and disease-free villages where people practise environmental ethics. In short, his principles guide the twenty-first century India.

### Gandhi's Contribution to Sustainable Development

Gandhi's greatest contribution to sustainable development was two-fold. Firstly, his experiments in simple living and high thinking need to be underlined. He believed that with simple living the resources of the planet earth can sustain us and his declaration that the earth provides enough for our needs but not for our greed is apt today. Secondly, he emphasized

inclusive growth and hence his focus on rural development. He gave India its freedom and the world a radical philosophy of non-violence and sustainable living. His teachings and experiments are more valid today than ever before, especially when the world tries to find solutions to global greed, violence and a runaway consumerist lifestyle which have placed a very heavy burden on the world's natural resources.

The views of Gandhi on different aspects of rural development have been gleaned from his writings, speeches and correspondence with his co-workers and the public. The codification of his views on various aspects of rural development is described as the Gandhian approach/philosophy/thought and Gandhian economics even though he himself did not claim any of these for himself.

India today faces a host of complex problems such as poverty, rootless and ruthless growth, futureless growth, pollution, inflation, unemployment, ecological imbalances and the unfavourable balance of trade caused by energy-price spiral. Gunnar Myrdal once said, "If Indian planning has not been more successful than it has actually been, the main explanation is that they have not kept as close as they should to the fundamentals of the teaching of the Father of the Nation."

Some of the ideas of Gandhi are presented in this section to find out to what extent they are relevant to the present-day situation in rural areas. Gandhi did not believe in any definite scheme of economic thought and his economic ideas are spread over a wide range of talks, writings and speeches. He held that economics and ethics cannot be separated from each other. The Gandhian approach contains solution to problems—both immediate and ultimate. According to him, man is the centre of all activities and his well-being is the ultimate goal. Changes in an individual's character precedes social and economic transformation.

According to Gandhi, the Seven Social Sins in life are:

Wealth without Work

Pleasure without Conscience

Knowledge without Character

Commerce without Morality

Science without Humanity

Worship without Sacrifice

Politics without Principles

He conceptualised rural development in its totality, consistent with the Indian situation. He declared: "If the villages perish, India will perish too." He constantly reminded the country that the soul of India lies in her villages and only when the village is awakened and its potentialities actualized, will the country be truly independent and a new era of social, cultural and economic transformation would be ushered in.

Essentially, Gandhi wanted development to be to be centred around villages. He wanted production to be labour-intensive, economy to be self-sufficient based on the principles of *swadeshi*, and administration to be decentralized. His concept of decentralised governance and non-violent non-cooperation are the answers to the politics of opportunism and hypocrisy prevalent today.

### Khadi and Village Industries

In Gandhi's plan, there would not be disguised unemployment in rural areas and hence the problem of migration to urban areas in search of a living would not arise. This was because the surplus labour in the agricultural sector could be absorbed in khadi and small-scale and village industries.

Gandhi considered *khadi* a lead industry. To him, the emphasis on khadi as a means of decentralization was moral as well as material. He recognised *khadi* as the means of decentralisation of production and distribution of the necessities of life and the beginning of economic freedom and equality. It may be noted that he gave a pragmatic turn to the choice of industry for village development accepting the reality that "those who do not see khadi as the centre of village activities . . . are welcome to concentrate their efforts on other industries," because village economy cannot be complete without other essential village industries such as hand-grinding, hand-pounding, soap-making, paper-making, metal-making, tanning, and oil processing.

### Gandhi and Machinery

It is wrong to look at Gandhi as an outright opponent of large-scale industries and machines. What he wanted was that large-scale industries should be established only in those areas of economy where they were absolutely necessary. As early as 1935, he wrote: "The village industry activity will protect any machinery which does not deprive masses opportunity to work, but which helps the individual and adds to his efficiency, I shall not mind villagers plying their implements and tools, with the help of electricity" (*Harijan*). He did not approve the use of machines that replaced people or made them subservient to them. He advocates a judicious use of machines, especially simple and indigenous technology of a non-exploitative nature in tune with non-violence.

He emphasized the importance of whatever could be produced locally (*From Yeravda Mandir*) and thought of a decentralized economy. He propagated the use of the spinning wheel and *khadi* for self-reliance as well as moral and economic regeneration. He believed in the creation of institutional mechanisms like Panchayati Raj, cooperatives and trusteeship for the implementation of rural reconstruction programme

### Trusteeship

Gandhi connects violence with unbridled greed and desire for luxury. He strongly advised people to shed selfishness and be satisfied with the minimum. He firmly believed that unless there is a complete transformation in our economy and our life-style, peace will elude us, however hard we may strive for it. His relentless struggle against inequality and poverty, exploitation and suppression has many lessons for contemporary times. It is important to realize that he is opposed to the concentration of power in any individual system that makes the individual subservient to the material.

To address the exploitation of the poor by the rich leading to class conflicts, he evoked the doctrine of Trusteeship. The rich, after satisfying their basic needs, were advised to use their resources for the benefit of the poor. When they failed to do so, he wanted to resort to *Satyagraha* to

compel them to do so. If such non-violent means failed, he would want the Government to intervene and, if necessary, expropriate the owners. The Trusteeship formula, as it was approved by him, is given below. It provides a means of transforming the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one. It gives no room for capitalism, but gives the present owning class a chance to reform itself. It is based on the faith that human nature is never beyond redemption.

The following are the tenets of Trusteeship:

1. It does not recognise any right of private property or its ownership except when it may be permitted by the society for its welfare.
2. It does not exclude legislative regulation of the ownership and use of wealth.
3. Thus under State-regulated Trusteeship, an individual will not be free to hold or use his wealth for selfish satisfaction, with disregard for the interests of society.
4. Just as it is proposed to fix a decent minimum living wage even so a limit should be fixed for the maximum income that could be allowed to any person. The difference between such minimum and maximum income should be reasonable, and equitable and variable from time to time, so much so that the tendency would be towards the obliteration of any difference.
5. Under the Gandhian economic order, the character of production will be determined by social necessity and not by any personal whim or greed.

Trusteeship aims at realizable outcomes like capital-labour cooperation, formation of social capital, reduction in concentration of economic power in a few hands, and voluntary cutting down of wants. Gandhi visualized an exploitation-free society based on cooperation and ethics. His vision included productive employment for India's millions, schemes for rebuilding villages and creating communities of care and concern, promotion of *khadi* and local handicrafts, production of need-based basic goods, empowering people by imparting basic education and necessary skills to enable them to create decentralized structures of power, and ensuring equality of opportunity for all. He believed that human wants have to be limited and argued that no one should suffer from deprivation and want of basic necessities. And for that, the required means of production

should be socially controlled. His emphasis is on collectivity and not on individual needs and greed. Wealth has to be created collectively and enjoyed collectively.

### Production by the Masses

Gandhi highlighted the role of decentralized production in the countryside, for in a densely populated country like India the problem of higher production and employment could be solved not by "mass production but by production by the masses". He wanted purity of means and ends in the system of planning and implementation. Failure to follow these principles has resulted in corruption in the field of rural development.

In India, agribusiness companies are acquiring land holdings from small and marginal farmers with bigger firms going for production of items such as coffee, tea, sugar, flowers or shrimp for the export market. The agricultural sector, instead of planning to increase domestic production to ensure food security, is focussing on augmenting trade in non-food agricultural commodities. This may seriously affect domestic consumption needs. This kind of negative economic growth is contrary to the right of self-determination which insists that "in no case may people be deprived of their own means of subsistence".

### Self-Sufficient Village Economy

Gandhi's ideal village is based on the philosophy of integrated development of villages. His mission in life was to make villages a "thing of beauty". He said, "An ideal village will be so constructed as to lend itself to perfect sanitation. It will have cottages with sufficient light and ventilation, but of material obtainable within a radius of five miles of it. The cottages will have courtyards enabling the householders to plant vegetables for domestic use and to house their cattle. The village lanes and streets will be free of all avoidable dust. It will have wells according to its needs and these would be accessible to all. It will have houses of worship for all, a common meeting place, common pastures for grazing its cattle, a co-operative dairy, primary and secondary schools in which industrial education will be the central factor and village panchayats for

settling disputes. It will produce its own grains, vegetables, and fruits and its own *khadi*. What is of importance is that Gandhi not only visualized the development of villages but the community as a whole—"a theory of inter-dependence and co-existence" which would lead to overall growth and development.

## Globalization and Gandhi

Globalization is the process of integrating the various economies of the world to allow the flow of goods and services, technologies, capital and human labour. India stepped into the era of globalization with the introduction of economic reforms in 1991. However, the benefits are yet to reach the majority, namely, the economically deprived sections and the rural poor. The Human Development Index reveals that India was ranked 124<sup>th</sup> in 2001, 126<sup>th</sup> in 2006, 134<sup>th</sup> in 2011 and 131<sup>st</sup> in 2016. It is observed that globalization brought polarization in the Indian society and failed to solve socio-economic problems.

Globalization has negative effects like destruction of domestic industries and resource depletion. The Gandhian approach to sustainable development seems to be the appropriate alternative to face the challenges caused by globalization. Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their needs. It is based on the efficient use of local resources, local workforce and conservation of resources, and economic and social equity. Hence, Gandhi laid emphasis on micro-level regional planning.

## Greatest Good of All

Gandhi draws our attention to the need to protect the environment and guard against the abuse of natural resources. Our mindless destruction of natural wealth is alarming. Mighty projects, big dams, giant industries and other massive ventures raise questions about the quality of life of the local people who have been badly affected.

The quest for the mirage of material development often leads to the destruction of forests, ecological imbalances, water scarcity, soil erosion,

silting of rivers and desertification which pose grave dangers to the environment. Gandhi encourages us to rethink the development model of putting too much stress on economic prosperity. He does not believe in the survival of the fittest, but believed in the survival of all and the greatest good of all. His talisman is of great value: "Whenever you are in doubt . . . apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him."

## Fundamentals of Gandhian Planning

A planning model based on Gandhian ideology has been formulated by B.P. Pandey (1988) which is given below:

1. **Simplicity and Limited Wants:** Gandhi was of the opinion that multiplicity of wants is the glaring vice of the modern materialistic civilization. Economic and social policies should be in consonance with the needs of millions who fall below the poverty line.
2. **Trusteeship:** Limiting wants can pave the way for a change of heart of those who own the means of production. Trusteeship allows the right to private property as a means of production as long as it is responsive to the needs of the community.
3. **Appropriate Technology:** 'Appropriateness' is used to designate the production function that maximises human needs satisfaction. No technology should be used which economises manual labour while there are unemployed workers in the community.
4. **Non-possession:** This concept is related to the minimization of wants. Everybody has a right to the basic necessities of life. The idea of non-possession can be propagated and practised through a social movement.
5. **Bread Labour:** Gandhi was of the opinion that everybody should labour to earn his bread. He remarked that he who eats without doing physical labour eats stolen bread. If all work for their bread, distinctions of rank would be removed. The world would become happier, healthier, and more peaceful if everyone takes to productive labour. Therefore, no man, including scientists and poets, ought to be free from the obligation of physical labour.

6. **Cooperation:** Gandhi was not a believer in competition which generates fear and insecurity, which, in turn, breed greed and violence. Cooperation, on the other hand, appeals to the human element of the need to serve one another.
7. **Equality:** To Gandhi, equality meant primarily two issues: Everybody has a basic right to live and so his essential needs should be fulfilled; and there should be no exploitation.
8. **Reforming Economic System:** Gandhi wanted the destruction of capitalism but only through non-violent means. He wanted to transform capitalism into communitarian socialism through the trusteeship model. He wanted a peaceful communitarian socialism rather than the Marxist path of class war and violent revolution.
9. **Decentralised Economy:** Gandhi rejects the power structure of the west as it would lead to centralisation of power, exploitation of the weak, denial of individual freedom and moral degradation. Secondly, he underlined the Panchayati Raj model. The success of political decentralisation, in his view, depends upon economic decentralisation.

Gandhi's concept of democratic decentralisation bears the stamp of his passionate belief in non-violence, truth and individual freedom. He calls it Panchayati Raj or village *swaraj*. His *khadi* implies a fundamental principle of self-sufficiency. Through decentralisation he wants to inject a new vitality and blood in the atrophied limbs of the body of the society. Decentralization is required at all levels, namely, production, planning, decision-making and administration. The concepts of truth and non-violence and *swadeshi* will mark any decentralised set-up.

## CHAPTER

## 13

RELEVANCE OF GANDHI IN  
TODAY'S ECONOMIC SCENARIO

M.P. Gurusamy

Mahatma Gandhi was a great social and economic revolutionary. He understood the problems of modern India and tried his best to solve them and wanted to create a new society, namely, Sarvodaya. Though he lived in the twentieth century, his economic ideas are relevant to the twenty-first century India which has not resolved the problems of the last century but has only multiplied them.

Before independence, Indian economy was called an 'underdeveloped economy'. After independence, due to the government's concerted efforts such as the five-year plans and community development, our economy reached the stage of 'developing economy'. Now our leaders are telling us that we have come to the stage of 'developed economy' and that we will soon become a great world power.

We are consciously following the principles of urbanization, industrialization, centralization, commercialization and westernisation. The result is the growth of very big cities with all modern amenities, a vast road and rail network, communication and banking facilities, mushrooming of educational institutions with a commercial outlook and widespread technological growth in communication. The growth in our national income and per capita income is better than what it was earlier. These are the bright features of our economy. But there is a dark side to our economy. It consists of problems which threaten us. They are poverty, unemployment, the widening gap between the rich and the poor, exploitation, corruption, black money and the ever-increasing public debt. Unless we address these issues, it is not possible to have growth with sustainable development.

In the present economic scenario, we think of Gandhian economic principles. According to J.C. Kumarappa, Gandhian economics stands on two principles: Truth and Non-violence. Its aim is to build economic

systems on a permanent footing. So it has both short- and long-term goals concerning the growth of the Indian economy. We shall consider some of Kumarappa's views and discuss how they are suitable for modern India.

Villages form the basis of our economy. In spite of all our efforts aimed at urbanization, nearly 65% of our population lives in rural areas. Gandhi rightly observed: "India lives in her villages. If villages develop, India will develop." Our village economy is based on agriculture, animal husbandry, rural industries, handicrafts and utilization of local resources.

Urban development and a fast-growing money economy have weakened the basic structures of the rural economy. This process was consciously initiated during the British rule and continued in independent India in the name of development. Cities were developed at the cost of villages. Industrialization and development required cheap labour which was supplied by the rural sector and the net result is the stagnation of village economy.

According to Gandhi, rural economy has to be strengthened. It should start with agriculture. He pointed out that land should be owned by the cultivator. In independent India, the first step we took in this direction was the enactment of the Land Ceiling Act. But due to various reasons, the Act was not fully implemented. Vinoba Bhave started his revolutionary Bhoodan movement but it could not be sustained. As a result, land has become a valuable property for the urban rich to invest their black money. This is a major blow to the agricultural sector. So steps have to be taken to prevent the sale of land to the rich and empower the farmers so that they own the land they cultivate.

Farmers have to be provided with necessary water facilities. If wells, tanks and canals are properly desilted and rain water is harvested, there would be prosperity. The Panchayat system has to be revived for the development of villages. Another major issue concerning the rural sector is credit and marketing facilities to farmers. Gandhi wanted to have cooperative societies in villages. Commercial banks help urbanization and industrialization but not villages.

Our educational system, especially engineering and technology education, has helped in the establishment of large-scale industries. This system has to be modified. Education, needed for the development of the rural sector has to be encouraged and developed. Rural industries and

crafts have to be revived and rural artisans with rare skills in producing art and musical instruments have to be protected.

One of the basic principles of Gandhian economics and rural economy is decentralization. By decentralization, we mean using the available raw materials to produce consumer goods which the local people need. It is based on the principle of self-sufficiency. When we develop industries on the principles of decentralization and self-sufficiency, the human resources available in every area will be used productively. Marketing will focus on surplus commodities and we will export only surplus commodities and import what is needed to develop our economy.

Gandhi was not totally against mechanization. He was against mechanization and large-scale industries which created unemployment. He is for labour-intensive industries. But he wanted iron and steel industries which manufacture tools and machines to be owned by the nation and not by the private sector.

Modern society, in the name of civilization, discourages physical labour. Kumarappa emphasizes the need and dignity of manual labour. According to him, the basic nature and structure of our body is to work. When we use our body productively and creatively, the health and spirit of the body is maintained and it develops our personality. Gandhi called it bread labour. When we give importance to manual labour, nature will be protected. Nature gives us whatever we need and will be friendly to us as long as we protect it. But when we start destroying it, its fury will be intolerable.

One of the major economic problems in India is consumerism. Many factors such as extension of marketing and credit facilities patronize consumerism. Most people spend more than what they earn. As a result, many are in debt. In other words, they are already consuming their future income and it is not good both for the individual and the society. According to Gandhi, simplicity in life is the alternative to consumerism. You consume whatever is needed for your body and engage with your work in a productive manner.

We live in a capitalist system which has many evils such as widening inequality, threatening poverty, ever-growing black money and accumulation of unearned wealth. Gandhi was against this type of capitalism. According to him, the Seven Social Sins of modern society are:



Wealth without Work  
 Pleasure without Conscience  
 Knowledge without Character  
 Commerce without Morality  
 Science without Humanity  
 Worship without Sacrifice  
 Politics without Principles

He formulated certain principles to address the issue of accumulation of wealth. He spoke about the principle of economic sharing and called it the doctrine of Trusteeship. According to this doctrine, the owners of property and capital should consider themselves trustees and use their wealth for their basic needs and the surplus has to be distributed among the needy. Gandhi warned that unless they become trustees, there would be a bloody revolution. Vinoba Bhave went a step further and formulated the principle of gift (Dhan). According to him, God has created every man with some surplus resource and this should be shared with the poor. He talked about five types of gifts.

- One who has a lot of labour power may work for the needy. This is called the Gift of Labour (Shram Dhan).
- One who has a lot of income may give the surplus income to the needy. This is called the Gift of Income (Sampath Dhan).
- One who has accumulated knowledge may share his knowledge with the society. This is called the Gift of Knowledge (Buddhi Dhan).
- One who has a lot of land may distribute the surplus land to the poor. This is called the Gift of Land (Bhoodan).
- One may give his entire life for the society. This is called Jeevan Dhan and this is the supreme gift.

Gandhi looked at life as an integrated whole and enunciated principles for the welfare of the entire society. He did not address social, economic, political and religious issues separately. Sarvodaya stands for the welfare of all based on the principles of Truth and Non-violence. During the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, we shall try to understand his life and philosophy and follow it as far as possible.

## CHAPTER

## 14

## SPINNING WHEEL AS A 'DEAR FORGOTTEN FRIEND OF WIDOWS

Sadan Jha

*'Old woman's spinning wheel came into action, children are alarmed' –  
 a Maithili folk saying.<sup>1</sup>*

*'Every widow I have met has recognised in the wheel a dear forgotten friend. Its restoration alone can fill the millions of hungry mouths'  
 (Mahatma Gandhi, 1921).<sup>2</sup>*

## Introduction

Symbols and icons travel in history. Along with them travel their meanings, imageries and myths, making the relationship between representation and the subject of representation porous, fluid and dynamic. In this essay, I would like to restrict my focus on the symbol, the spinning wheel. In this way, I would be mobilising the history of Gandhian nationalism to write about this Gandhian symbol. Thus, the challenge is to trace the history of this symbol.

The attempt is to write a history of the spinning wheel with reference to strategies of gender politics that go into the construction of this semiotic space, and not to aspire for merely another analysis of Gandhian-politics. This essay is a reading of gender stereotypes that developed around the symbol, spinning wheel (*charkha*), by shifting the point of view away from what Gandhi said to how Gandhian ideologies and symbols were perceived.

In the above-mentioned folk saying, the body of old women is placed in opposition to the body of the new generation (children). In fact, on second thoughts, a reading of this couplet seems to reveal three and not merely two sets of oppositional locations: old woman, new generation and these two sites are mediated by the presence of a third body—the

site of the spinning wheel. It is the emergence of the spinning wheel into action that puts two different generations in opposition to each other. The couplet intends to suggest that the old woman is back at work and so do not fiddle with her. Here the space of the spinning wheel is central to the environment of the old woman. It is this wheel that defines her activity.

Invert these oppositional sets and we come face to face with a different layer of relationship among agencies of this narrative. Two generations are actually communicating/connected to each other through the action of the spinning wheel. It is actually the body of the spinning wheel that allows the gestural dialogue across generations possible. The body of the spinning wheel is bridging this generational gap.

There must be various other reading possibilities with this couplet. My reading points to merely two sets of interpretations of the spinning wheel as a site, a body. First, the spinning wheel acts as a carrier of certain action and works as a linkage between two bodies/generations/narrative positions. Secondly, the spinning wheel acts as a contested site in itself – a site where the drama of opposition is performed. A site where both an old woman and children are making their own claims. Old woman through her action, as the spinning wheel belongs to her space and she enjoys the right to put it in motion. On the other hand, without considering the effect produced by this action (of the wheel), the meaning of the couplet remains incapable of generating any communities of responses. It is the effect that defines the significance of the spinning wheel. Children got alarmed – some kind of order is restored (the very mention of the fact that children are alarmed presupposes a state of affairs where children are playful and in some kind of a situation of orderless-ness). Thus, it is the body of the children and their awareness about the active spinning wheel that completes the narrative process; hence this body owns a legitimate say over the body of the spinning wheel. The bodies of the (aged) woman, young generation, and the spinning wheel all participate in the textual celebration of this couplet. However, the contestation goes on.

This reading of erasures of a popular Gandhian symbol, spinning wheel (*charkha*), not only helps us to understand the different layers of the politics of disjuncture which operates at different levels, making us more critical of the dominant interpretations of this textual field (in this case Gandhian discourse), but in the trace of its traces we also come to know different erased memories of this symbol with enough potential to

alter our reading of Gandhism. Long back, these memories were worked out and included in Gandhian politics. However, these traces ('everyday' use) of the symbol remained active outside the domain of Gandhian ideological framework and constantly redefined this framework itself.

### Spinning Wheel

*"For me," Mahatma Gandhi once wrote, "nothing in the political world is more important than the spinning wheel".<sup>3</sup>*

The spinning wheel (*charkha*), for Gandhi, was not just a tool of political emancipation but it was a metaphor of 'ancient work ethics' and a symbol of economic and social reaction to the British rule. This 'ancient work ethics' and the goal of *swaraj* (self-rule) in Gandhian framework had to be mediated in and through the 'daily life'. For him, 'it is in the daily life that dharma and practicality come together' and the spinning wheel was the realisation of this possibility. Thus any study of Gandhism needs to bring into focus this metaphor of 'ancient work ethics,' this site of 'daily life' and this symbol of social and economic reaction.

In Gandhian discourse, the spinning wheel signifies 'decentralisation against centralised production,' 'the sole remedy' for the dwindling handloom industry in particular and India's traditional sector in general, a weapon for stopping the import of foreign goods, the only solution for hidden-mass unemployment of rural population and last but not least 'a dear forgotten friend of Indian widow'. The significance of the spinning wheel can be seen in Gandhi's insistence that "India as a nation can live and die only for the spinning wheel."<sup>4</sup> However, away from what Gandhi believed and wanted people to believe it is equally significant to analyse the ways in which images of this popular symbol, spinning wheel, and Gandhian *swaraj* acquired various shapes in the domain of political culture and construct 'communities of responses'. These communities are varied and made up of perceptions, practices and myths that developed in the domain of 'people' over the years.

### Gender Constructs and Gandhi's Unique Position

Historians of Gandhian studies have informed us that strategies of gender function in quite unusual ways in Gandhian discourse. It is this specificity of Gandhian position, which has remained a motivational force

for scholars to delve deep into the gender dynamics from a Gandhian perspective. Madhu Kishwar writes:

Gandhiji's responses to women are important for an understanding of his general social view on women not only because he more than any other leader tried to live his personal life publicly, but also because many of his experiments which most people consider eccentricities and obsessions are inextricably linked to his vision of new types of relationships between men and women. He is also important for feminist scholars because, unlike 19<sup>th</sup> century social-religious reformers, Mahatma Gandhi did not view women as an object of reform, he saw them as active subjects.

In the language of Kishwar, "Gandhi's Sita' was no helpless creature".<sup>5</sup>

In psychoanalytical treatments, the unique position of Gandhi lies in the manner in which he inverted western notions of sexuality and other socio-psychological codes. He, in his attitude and political stands, always aspired to be a woman instead of man. Ashish Nandy argues that as a typical representative of the Indian psyche, Gandhi "had always feared womanhood and either abnegated femininity or defensively glorified it out of all proportion."<sup>6</sup> He writes further, "Gandhi attacked the structure of sexual dominance as a homologue of both the colonial situation and the traditional social stratification. Gandhi was trying to fight colonialism by fighting the psychological equation which a patriarchy makes between masculinity and aggressive social dominance and between femininity and subjugation".<sup>7</sup> In other words, defiant subject-hood and passive resistance to violence—militant non-violence, as Erick Erickson calls it—became in the Gandhian world-view an indicator of moral accomplishment and superiority, in the subjects as well as in the more sensitive rulers who yielded to non-violence. Honour, he asserted, universally lay with the victims and not the aggressors.<sup>8</sup>

By and large it seems that there is a general agreement among scholars that an understanding of Gandhi's concepts of gender cannot be properly and adequately acquired from borrowed paradigms of first world gender discourses. This is also because Gandhi openly and vehemently denied his own masculine image. He aspired for those images and attributes which are commonly attached with feminine identity.

This position of Gandhi was quite in tune with the Indian notion of *ardhনারিস্বর* in which male and female are not two separate bodies/categories but both are, in fact, one single body. Both femininity and masculinity coexist in a single body (in Samkhya philosophy the duality has been explained in terms of *purush* and *prakriti*). Gandhi always aspired for the feminine self both in his body and in his politics. This yearning for womanhood disturbs the modernist discourse of gender in which the male position is always hailed as a superior status.

However, at the level of scholarly treatment, it appears to me that the 'Mahatmaship of Gandhiji' has hegemonised readings of gender politics in Gandhian discourse. This means that a superior position of Gandhi has been taken for granted while discussing gender politics in this discourse. This is also due to the fact that almost all recent studies on gender relationship in Gandhian discourse have been written from the Gandhian point of view only.<sup>9</sup> These writings have either used Gandhi as a reference point or scholars have used one or another aspect of Gandhian philosophy regarding women as entry point(s) into the discourse of popular culture of the colonial period. The notion of celibacy is one such case. Exploring the relationship between celibacy, sexuality and nationalism, Joseph S Alter writes, "Gandhi's mass appeal was partly effected on a visceral level at which many Hindu men were able to fully appreciate the logic of celibacy as a means to psychological security, self-employment and national reform . . . The nationalism which emerges out of this discourse is of an oblique and somewhat utopian sort . . . Scholars have pointed out that Gandhian treatment of male-female relationship led to the construction of an androgynous politics. The notion that one could become powerful by dominating others – sexually or physically – was anathema to Gandhi."<sup>10</sup>

At another popular level, scholars have always seen Gandhi and his concern for women's cause either from a contemporary feminist or gender point of view, or they have sought a kind of remedy for contemporary gender-social problems in Gandhian discourse. Both these treatments have helped in the construction of other gender stereotypes. What is missing in these studies is the scope of posing the simple question: How did these Gandhian notions themselves act as locations of the struggle for domination and resistance? Thus what matters is not the question of: How did he visualise male, female relationship but also how was he being perceived and how did his ideas regarding gender relationships take shape in the domain of popular culture?

One of my tasks is to explore how gender stereotypes developed in discourses on the spinning wheel and how popular culture was partially read and acted upon. Gender appears no more as a pre-category in identity construction; rather it appears as a form of power, a kind of strategy, channel for the construction and reconstruction of political claims and political categories themselves. Thus the study of representations and images appear to be crucial in understanding the networks of power operating simultaneously at various locations in this textual field. I have also tried to raise the most obvious looking question: How did women, who were day-to-day practitioners of Gandhism, perceive this Gandhian symbol?

### The Context

In peasant societies of India, spinning was primarily a woman's job, while weaving was done by the male. But one finds a reversal of these roles in tribal societies. In tribal societies, male members take up spinning while women weave the threads into cloth. This work division along gender lines is both an outcome as well as a defining agency (producing its own cultural stereotypes) of the culture that produces this narrative.

Recent works have shown that weaving, weaver's looms or the weaving techniques are not merely modes of cloth production. Roy Dilley in his study of Tukolor loom of Senegal has shown the interplay of myths, traditional beliefs and rituals at work in the weaving space and the weaver's loom.<sup>11</sup> In the Indian context, Deepak Mehta in his study of the community of Muslim weavers of Barabanki, Uttar Pradesh points out that 'the technique of making cloth and quilts is constituted within a semiotic system.'<sup>12</sup> He explores the body of the weaver as the site where both verbal and non-verbal actions are embodied and disembodied. On the other hand, Katherine S Marsh in her study of Tamang culture of Nepal compares the cultural act of weaving to that of writing.<sup>13</sup> She tells us that "these two acts are gender symbols not only because they tell the Tamang about the separate roles of sexes, but also because they are about what transpires between the sexes as each defines the other. Two opposing conceptions of the world emerge as Tamang men and women view one another".<sup>14</sup>

These studies have helped me to see the space of the spinning wheel not just as a political symbol but essentially as a cultural representational arena, which has been utilised and reworked along political, national and gender lines. The act of political recodification of the spinning wheel by Gandhi did not wash out its cultural meanings; rather this act of political (re)codification and appropriation in a way expanded and enhanced its cultural value. Deriving its life spirit from the culture of the land, the processes of assigning specific political meanings into an ordinary everyday metaphor of Indian life had a close dialogue with its earlier contextual sites at every level throughout the period of anti-colonial movement. Thus, the people, culture and narratives of traditions acted both as sources and fields of Gandhian discourse. These sources and fields retained the legacies of dominant gender constructs of their old cultural contexts even when they underwent various processes of recodification after entering into the Gandhian discourse.<sup>15</sup>

In order to understand the politics of recodification, it is necessary to look briefly into the historical context in which the spinning wheel, weaving and the whole semiotic field around cloth entered the nationalist discourse. This context was highlighted by the Swadeshi movement of 1905-07. Colonialism and its impact on the yarn sector, the vulnerable position of the weaver (with the dependence on imported fabric) and search for popular symbols to resist exploitative colonial structures are a few subtexts where economic historians have debated fiercely. The *Amrit Bazaar Patrika*, a leading voice of the time, wrote in an editorial of November 1, 1907: "We have urged to spin our own thread, so long we cannot honestly say that we have abjured foreign cotton fabrics. And the charkha (spinning wheel) is the best means for helping in this manner . . . If every householder makes the thread required for clothing his family, then we can be independent of Manchester without practically any effort on our part".<sup>16</sup> Sumit Sarkar pointed out that during the swadeshi movement, propagation of the *charkha* bore little fruit at the popular front. It had to wait for the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi in Indian politics.

Popular singers, actors and preachers made strenuous efforts to reverse the stereotype that the country cloth was rough and homely while the British clothes were fine and pure, directing their message to women in particular. At the same time, the homeliness and loose, thick weave of village cloth were lauded for their naturalness, purity and lack of

sophistication. The village songs of the 1905-10 period associated country cloth with images of motherhood, with thick white rice and curd and with good things of unpolluted countryside.<sup>17</sup>

After the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi, the *charkha* made a radical difference in terms of the attitude of the common folk regarding their own lives and well-being. This difference can be seen in the issue of migration and its social responses in folklore. Citing the example of migration, Gyan Pandey has written that in the pre-colonial period, mass migration was an emergency remedy in situations of crisis and it was a weapon of protest against the tyranny of the local landowners. But, in the latter decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the wholesale migration of a community to escape from oppression and a collective act of protest had been transformed into an individual act of desperation.<sup>18</sup> The folklore of the Bhojpuri region captures some of the hopes and travails that arose out of this transformation.

‘Poorabkedeshwa men kaileenokariatekaresonwankerojigarjaniah’  
(One who gets a job in the east can fill his house with gold)<sup>19</sup>

This folksong is not just a statement of the shift of occupation (from agriculture or weaving to petty jobs and wage labour) but is also a narrative of protest. One can see an element of contrast between this narrative of protest and the following narrative of appeal which has been composed around the *charkha*. In one of the Bhojpuri *gramgeet*, women sing:

‘ab ham katabicharakhabapiyamati jahubideshwa. Ham katabi  
*charkha sajantuhujaabmili ahi se surajabaa, piyamati . . .*’<sup>20</sup>

(‘Now I shall ply the charkha O dear, please don’t go to alien lands O dear, ‘

I shall ply charkha and we shall attain swaraj, O dear don’t go . . . ’)

Both these narratives resist the dislocations caused by colonialism but in the *charkha-geet* it has been claimed that the act of spinning can reverse the process of dislocation. Thus while the hidden aspect of the text attacks colonialism and its evil effects, the overt text conveys hopes of a golden future.

In another folk song, the appeal acquires more confidence and we hear the talk of turning the world upside down with the spinning wheel:

‘sakhi sab mili charkha chalabahu jug paltabahu he’<sup>21</sup>

(‘O dear friends! ply the spinning wheel and turn the world upside down’)

The reference is too innocent, almost mythical, creating highly non-authoritarian appeals about the power of the spinning wheel. The mythical hope, playfulness associated with the ideal golden future and the rhythmic, lyrical optimism emanating from the humming of the spinning wheel in this maithili/bhojpuri folk song not just widened the field of play for Gandhian politics but had a tendency to politicise even the most mundane moments of everyday life (of womenfolk in particular).

### Challenging Colonial Myths, Creating New Mythology

Partha Chatterjee writes, “In its specific historical effectivity, Gandhism provided for the first time in Indian politics an ideological basis for including the whole people within the political nation. In order to do this, it quite consciously sought to bridge even the most sanctified cultural barriers that divided the people in an immensely complex agrarian society.”<sup>22</sup>

Various new metaphors were added to the spinning wheel to colonise the day-to-day lives of Indians. This language revolved around Gandhi’s notion of *swaraj* and he placed the spinning wheel at the centre of it. For example, he once called Darbhanga, a town in north Bihar, a ‘modern pilgrimage centre’ because it was one of the major centres for khadi production.<sup>23</sup> Gandhi linked *khadi* with religious ethics and sentiment. He often tried to legitimise his programme or notions of *khadi* by making the material stand for piety or spirituality. These acts of recodification not only extended the field of power but also redefined the field of politics itself.

Gandhi discarded the notion of politics as a distinct category both at the level of ideology and action. The other side of this rhetorical refusal of politics (when he brought together politics and religion) was the impulse to invest politics everywhere. He believed that politics does not take place in a defined sphere; it tends to invade everyday life instead.

A particular gendered positioning of the spinning wheel that we commonsensically find in Gandhian treatment of the spinning wheel is also because of the fact that Gandhi’s wheel was primarily taken from peasant

cosmology. It appears that the Gandhian model of cloth production, in which women are assigned the job of hand spinning and men are weavers, was based on the peasant version of cloth production. Gandhi popularised this peasant (dominant) version of cloth culture and as a result, various gender-cultural stereotypes emerged in which spinning was primarily recognised as women's concern.

Having said this, one must also remember that for Gandhi, spinning was important equally for both men and women and he advocated the utility of spinning without acknowledging any difference along gender line.<sup>24</sup> Yet, the way in which women subjects were assigned privileged positions in the political vocabulary developed around the spinning wheel tells its own story. This is a story where a close association between the female body and the body of the spinning wheel is both established and targeted.

Looked at from another vantage point and at a different textual location, the following folksong shows how *khadi* worked as a carrier of Gandhian ideology, how Gandhian gender norms were internalised by rural women, and the manner in which various communities of responses associated with social sexual positions came into play in the conflict between the private and the public:

I will not wear foreign cloth, the words of my darling call out.

I will fight rather than give in

Because wearing such thin cloth in the Ganges to bathe when I am wet in the Ganges, my body will show shamefully.<sup>25</sup>

"This song, sung in Maithili in north Bihar and in Magahi in south Bihar, represents a man hearing the words of his sweetheart. Strikingly, however, the song was sung by women spinning or marching at cloth stores – it characterised a gender inversion of women singing the part of men and joining men in the movement"<sup>27,26</sup> However, when put in the proper cultural context this narrative reveals another layer of politics. The metaphorical and cultural contexts referred to in this folksong are that of bathing in the open, bathing in the Ganges. In order to understand the politics of this specific folk song and images of Gandhian philosophy inbuilt into it, let me briefly discuss the cultural contexts that shape circles of meanings around this folksong.

The concept of 'Ganga-snaan' (sacred dip in holy Ganga) is a popular and easily affordable pilgrimage for almost all sections of 'maithil' (those who live in the region of Mithila) people. It is recognised as a sacred bathing of very high esteem in the religious culture of that region. However, there are various popular perceptions of this 'Ganga-bathing'. This pilgrimage, like others, has been viewed as an occasion when women 'enjoy open air'. Thus the practice itself has been recognised as a grave threat to the dominant gender codes, especially codes related with the domestication of female subjects.

### Weakness as Strength: Inversion of Codes

In Gandhian narratives in general, the thickness of cloth has been hailed as a positive aspect while fineness has been denounced. Although Gandhi recognised the richness of the Indian weaving tradition, he never used this point as a weapon of his attack on colonialism. In fact, he developed his strategy to counter the power of colonialism precisely around those sites which were criticised and held inferior positions in colonial meta-narratives. He countered fineness with thickness. This reversal of value system is significant in a culture which has a long and popular history of the production of fine quality yarns and cloths.

Fineness was the hallmark of pre-colonial Indian cloth. Thickness displaced the space occupied by fineness and sophistication in the value system of cloth and dressing. As has been shown earlier in the reading of Gandhian folksong, we find that what is also crucial here is that this nationalist position/desire for thickness simultaneously caters to the interests of the dominant gender.

### The Charkha as a Shelter from Patriarchal Tyranny

Gandhi himself never advocated any kind of work division along gender lines but *khadi* production, in fact, distinguished the kind of work performed by men and women (this reading is particularly based in the north Indian context). Women workers were assigned the production task and thus pushed into the inner sphere while male volunteers were given marketing and other jobs dealing with the public. However, a crucial outcome of the *khadi* movement was that ashrams acted as shelters for

those courageous women who wanted to escape from the tyranny of patriarchal social structures and norms. The spinning wheel, which symbolised the *khadi* movement, very soon became a symbol of self-employment, abolition of *pardah* and other oppressive social traditions. But the more popular the movement became, the more it provided new outlets for rural women with other political agendas.

Janaki Devi of Madhubani district of Bihar joined the movement to avoid a dreaded marriage.<sup>27</sup> Sita Devi of the same place joined the anti-*pardah* movement and then the *khadi* movement because as a young widow she saw these political alternatives as a means of economic independence from her in-laws' household.<sup>28</sup> Women who did not want to marry or who could not marry found refuge in these ashrams.

*Khadi bhandars* marked a definite transition from 'social to political' as we conventionally use these concepts ('politics' has been used here as something pertaining to the state). *Khadi bhandars* were hailed not only as 'social' and thus an 'apolitical' space in the Gandhian discourse, but also as a place of recruitment of volunteers in the fight against colonialism and for the attainment of *swaraj*. On the other hand in dominant social perceptions, these *bhandars* were seen primarily as a threat to the social moral order and thus constituted a corrupt political location. This reading of social resistance and women's imagination/resistance in and around *khadi bhandar* provides scope for further inquiry on the dynamics of body politic that developed around Gandhi ashrams and *khadi bhandars*.

Wendy Singer has noted that gender also influenced the age at which political activism was acceptable. Most women did not join politics until they were married or when their children were old enough to be left at home. Therefore, while teenage boys began wearing *khadi* and congregated at *khadi* centres, women did not begin their political work until they were at least in their 20s and often not until they were old enough to leave the daughter-in-law to manage the household.<sup>29</sup>

In the male public sphere, Gandhi ashrams were often perceived as places where social-sexual norms were frequently violated. Women at work were exposed to male gaze. On the one hand the division of work was along gender lines. Women were generally given inside jobs, i.e. production tasks, while jobs which demanded direct contact with outsiders were assigned to only males. On the other hand, this politics seems to lose its weight at the time of political demonstrations. Women volunteers

came out in public and defied gender norms on other occasions too. Clad in *khadi* saris, they felt a unique kind of security from male gaze. Their sense of security came from their faith in the pious nature of Gandhian objectives.

However, in the history of a symbol, one needs to problematise this 'sense of security'. In order to unsettle this account, one needs to look at the ways in which the culture produced by the Gandhian *charkha* weaves its own threads. Here, the point of view of those consumers is crucial for whom the Gandhian wheel was brought in the centre of the political frame.

We have briefly discussed ways in which nationalisation of the body of the spinning wheel took place and the manner in which the body of the spinning wheel was internalised within Gandhian discourse. We have seen that this internalisation was performed by injecting various markers into the body of spinning wheel and the body of cloth in general. Texts of purity/impurity, pious/profane, tradition/modernity, etc. were propagated at the historical juncture of the anti-colonial struggle to counter the hegemony of cheap and fine mill cloth.

Note: This is a revised version of an article earlier published in the *Economic and Political Weekly* on July 10, 2004.

## References

Maithili is the language of Mithila, a geo-cultural region in the north Bihar, India.

Mahatma Gandhi, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol XIX, Delhi, Publication Division, 1976, pp 454-56.

Mahatma Gandhi, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol XIX, Delhi, Publication Division, 1976, pp 454-56.

*Ibid.*

MadhuKishwar writes, "The Sita or Draupaadi of Gandhi was not the commonly accepted lifeless stereotypes of subservience. They were symbols versatile enough to incorporate the qualities that he chose to endow them with. In fact, sometimes, he tended to overburden the symbols with meanings they were ill-equipped to carry. For example, Sita was used as a symbol of *swadeshi*, to convey an anti-imperialist

message. Sita only wore 'cloth made in India' or home-spun and thus kept her heart and body pure. Furthermore, 'Sita was no slave of Rama'. She was portrayed as being able to say no even to her husband if he approached her carnally against her will. Gandhi's Sita was no helpless creature." *ibid*, p 1691; also see, Madhu Kishwar, *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol XX, no 41, October 12, 1985, pp 1753-58.

Ashis Nandy, *At the Edge of Psychology*, Delhi, OUP, 1980, pp 47-70.

*Ibid*.

Erik H Erikson writes, "Who could deny that Gandhi was 'a man'? But, just because Gandhi was so free in providing us with conflictual memories as well as with confessions of 'unmanly' aspirations, we must be sparing with our interpretations; for in his revealed life the abnormal and supernormal vie with such disarming frankness that whatever we could diagnose as his neurosis simply becomes part of his personal swaraj, the home ground of his being – and a man must build on that. I would add that in such a man, and especially in an innovator, much phallic maleness seems to be absorbed in the decisive wielding of influence – and in a certain locomotor drivenness." He further remarks, "But I wonder whether there has ever been another political leader who almost prided himself on being half man and half woman, and who so blatantly aspired to be more motherly than women born to the job, as Gandhi did." Erik H Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence*, London, Faber and Faber, 1970, pp 401-02.

However, writings coming from post-colonial location have seriously posed a challenge to author-centric discourse. Shahid Amin's 'Gandhi as Mahatma' marks the birth of the reader in the text of Gandhian History. See, Shahid Amin, 'Gandhi As Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern UP, 1921-22' in Ranajit Guha (ed), *Subaltern Studies vol III*, OUP, Delhi, 1984, pp 1-61. A recent study by Dipesh Chakrabarty on the use of khadi/white in Indian public life problematises this arena of readership of Gandhian text by bringing the subject of values in post-colonial life as these have been developed around Gandhian imageries. See, Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Clothing the Political Man: A Reading of

the Use of Khadi/White in Indian Public Life', *Postcolonial Studies*, vol 4, No 1, 2001, pp 27-38.

Joseph S Adler, 'Celibacy, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Gender into Nationalism in North India', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol 53, no 1, February 1994, pp 45-46.

Roy Dilley, 'Myth and Meaning and The Tukolar Loom', *Man* (ns), vol 22, 1987, pp 256-66.

Deepak Mehata, *Work, Ritual, Biography: A Muslim Community in North India*, OUP, Delhi, 1997, p 3.

Katherine S Marsh, 'Weaving, Writing and Gender', *Man* (ns), vol 18, 1983, pp 729-44.

*Ibid*.

See Rudolph and Rudolph, *Modernity of Tradition*, and Shahid Amin, *op cit*. These two readings provide interesting insights into the relationship between Gandhism and its cultural context.

Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal: 1903-08*, OUP, New Delhi, 1973, foot note 48, p 103.

C.A. Bayly, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India*, OUP, Delhi, 1998, pp 199-200.

Gyan Pandey, 'Economic Dislocation in Nineteenth Century Eastern Uttar Pradesh: Some Implications of the Decline of Artisanal Industry in Colonial India' in Peter Robb (ed), *Rural South Asia, Linkages, Change and Development*, Segment Book Distributors, New Delhi, (year not mentioned), pp 112-13.

Bhikhari Thakur in Gyan Pandey, *op cit*, p 113.

'Charkha: A Bhojpuri Gramgeet', Shiva Kumar Mishra (comp and ed), *Azadiki Shikshayan*, Indian Fertilisers Cooperative, New Delhi, 1998, p 248.

'Gandhi keyaljamana' in Shiv Kumar Mishra (comp and ed), *Azadi Ki Shikshayain*, Indian Fertilisers Cooperative, Delhi, 1998, p 247.



Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* OUP, Delhi, 1986, p 110.

Cited from *Young India*, 1927-28, p 74 by K K Dutta, *Bihar Main Swatantrata Andolan Ka Itihas*, vol I (tr by), Vishnu Anugraha Narayan), Bihar Hindi Granth Akadami, Patna, 1975, p 494.

Gandhi was very critical of the antagonistic positions of male vs female. He wrote, "My ideal is this: A man should remain man and yet should become woman. Similarly, a woman should remain a woman and yet become man. This means that man should cultivate the gentleness of woman and women should cast off their timidity and become brave and courageous" in Raghvan Iyer, *Moral and Political Writings of Gandhi*, vol 3, Oxford University Press, New York, 1986, pp 1-2.

Wendy Singer, *Creating Histories; Oral Narratives and the Politics of History Making*, OUP, 1997, pp 230-31.

*Ibid.*

Wendy Singer, op cit, p 69.

*Ibid*, p 69.

"Janaki Devi always considered herself primarily a khadi worker, though she opposed more conservative forms of khadi production that allowed and reinforced *pardah*. She continued through her school and through personal aid to young women willing to rebel against the standard definitions of womanhood. Her radical departure from the mainstream khadi workers was shaped by her attempt to redefine what was feminine," p 261.

## CHAPTER

# 15

## GANDHI AND UNTOUCHABILITY

. Gurusamy

### Preamble

Mohanlal Karamchand Gandhi, popularly known as Mahatma Gandhi, had a humble beginning. His parents, Karamchand Gandhi and Putlibai, were deeply religious people and led a pious and ethical life. The Gandhi family and their relatives were involved in trade and commercial activities. Gandhi later observed that the religious values and cultural traits that shaped his personality, behaviour and relationships were inherited from his family.

### Gandhi and Social Advocacy

Gandhi's social advocacy was marked by Truth and Non-violence and aimed at *Poorna Swaraj* (complete independence). Gandhi, as a social reformer, fought for the eradication of caste, religious and gender inequalities and pleaded for communal harmony and peaceful coexistence. He had spoken about eighteen constructive programmes aimed at improving the lives of peasants, women, Dalits and others as part of the independence movement. He never tolerated gross socio-economic inequalities that prevailed in India during his time. To him, communal unity and social integration would be the hallmark of a country marked by equality and plurality. His social advocacy was focused on social-structural issues like caste, religion and gender, and he strove hard to address socio-economic and gender issues through non-violent means. Through his eighteen constructive programmes and eleven vows he wanted to create a new India.

Gandhi was totally against all types of socio-economic, educational, religious, gender and political inequalities and worked hard to promote and sustain fraternity and social integration. He wanted to eradicate untouchability and dealt with gender inequality and religious intolerance. While preaching communal harmony, social integration, inter-caste amity and secularism, he had to face a lot of resistance, since these issues and practices were entrenched in the Indian cultural ethos.

## Social Structure

One of the significant features of the Indian social structure is stratification and inequality emerging out of caste, gender and regional disparities. Caste discrimination is perpetuated by socio-cultural and religious norms, customs and traditions. The process of socialization advocated conformity to the prevalent norms of socio-cultural life and people imbibed these negative values. In addition, social segmentation and stratification, based on the traditional *varna* system, perpetuated caste inequalities where social groups were ascribed different status based on their position in the caste hierarchy.

Indian castes are stratified into four groups on the basis of work and purity. In the Hindu hierarchy, there are the Brahmins (priestly caste), the Kshatriyas (warriors), the Vaishyas (traders) and the Shudras (menial task workers). Outside this four-tier caste system are the untouchables (*punchamas*) who are called Scheduled Castes. The structural properties of caste, namely, endogamy, caste occupations and hierarchy have a direct bearing on social stratification. Caste divisions in India dominate settlements, housing, marriage, employment and general social interaction, and these are reinforced, directly and indirectly, through various means, especially cultural-religious norms. Dalits are discriminated against in our society and the practice of untouchability is rampant and severe especially in rural societies. Though their status has improved marginally today because of several development activities and affirmative action initiated by both the Central and State governments, their plight is still deplorable.

Understanding the inequalities, disparities and various other problems suffered by the Dalits and taking into consideration the constitutional guarantee of protection and social security to them, the governments, both Central and State, have formulated a policy of protective discrimination and affirmative action for their benefit. Some of the significant policies and programmes formulated in this regard include Protection of Civil Rights Act (PCRA) and the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. Besides, there is reservation for the Dalits in educational, employment and other sectors.

The Scheduled Castes are also referred to as Dalits in contemporary literature. In 2001, the Dalits constituted 16.2 per cent of India's total population. Since 1950, India has enacted many laws to protect and improve their socio-economic conditions. Taking advantage of the constitutional provisions and legislations as well as the policies and programmes of the Government, the Dalits have improved their status. However, their ascribed status has kept them

in the lowest rungs of the caste ladder and they continue to suffer discrimination and inequities due to socio-cultural, structural and stratification.

## Caste and Social Status

Ambedkar listed the evils of the caste system: it isolated people, infused a sense of inferiority into lower-caste individuals, and divided humanity. He argued that the caste system was not just a social problem. He pointed out that it traumatized people and affected the country's economy badly. The ideology supporting and legitimizing social stratification discouraged critical thinking and cooperative effort, and encouraged absurd theories and chaotic speculations. The lack of social mobility, noted Ambedkar, prevented India from going forward. He stated that the absence of vibrant scientific and technical progress, combined with meek submission to one's fate, perpetrated the caste system. He pointed out that caste divided people and added that it divided the upper castes as well into numerous sub-castes.

Caste, claimed Gandhi, had nothing to do with religion. He argued that he discrimination and trauma experienced by the lower castes was the result of socio-cultural tradition, the origin of which is not clearly known. The reality of colonial India was, he noted, that there was no significant disparity between the economic condition and earnings of members of different castes. In other words, both the higher and lower castes were poor. He acknowledged that the caste system in India had spiritually blinded a lot of Indians.

## Untouchability

Those jobs considered polluting and impure are reserved for the Dalits. These jobs include removing human waste (manual scavenging), skinning animal carcasses, tanning, and washing clothes. Dalits are supposed to reside outside the village so that their physical presence does not pollute the village. Not only are they restricted in terms of space, but their houses are also inferior in quality and devoid of basic facilities like water and electricity. They are often landless, as non-Dalits own most of the land in villages. Government officials do not enforce the existing laws and policies to allocate land for the Dalits. Even when a piece of land is allotted to them, they are often denied access to that land because of the vicious caste discrimination.

## Gandhi as a Social Reformer

Gandhi's thoughts on social issues prepared the ground for concerted action which included his eighteen programmes of social reconstruction dealing with communal harmony, elimination of untouchability, development of women, economic equality, and empowerment of farmers, labourers, Adivasis and lepers and the eleven vows aimed at establishing and promoting a society founded on social justice. These constructive programmes were the basis for community and rural development programmes and the development of deprived communities and other marginalized groups. His thoughts on rural reconstruction provided the platform for development planning at the grassroots keeping *gram sabha* as the base.

His concept of *sarvodaya* or the welfare of all was the basis of his mission on social reforms. His thoughts were founded on the principles of economic prosperity and social justice and Truth and Non-Violence. To him, individual happiness lay in the happiness of the society of which he/she is a vital part. He considered all those practices which affected the well-being of individuals and the community immoral, unethical and sinful.

## Relevance of Gandhi in 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Mahatma Gandhi's thoughts and philosophy are timeless and eternal. The universal relevance of Gandhi emerges from his experiments with Truth and Non-Violence and it is essential for the promotion of harmonious social relationships among different countries, societies, communities, castes, religions and races. Gandhian thought is relevant to the contemporary era for promoting social cohesion and fostering religious tolerance through *Ahimsa*. His thoughts are essential to build a pluralistic society based on the principle of *sarvodaya*.

## Conclusion

Gandhian thought and philosophy is very relevant today to address the conflict and violence that is tearing the world apart. His ideology and economic theories will certainly help in the preservation of the environment and promote sustainable development. Gandhian thought, principles and vows, when translated into practice, will be a source of security to the entire humanity and will ensure peaceful co-existence and understanding on the basis of Truth and Non-violence and will promote *sarvodaya*.

# CONTRIBUTORS

**G. Ramachandran** (1904-1995), Founder Vice-Chancellor of Gandhigram Rural Institute, Gandhigram 624 302, Tamil Nadu

**Renana Jhabvala** (Former Chancellor, Gandhigram Rural Institute-Deemed University, Gandhigram 624 302) Chairperson, SEWA Bharat, 7/5 First Floor, South Patel Nagar, New Delhi 110 008

Email: renanajhabvala@gmail.com

**Ram Ponnu** (Former Principal, Kamarajar Government Arts College, Surandai, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu) C-194, Nellaiappar Street, Tirunagar, Madurai 625 006, Tamil Nadu

Email: eraponnu@gmail.com

**A. S. Sasikala**, Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences,

GITAM University, Vishakhapatnam 530 045, Andhra Pradesh

E-mail: sasikala.alappat@gitam.edu

**Andrew Rigby**, Emeritus Professor of Peace Studies, Coventry University, UK

Email: a.rigby@coventry.ac.uk

**S. V. Shettar**, Chairman, Department of Gandhian Studies, Karnatak University,

Dharwad 580 003, Karnataka

Email: dr.svshet0tar@gmail.com

**Y.P. Anand**, Former Director, National Gandhi Museum, New Delhi (also Former Chairman, Railway Board, New Delhi)

Email: yanandindia@yahoo.co.in

**Manohar Lal Sharma**, Former Chairperson, Department of Gandhian & Peace Studies and Honorary Director, Gandhi Bhawan, Punjab University, Chandigarh 160 014

Email: doctormlsharma@yahoo.com

**N. Markandan**, (Former Vice-Chancellor, Gandhigram Rural Institute-Deemed University Gandhigram 624 302) No.4, Sati Cross St. No.1, Opposite GP Hospital, Gandhipuram, Coimbatore 641 012, Tamil Nadu

**Figlio di terra**, Workers' Home, Gandhigram 624 302, Tamil Nadu

**G. Pankajam**, (Former Vice-Chancellor, Gandhigram Rural Institute-Deemed University, Gandhigram 624 302) Secretary, Gandhigram Trust, Gandhigram 624 302, Tamil Nadu

Email: pankajamg@yahoo.co.in

**K. Shivakumar**, Managing Trustee, Gandhigram Trust, Gandhigram 624 302, Tamil Nadu

Email: vkshivagm@gmail.com

**Sadan Jha**, Associate Professor, Centre for Social Studies, Veer Narmad South Gujarat Campus, Udhna Magdalla Road, Surat 395 007, Gujarat

E-mail: sadanjha@gmail.com

**S. Gurusamy**, Director, Centre for Studies in Sociology and Dean, School of Social Sciences, Gandhigram Rural Institute-Deemed to be University, Gandhigram 624 302, Tamil Nadu

Email: sellagurusamy@gmail.com

**M.P. Gurusamy**, Chairman, Kumarappa Research Institution, Dindigul (Thayanbagam, Sixth Street, AKMG Nagar, Karur Road, Dindigul 624 001, Tamil Nadu)

**S. Natarajan**, Vice-Chancellor, Gandhigram Rural Institute-Deemed to be University, Gandhigram 624 302, Tamil Nadu

Email: sai.snatarajan@gmail.com

**A. Joseph Dorairaj**, Professor of English and Dean, School of English and Foreign Languages, Gandhigram Rural Institute-Deemed to be University, Gandhigram 624 302, Tamil Nadu

Email: josephdorairaj@gmail.com

**M. Tamizhchelvan**, Deputy Librarian, Gandhigram Rural Institute-Deemed to be University, Gandhigram 624 302, Tamil Nadu

Email: tamizhchelvan@gmail.com

'SUCCESS ATTENDS WHERE TRUTH REIGNS'  
(The Mahatma's message at the inauguration of  
Gandhigram on October 7, 1947)



**THE GANDHIGRAM RURAL INSTITUTE (DEEMED TO BE UNIVERSITY)**

காந்திகிராம கிராமிய நிகர்நிலைப் பல்கலைக்கழகம் | गांधीग्राम ग्रामीण संस्थान (मानित विश्वविद्यालय)

கிராமம் உயர் நாடு உயரும்

Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India.  
Accredited by NAAC with 'A' Grade (3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle)

 **ARVIND  
ASSOCIATES**

₹195/-

ISBN 9788194079705



9 788194 079705